AmeriCorps

Guide to Entering VISTA Service

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Contents

Welcome to AmeriCorps VISTA!

Thank you for joining AmeriCorps as a member of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)! Over the next year, you will help mobilize resources and build the capacity of important programs in the community you serve.

Since 1965, over 220,000 VISTA members have joined the fight against poverty by helping local organizations expand their capacity to make change. The VISTA program serves in all U.S. states and territories.

Through capacity building activities such as fundraising, grant writing, research, and volunteer recruitment, VISTA members serve in an office setting and gain experience and leadership skills throughout their year of service.

Thank you for stepping up to serve and alleviate poverty in your community! The VISTA staff look forward to meeting you and helping you prepare for your first day of service and your **VISTA Member Orientation (VMO)**. VMO is an online onboarding and orientation process that begins before you start service and continues at your project site.

VMO consists of a number of learning opportunities and tasks that you will complete in this order:

- Pre-Service Coursework
- Onboarding Forms
- Criminal History Check
- Countdown to VISTA Service webinar
- Launching Your VISTA Service webinar
- On-Site Orientation and Training
- Early-Service Coursework

Before arriving at your project site, you must complete the Pre-Service Coursework on the VISTA Campus and your onboarding forms in your My AmeriCorps account (my.americorps.gov).

Read below for details on each element of your orientation.

Introduction to the VISTA Campus and Member Handbook

By now you are familiar with the AmeriCorps Member Portal, or My AmeriCorps (**my.americorps.gov**), which is where you applied for your VISTA position. Your next step will be to visit the **VISTA Campus** and create an account (*please note: your VISTA Campus account is separate from your My AmeriCorps account*). Once you create your account, you will have access to the *VISTA Training* and *VISTA Connect* pages of the Campus. Start by accessing the VISTA Training section, and select **Catalogue** in the top menu, and click on the **VISTA Member Orientation block** on the Catalogue page. If this is your first time viewing the learning path, click "**Learn More**" and "**Enroll.**"

Please note: as you progress through the VMO learning path, a green checkmark (seen in image to the right) will indicate that you've completed an activity or module. Please ignore any percentages or scores listed, and instead focus on the green checkmarks as you track completion.

This learning path consists of modules and activities that you'll need to complete during your VISTA Member Orientation. As you go through the modules and activities, you can track your completion at the top of the learning path in the Global Training Progress bar and with the green check marks under the "Status" column (please ignore the "Score" column).

If you have any technical issues with the Campus, please contact **VISTACampus@itcon-inc.com**.

VISTA Member Handbook

Another important resource for you – both now and during your year of service – is the **VISTA Member Handbook**. The handbook is the VISTA program's primary resource for members, and it covers a wide range of topics that are central to a successful service term.

When VISTAs have questions, the VISTA Member Handbook is the best place to check first for information. If the handbook does not answer your question or provide the information you need, feel free to reach out to the VISTA Member Support Unit through the **AmeriCorps Hotline**. Questions can be submitted to the hotline by live chat, webform submission, or by calling 800-942-2677, Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. ET.

Pre-Service Coursework

You'll notice on the VISTA Member Orientation learning path that there are two modules for Pre-Service Coursework: Required and Recommended.

You are required to complete the following two courses, and accept the Terms and Conditions, before you can start service.

- **AmeriCorps VISTA Civil Rights and Responsibilities**. This course explains your legal rights and responsibilities as a VISTA member, and what to do if you experience or witness discrimination or harassment.
- **AmeriCorps VISTA Terms and Conditions**. This course describes the laws and policies related to your service. After completing all modules of this course, you will be

> *You must accept the VISTA Terms and Conditions in your My AmeriCorps account before you can start service.*

directed to a Terms and Conditions Acceptance form on **my.americorps.gov**.

You are also strongly encouraged to complete the Recommended Pre-Service Coursework in order to manage your benefits, find support, and focus your service goals.

- **Benefits of VISTA Service.** This will link you to the wide range of benefits you are eligible to receive during and after your service, including the end of service benefit, healthcare benefit, and childcare benefit.
- **VISTA's Mission and Program Goals.** This course provides a brief overview of the AmeriCorps VISTA program.
- **Test your knowledge!** Take this brief quiz to test your comprehension of the VISTA program mission, benefits, and terms and conditions of service.

