

AmeriCorps VISTA FAQ

What is AmeriCorps VISTA?

VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. Authorized in 1964 and founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965, VISTA was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993. VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for 45 years.

What do VISTA members do?

AmeriCorps VISTA members serve full-time for a year in anti-poverty organizations and agencies throughout the nation, working on issues such as fighting illiteracy, improving health services, creating businesses, increasing housing opportunities, improving college access, and bridging the digital divide.

VISTAs perform indirect service, which means they help build the capacity of organizations to deliver valuable direct services to people living in poverty. VISTAs typically create new programs, write grants, and recruit volunteers. For example, a VISTA could establish a tutoring program, recruit and train volunteers, and raise money for the program—but would not tutor the children.

Are all assignments full-time?

All VISTA positions are full-time, year-long engagements. Our VISTA summer program is the exception, with the engagement lasting between 8-12 weeks but still being a full-time commitment.

Are my relocation costs covered?

If you are moving more than 50 miles to serve as a VISTA, you are eligible to receive up to \$500 to assist with your moving expenses. Each state director distributes relocation funds with his or her own discretion.

What skills do I need?

Most programs seek members with college degrees or at least three years of work experience. Many VISTAs bring significant work and life experiences to their assignment. Initiative, flexibility, and organizational skills are a must. Fluency in Spanish or other languages also are helpful in certain programs. You must be available to serve full-time for one year.

Is there an age requirement?

You must be at least 18 years old, but there is no upper age limit. With such a wide variety of projects, VISTA seeks individuals from all walks of life

Do I get paid?

No, but VISTA members receive a modest, monthly living allowance to help cover the basic necessities. VISTA members who successfully complete a term of service are also eligible to receive either a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of \$5,815 to pay for college or to pay off student loans, or an end-of-service cash stipend of \$1,500.

Can I defer student loans during my service with AmeriCorps?

You may qualify for postponement, or forbearance, of the repayment of your loans during your service. The education award will help you pay off qualified student loans when you're finished. Contact your lender for more specific information or to confirm your loan status during VISTA service.

Will my college or university match my education award?

The [Segal AmeriCorps Education Award](#) is matched by certain colleges and universities.

What are the other benefits?

Additional benefits include training, limited health care benefits, relocation expenses, student-loan forbearance or deferment and non-competitive eligibility for a federal government position. You may also be eligible for childcare assistance should you need it. Perhaps the greatest benefit is the experience of making a positive change in your community and your country. But there are other benefits as well. VISTAs serve for a variety of reasons, from wanting to make the world a better place to discovering a life-changing adventure. For one year, you will be doing everything you can to create and expand programs that ultimately bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

As a VISTA, you'll gain:

- Memorable experiences
- Highly developed skills
- New friends
- A sense of belonging to a community
- Feeling of waking up every morning to help the world
- A new challenge

Recent graduates gain the kind of real-world experience they can't find in a typical entry-level job. Experienced adults apply their skills and knowledge to serious social problems and discover previously untapped strengths.

How long can I serve?

You can serve as a VISTA for up to five years. However, you can only earn up to the value of two education awards. If you earn full-value of two education awards and serve additional years, you must choose the cash stipend.

Campus Compact FAQs

What do Campus Compact AmeriCorps*VISTAs do on campuses?

Campus Compact Volunteers in Service to America (VISTAs) spend a year of service on college campuses and in communities to address the needs of low-income communities. VISTA members leverage existing campus and community resources to facilitate sustainable local initiatives. Examples of VISTA activities include:

Improving access to college for underrepresented populations
Convening community forums to identify local needs and assets
Action planning and assessment of partnerships and partnership activities
Recruiting and coordinating placement of students as volunteers with local community agencies
Working with faculty to create and improve service-learning courses
Advising and mentoring students and student groups involved in community service
Planning and implementing tutoring programs in local public schools

Members of the Campus Compact VISTA team serve in a wide variety of communities and campuses. They meet regularly throughout the year for professional development and networking, and receive ongoing support from an on-campus supervisor, the state Campus Compact VISTA staff, and each other.

May I have another job while I'm a Campus Compact AmeriCorps*VISTA?

AmeriCorps*VISTA members may have outside employment. To do so, an AmeriCorps VISTA member needs to submit an Outside Employment form to their Supervisor and Program Director, and their State Office.

May I go to school while I'm a Campus Compact AmeriCorps*VISTA?

Enrolling in classes is now permitted for VISTAs, if:

- the class commitment is less than full time,
- if the classes and coursework do not interfere with VISTA service (in the event of a conflict, VISTA obligations must come first),
- and if the member's plans to enroll in classes are first discussed with the supervisor who agrees the educational plans will not interfere with VISTA service.

If there is a concern that classes or coursework are interfering with VISTA service, the CNCS state office will investigate; the VISTA member may be required to withdraw from classes within 7 days or face termination. CNCS and Campus Compact are not responsible for any educational costs the member may incur, even if withdrawal is required.

For exact policies, [please contact your state CNCS Office.](#)

How do I use the End-of-Service Education Award?

When a member who has selected the Ed Award is successfully exited by the VISTA Member Support Unit, s/he gains access to a section of the [MyAmeriCorps](#) portal for controlling Ed Award payments (this normally happens within 1-2 weeks after the VISTA's exit date). In this section, members may identify the institution (lender or college/university) they want to pay with their Ed Award, specify the amount to pay, and request that payment be sent. The Education Award can be used to:

- Repay qualified student loans or
- Pay all or part of the cost of attending a qualified institution of higher education.

The Education Award is not transferable to a spouse, child, or other family member and must be used within seven years of the date the VISTA finishes service.

What if I do not want an Education Award?

VISTA members may elect a \$1,500 cash stipend instead of the Education Award. VISTA members must choose either the Education Award or the cash stipend during pre-service orientation.

How do I postpone the repayment of my student loans?

If VISTA members elect the Education Award, they are eligible for *forbearance* on student loans based on national service. The AmeriCorps Trust will pay interest on the VISTA's behalf upon completion of service after receipt of an Interest Accrual Form. The interest payment is not deducted from the Education Award. If VISTA members elect the cash stipend, they may be eligible for loan "deferment" based on criteria such as economic hardship at the discretion of the lender. The type of deferment will depend on the type and date of the loan.

What do I need to know about AmeriCorps*VISTA health coverage?

Health coverage begins on the first day of AmeriCorps*VISTA training and ends at midnight on your termination date. Coverage includes payment for most medical and surgical costs, hospitalization, prescription drugs, and certain emergency dental, vision, and maternity care. Some medical costs not covered include: routine physicals, dental exams, and eye exams; medical costs associated with pre-existing conditions (except prescription medications); chiropractic visits and procedures; substance abuse; and allergy tests. Coverage only applies to the VISTA member. Dependents cannot be covered under this plan. A \$5 co-pay is required for all medical office visits. [Get more information about coverage.](#)

Does AmeriCorps*VISTA provide childcare?

VISTA members who have dependent children may be eligible for child care support administered through First Financial Associates. For more information, contact: