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# Hosting a VISTA

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*Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
Family-School-Community Partnerships Project*

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# What is VISTA?

## Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)

- AmeriCorps\*VISTA is a national service program 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**.
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# Process\*

- Potential school host sites submit “Host Site Application” to by the April 15<sup>th</sup> deadline
- Applications are reviewed and sites are notified of decisions in early-mid May
- Accepted school site supervisors “meet” (in person or via phone) with DPI to review Project expectations
- Candidates are recruited and selected (in consultation with host sites)
- DPI and CNCS approve candidates
- VISTAs attend Pre Service Orientation August 11-14 (optional for School Site Supervisors)
- VISTAs begin their on-site service on August 15<sup>th</sup>
- VISTAs and school site supervisors attend DPI orientation in September

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\*Milwaukee host sites will work in conjunction with Parents Plus on this process.

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# Note on Recruitment

- Approval of host site application does not guarantee VISTA placement
  - Sites must help recruit a qualified candidate by the deadline (June 15<sup>th</sup>)
  - The DPI will approve more than enough host sites
  - Sites unable to secure a VISTA for the August start date will be considered for November and February start dates
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# VISTA Qualifications

- 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 to promote partnerships
  - Commitment to the mission of the project and its impact on schools and communities
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# Benefits to the VISTA

- A living allowance of \$865/month (urban) or \$833/month (rural)
  - Health benefits
  - Child care - if eligible (max \$400/month)
  - Option of an Education Award of \$4,725 OR an end-of-year cash stipend of \$1,200
  - Ten personal leave days and ten sick days
  - An option to purchase life insurance
  - A relocation allowance (if further than 50 miles)
  - Training opportunities
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# Overall Project Goal

Improve student achievement in low income and underserved schools, thereby helping to close the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and their peers.

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# Broad Duties of VISTA

- Develop and expand ongoing collaborative partnerships between schools and their respective families and communities
  - Involve families in learning at home, volunteering, communication with teachers and administrators, and decision making processes that affect students' education
  - Facilitate an Action Team for Partnerships that designs, implements, and sustains partnership practices (based on research from NNPS)
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# National Network of Partnership Schools (Johns Hopkins University)

- NNPS brings together schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing and maintaining comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships. Staff work with Network members to encourage, inform, recognize, and support efforts to improve and maintain school, family, and community connections that produce positive results for students.

[www.partnershipschoools.org](http://www.partnershipschoools.org)

- ALL schools **MUST** join NNPS prior to VISTA placement
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NATIONAL NETWORK OF  
**Partnership Schools**  
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

**[www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)**

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# DPI Responsibilities

- Help recruit, interview and select candidates
  - Provide various training opportunities throughout the year for VISTAs and all Supervisors
  - Pay living allowance to VISTAs from federal grant
  - Provide networking opportunities
  - Conduct regional and individual site visits
  - Communicate regularly with Site Supervisors
  - Act as liaison between sites and the CNCS and report on performance measures
  - Provide information on grant opportunities, workshops, and other topics
  - Provide technical support and guidance
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# School Site Responsibilities

- Help recruit candidates
  - Participate in DPI Orientation (Sept.)
  - Participate in VISTA Supervisor Training (Aug. - optional)
  - Attend DPI regional meetings and participate in site visits
  - Provide On-Site Orientation and Training
  - Provide supervision and support
  - Provide office space with access to a phone, voicemail, printer, fax machine, computer, and the Internet
  - Communicate bi-weekly with VISTA Leader
  - Support project for sustainability
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# School Work Plan

**Goal 1:** Lay the groundwork for partnerships

**Goal 2:** Participate in DPI trainings and meetings, and contribute to the DPI group to optimize efforts

**Goal 3:** With principal/supervisor, facilitate Action Team process, using Family-School-Community Partnership model and existing support network. See *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Epstein, et. al.)

**Goal 4:** Seek sustainability

**Goal 5:** Work on summer plan and prepare for next school year

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# Reflect: Buy-In

- How do you have (or how will you secure) buy-in/ownership from your staff for a VISTA *prior* to the VISTA's placement in your school?
  - How will this support be maintained once the VISTA has begun service at your site?
  - What committees, teams, and organizations within your school community will be involved in this project?
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# Reflect: Site Resources

What resources can you commit to the VISTA project?

- professional development opportunities
  - reimbursement for mileage/assigned tasks
  - adequate equipment and supplies to do the job
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# Reflect: Sustainability

AmeriCorps\*VISTA projects generally follow a three-year cycle with a goal of sustainability at the end of three years.

What systems will you put into place that assist in establishing sustainability at your site?

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