Onboarding Forms

You also must complete the following forms before you start your VISTA service. All onboarding forms are completed in your account in **My AmeriCorps**. Log into My AmeriCorps, and then follow the directions below:

Form	Instructions
Direct Deposit Information	Click **My Living Allowance** on the left side of your member homepage. When the page opens, under Direct Deposit Information, click on Edit Account Information. When this page opens, complete the information requested. So that your pay is not delayed, please be sure to enter your direct deposit information correctly. Your checking account and routing number can be found on a check or by calling your bank. Your debit card number is not your checking account number. Click Submit to save your information. We strongly encourage you to utilize direct deposit. If you would like to waive it, please click Waive Direct Deposit and follow the prompts. If you decide to waive direct deposit, a paper paycheck will be sent to the site address on file – not your home address.

Federal Tax Withholding (W-4)	Click **My Living Allowance** on the left side of your member homepage. When the page opens, under Federal Tax Withholding, click Change W-4 Elections. When this page opens, fill out the requested information and click Save.
Unpaid Compensation Information (Designation of Beneficiary)	Click **My Living Allowance** on the left side of your member homepage. When the page opens, under Unpaid Compensation Information, click Designation of Beneficiary of Unpaid Compensation. Enter the requested information and click Save. If you don't know the ZIP+4 extension, enter 1111 and click Save, and the system will suggest the correct extension. Make sure you click Save a second time to save the form. Alternatively, you can find full 9-digit ZIP codes on the USPS website: **https://tools.usps.com/go/ZipLookupAction!input.action**
End of Service Benefit Selection	Click **Edit End-of-Service Option** on the left side of your member homepage. When the page opens, select either the Education Award or the Cash Stipend from the drop-down menu, then click Save. Be sure to read the instructions on the page carefully for full details. You can find more information on the end of service benefits **here**.
VISTA Terms and Conditions Certification	As mentioned above, one of the courses to complete on the VISTA Campus is your Terms and Conditions course. After completing this, you must accept the Terms and Conditions in your account in My AmeriCorps. Click My Terms & Conditions Acceptance on the left side of your member homepage. Read the information on the screen, make your selections, and submit the form. Once submitted, the screen will be grayed out and read-only. You can verify your completion by looking for a Terms & Conditions Acceptance link in the left menu of your account in my.americorps.gov. **If you do not see this link, it means that your acceptance was not recorded**. *Members must accept the Terms and Conditions for each new term of service.*

Criminal History Check

You will receive an email from **support@checkr.com** with instructions on how to securely submit the required information for the background check. Checkr will conduct your background check and provide VISTA with the results of the search. There is no cost to you for completing the background check.

You must complete the online background check information **immediately**, or <u>no later than seven calendar days</u> from receiving the email. Failure to complete this check by the deadline may result in your termination from the VISTA program. However, please note that issues with Checkr that prevent you from completing the online check within the specified timeframe will not impact you.

After submitting your information, you may receive follow-up emails from Checkr asking for additional information such as identity verification. If you receive an email requesting additional information, please follow the instructions in the email and submit any requested information as soon as possible.

If you have issues with the link Checkr provides, please try pasting the link in a different browser. If you do not see an email, please first check your spam folder, then email **VISTAfingerprint@cns.gov** for assistance.

Relocation Benefit Eligibility

If you are relocating more than 50 miles to serve, you may be eligible for the VISTA relocation benefit. The VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) will email a Relocation Allowance Request Form and instructions to all members who've been marked as eligible to relocate before you start service. You will need to complete and submit the Relocation Allowance Request Form (provided in the email from the VMSU) in order to be eligible for the relocation benefit.
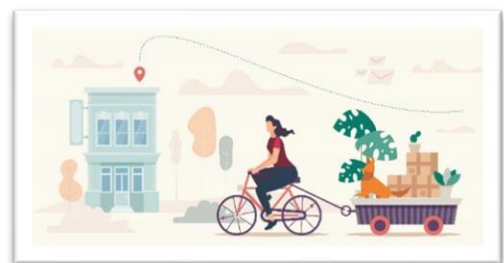
You can find more information on the relocation benefit in Chapter 7 of the **VISTA Member Handbook.** If you have additional questions, please call the VMSU via the AmeriCorps Hotline at 800-942-2677, or email **vmsu@cns.gov**.

Countdown to VISTA Service Webinar

This live webinar takes place on the Tuesday prior to your start date at 3:00-4:30 p.m. ET (please adjust for your time zone). The webinar provides essential information to prepare you to begin service and includes time for Q&A.

No registration is required, and you can **use this link to join the webinar**. On the day of the webinar, you'll receive a reminder email that also includes the link to join as well as any supporting materials needed for the session. If possible, join the webinar on a laptop or desktop computer to be able to use all of the Zoom features; and run a test on your device before the webinar start time to make sure you are ready to join on time.

> *Because this webinar takes place before you start VISTA service, it is possible that you will have a scheduling conflict. If that is the case, please email VISTATraining@cns.gov as quickly as possible to notify the VISTA training staff of your attendance issue.*

Launching Your VISTA Service Webinar

This live webinar takes place on your first day of service at 3:00-4:30 p.m. ET (please adjust for your time zone). The webinar further introduces you to the mission and history of the VISTA program, gives more detail about your service, and concludes with your federal Oath of Service.

As with the Countdown webinar, no registration is required, and you can **use this link to join**. You'll also receive a reminder email that includes the link to join as well as any supporting materials needed for the session.

On this webinar, you will take the Oath of Service that officially enters you into VISTA service. It is offered only once, therefore you are required to attend this webinar. Your supervisor will set aside time during your first day to attend. In case of any scheduling confusion or miscommunication at your site, please be sure to remind your supervisor that you are required to attend the Launching webinar and be sworn into service by VISTA staff.

Your First Day of Service

On your first day of service, you must report to your project site at the time and place your VISTA supervisor specifies. In some cases, your supervisor may approve your first day of service to occur at home or another remote location (i.e., "teleservice"). Your supervisor will walk you through the specifics of your VISTA assignment, and this will be the beginning of your On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT). Your OSOT introduces you to your sponsoring organization, the community you are serving, sponsor policies and procedures, and much more. This will likely span several weeks and involve both formal and informal learning opportunities, meetings, activities, and more.

And, as a reminder, on your first day, you must attend the *Launching Your VISTA Service* webinar from 3:00-4:30 p.m. ET (more details provided above; be sure to verify your time zone to attend the webinar on time).

Early-Service Coursework

During your first two weeks of service, you are encouraged to complete the below courses in the VISTA Campus. The courses align with your On-Site Orientation and Training and are designed to help prepare you for your year of service.

When you log in to the **VISTA Campus**, open the Catalogue and the VISTA Member Orientation learning path. There you will find your recommended Early-Service Coursework in the final module of the learning path:

- *VISTA Assignment Description Worksheet*
- *Creating a Community Profile*
- *Introducing Yourself and Your Organization: The Minute Intro*
- *Learn About the Theory of Change*
- *How Poverty is Measured in the United States*
- *13 Lessons About Poverty*
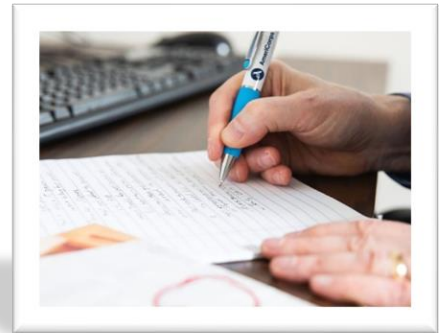
Where to Find Answers

VISTA Campus technical difficulties:	**VISTACampus@itcon-inc.com**
VMO webinars or Campus coursework questions:	**VISTATraining@cns.gov**
Onboarding forms, relocation, or benefits-related questions:	**VMSU@cns.gov**
Criminal History Check questions:	**VISTAFingerprint@cns.gov**
On-Site Orientation and Training or site-specific questions (e.g., where or when to report on your first day):	**Your site supervisor or your AmeriCorps Regional Office**

Thank you for joining VISTA!

There is a lot to do to get you onboarded for VISTA; thank you for taking on this great opportunity. Please reach out to your project and the VISTA staff if there's anything you need to feel comfortable about the orientation process as you prepare for your first day of service.

Please know there is a big team at AmeriCorps cheering you on right now – and all are hoping this is the start of a powerful service experience, like those of these alumni:

> *"My VISTA service has brought my career and a big part of my life full circle."*
>
> *"AmeriCorps VISTA is the opportunity to be the greater good."*
>
> *"My service experience gave me a sense of purpose when I needed it the most."*