



DPI VISTA PROJECT HOST SITE INFORMATION

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The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Family-School-Community Partnerships AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) Project began in 1998 and is funded by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service. The grant allows for VISTA members to serve as family-school-community partnership coordinators in low-income Wisconsin schools and community organizations. The project goals for the sites are to:

- Develop and expand ongoing collaborative partnerships between the sites and their respective families and communities;
- Involve parents of students in learning at home, volunteering, communicating with teachers and administrators, and participating in site decision making and community collaboration; and
- Create and train an Action Team for Partnerships to design, implement, and sustain partnership practices for the purpose of improving student achievement.

In 2012-13, the VISTA project will support 14 VISTAs and will only consider applications from continuing sites due to programmatic and budget cuts.

A. ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

The following few paragraphs provide more information on organizations that support, fund, and inform the DPI VISTA Project.

1. TITLE I AND SCHOOL SUPPORT TEAM

The Title I team is part of the Division for Student and School Success at the DPI. The Title I team website is located at <http://dpi.wi.gov/tss/index.html>. In addition to hosting the VISTA program, the Title I team also provides statewide leadership and technical assistance for state and federal programs including Migrant Education, Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE), and Supplemental Educational Services. The Program Director and VISTA Leader, located at DPI, and members of the Title I team, provide technical assistance for your site, including responsibilities and work plan related concerns, payroll questions, conference registrations, and reimbursement for on-site training related expenses.

2. CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (CNCS)

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through two programs: Senior Corps and AmeriCorps. Members and volunteers serve with national and community non-profit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and local agencies to help meet community needs in education, the environment, public safety, homeland security, and other critical areas.

AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is one of the Corporation's national service programs in which full time volunteers build infrastructure and design sustainable programs while living in the communities they serve. Started in 1965, VISTA was created to meet the needs of underserved communities and to address and combat poverty. VISTA is now a program under the umbrella of AmeriCorps, an initiative started in 1993.

The Corporation for National and Community Service, also created in 1993, oversees all AmeriCorps*VISTA programs. Wisconsin's CNCS State Office is located in Milwaukee.

3. NATIONAL NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS (NNPS)

Established by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, The National Network of Partnership Schools brings together schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing and maintaining comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships. "Based on more than a decade of research and the work of many educators, parents, students, and others, we know that it is possible for all elementary, middle, and high schools to develop and maintain strong programs of partnership," explains Joyce L. Epstein, Director, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Dr. Epstein and all of the staff will work with members of the Network to encourage, inform, recognize, and support efforts to improve and maintain school, family, and community connections that produce positive results for students. The Center and NNPS are located at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Visit <http://www.partnershipschools.org> for more information on NNPS, conferences, promising partnership practices, a bulletin board, meeting NCLB requirements, and current research.

Sites are encouraged to maintain membership in NNPS by submitting an annual UPDATE survey and a \$200 renewal fee. *However, this is optional.* DPI will still collect the UPDATE survey for reporting purposes.

B. VISTA POSITION DESCRIPTION AND SITE EXPECTATIONS

*The overall goal of the DPI AmeriCorps*VISTA Project is to build capacity for family involvement in low-income schools and communities by implementing a research-based, sustainable process for partnerships. Below are the responsibilities of members and sites. While each site will create an application that outlines their own needs, all sites must fit within our parameters and agree to address each performance measure.*

RESPONSIBILITIES

Each individual project site should adapt the position description and work plan to the needs of the site and local community (these modifications need to be approved by the Program Director). However, at a minimum, VISTA members typically do the following:

- Participate in an assets mapping project in collaboration with staff and community members.
- Help develop staff development and parent education workshops.
- Enhance relationships with staff, volunteers, parents, and others that will help sustain programs beyond the VISTA's term of service.
- Help establish an effective and comprehensive communication system for the site community.
- Help families understand organization structure and to feel welcome at the site.
- Coordinate the recruitment and training of tutors and/or mentors.
- Communicate regularly with volunteers to discuss their work and address any concerns.
- Help in offering learning activities and events for the whole family.
- Include parents and other community members in facilitating children's learning outside of school or organization.
- Recruit families and other community members to volunteer in community events.
- Encourage parents to participate in school or organization activities, including attending school board and site council meetings.
- Involve local service groups at the site.
- Recognize and celebrate community involvement in schools.
- Promote partnership efforts through various media.
- Write grant proposals to support partnership activities.

The VISTA reports directly to his or her Site Supervisor but will also be responsible for communicating regularly with the VISTA Program Director and VISTA Leader through bi-weekly and quarterly reporting, and other progress assessments. Additionally, VISTAs are encouraged to network and share resources with fellow DPI VISTA members through e-mail, occasional regional and statewide meetings, and by phone.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Each site must adhere to our grant's performance measures, which are listed below. These are not just the responsibility of the VISTA, but also of the supervisor and others at the site.

1. VISTAs will help sites in meeting the challenges of developing meaningful, reciprocal family partnerships.

Indicator: At least 75 percent of our sites will have made at least "good progress" on meeting all partnership challenges at their sites, as indicated on the UPDATE report due on July 2.

2. Low-income families will feel welcome in their local school, have an understanding of the importance of being involved in their children's learning, and know how to participate to help improve the educational progress and outcomes of their children.

Indicator: At least 75 percent of sites will indicate improvement from their pre- self assessment to their post- self assessment. The assessment tool will be the Measuring your Family-School-Community Partnerships Inventory. The Inventory must be completed by 20 percent of staff members and ten families who represent the diversity of your site at the beginning and end of year.

3. Sites will have an identified process for partnerships that enables low-income families to have a voice in their children's education.

Indicator 1: 75 percent of sites will establish an action team for partnerships by the end of the first year. Membership must include at least one staff member who works with low-income families in addition to one low-income parent.

Indicator 2: 100 percent of second and third year sites will support the growth and development of the action team for partnerships.

4. Family partnerships will be sustained at VISTA sites, enabling low-income and Title I families to participate in their children's education on an ongoing, meaningful basis after the VISTA has left.

Indicator: Sites will submit an action plan for partnerships, written by school staff and family members and informed by the school-family compact. Plans will include one goal to address needs of low-income students and families.

5. Family partnerships will be integrated into the school culture as an important tool in increasing academic success for low-income students.

Indicator: 25 percent of staff at each site will be trained in Epstein's Partnership model, culturally competent family engagement, and the VISTA project.

BENEFITS

To support them in their service, VISTAs receive:

- A living allowance of \$927/month (urban) or \$892/month (rural)
- Health coverage
- Child care, if eligible (\$400/month)
- Option of an end-of-year cash stipend of \$1,500 or an Education Award of \$5,550
- Ten personal leave days and ten sick days
- An option to purchase life insurance
- A relocation allowance (if moving further than 50 miles)
- Training opportunities
- Loan deferment and forbearance options
- Flexibility to take classes during the year

QUALIFICATIONS

VISTA candidates must have:

- A bachelor's degree
- Excellent oral and written communication skills
- Computer and e-mail proficiency
- Excellent organizational skills
- Patience and flexibility
- Entrepreneurial skills (to seek funding)
- Relationship-building skills
- Team and leadership skills
- Research skills
- A willingness to take initiative
- Interest in and commitment to family engagement

C. STAKEHOLDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following information outlines the roles and responsibilities of the DPI and the host site.

DPI

- Pay monthly living allowance to members. Checks are deposited directly into the VISTAs' bank accounts bi-weekly.
- Screen all candidates and coordinate enrollment procedures for selected VISTA candidates.
- Help sites in recruiting candidates for available positions through the online AmeriCorps recruitment system and other venues.
- Provide orientation at the beginning of the year and various training opportunities throughout the year for VISTAs and Supervisors.
- Provide networking opportunities to members via e-mail and various trainings.
- Conduct individual site visits.
- Coordinate monthly communications with Supervisors and VISTA members.
- Act as a liaison between sites and the CNCS to provide information.
- Provide information on grant opportunities, workshops, and other topics.
- Provide technical support and guidance.
- Create and distribute online partnership tools.
- Develop a memorandum of understanding between all stakeholders.

SITES

- Attend the DPI Orientation at the beginning of the VISTA year as well as required trainings with their VISTA during the year (see application for details).
- Design an On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) to acquaint their VISTA with the staff, community, and position.
- Provide office space with access to a phone, voicemail, printer, fax machine, computer, and the internet.
- Develop a Work Plan for the VISTA *prior* to his/her arrival with approval from the DPI; sites should ensure that it is followed throughout the year.
- Be available to meet with their VISTA to discuss projects, goals, and actions, on a bi-weekly basis.
- Ensure VISTA is performing direct service (i.e., work that is normally done by a paid staff member, such as substitute teaching, answering phones, lunch/recess/bus duty; or by a volunteer, such as copying, filing, data entry).
- Participate in an exit interview with project staff after the completion of three years.
- *Provide a cash match of \$750 per VISTA to cover costs of VISTA training.

**Due to cuts at the national and state level to national service, VISTA projects no longer receive any funds to train their VISTA members yet they are still required to provide orientation and training throughout the year. We are asking each site to contribute a \$750 cash match for each VISTA they receive; an increase from \$550 in 2011-12. These funds will ensure that your VISTA is trained in family-school-community partnerships and prepared to do this work at your site. We hope sites view the opportunity to have a full time volunteer for an entire year as worth the modest cash match. Other VISTA projects require, on average, \$1,000 in cash match and AmeriCorps programs require anywhere from \$2,500 to \$4,500. If your site has concerns about paying this match, please contact the DPI VISTA Program Director.*

D. RECRUITMENT INFORMATION AND TIMELINE

Recruitment of VISTAs takes several months to ensure that the best candidates are selected and placed at your site. This section will provide an overview of the recruitment and placement process as well as provide sites with a tentative timeline for 2012 recruitment.

DPI will search for and screen candidates on an ongoing basis beginning in February. This is to ensure that the candidates understand the commitment they must make to serve with the program. We will often ask them to shadow or speak with a current VISTA member to get another perspective. Once the screening has been completed, the Program Director will forward applications to sites for consideration.

To streamline this process, top candidates will be forwarded to sites on the following dates. Once a candidate has been selected, sites will not receive any additional applications.

- March 9
- April 2 (if needed)
- May 1 (if needed)
- June 1 (if needed)

Sites are expected to conduct interviews and make the final decisions regarding their VISTA *unless they prefer Project staff hire a VISTA member for their site (this should be communicated with the Program Director right away).* The Program Director will be in touch regularly regarding deadlines and other logistics and will consult on the final decision.

Please note that the VISTA members' term of service is for one calendar year, and begins immediately following the mandatory Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The DPI VISTA Project will send VISTAs to the July PSO and the August PSO. Sites should indicate when they would like their VISTA to start (July 21, 2012, or August 18, 2012).

March 1: Site Updates due

March 9: Accepted host sites notified

March-June: Applications forwarded to sites/interviews conducted

May 15: Recruitment deadline #1 (for July starts)

June 15: Recruitment deadline #2 (for Aug starts)

July 17-20: July Pre-Service Orientation

July 21: July VISTAs officially begin service

August 14-17: August Pre-Service Orientation

August 18: August VISTAs officially begin service