



# DPI VISTA Monthly

## Grassroots Leadership College: A VISTA Resource

*By Mara James, WICC VISTA  
and Melissa Stephenson, DPI VISTA*

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This fall we are participating in a Community Organizing Semester through Grassroots Leadership College in Madison. GLC is a group of community members with either experience or interest in community organizing; experienced “coaches” guide enthusiastic “developing leaders” in a community-organizing project. We meet weekly for presentations from guest faculty on relevant topics, such as confronting oppression in organizing, transforming conflict, leading effective meetings, fundraising, grant writing, and getting people engaged in community action. Additionally, the weekly sessions offer an opportunity to network and learn about the skills and projects of other community organizers in the area.

Our individual projects allow us to develop community-organizing skills while working on real and meaningful community needs.

**Mara’s project** is focused on engaging teachers, parents, and students in the college access programs Edgewood and the Lussier Community Education Center are developing and running. She wants to provide these groups with opportunities to fully engage in the programming as well as develop a feeling of ownership, which will (hopefully) lead to their continuation. From her involvement with the Community Organizing Semester, Mara has learned a lot about methods for engaging with community members as well as improved her understanding of what it means to do this work.

**Melissa’s project** is to plan and establish a school and community garden at Leopold Elementary School.

Leopold, which serves a population of over 70% low-income students, is located in a neighborhood of high-density multifamily rental housing and no grocery store. Melissa is working with school staff, parents, and community agencies to coordinate planning for a garden that could help address food security, nutrition education, neighborhood beautification, and increase community ownership in the school property. Through GLC, Melissa has made valuable contacts, learned about other successful community gardens in the area, and has benefited immensely from the relevant trainings in organizing.

Beyond the curriculum, GLC has provided us the opportunity to connect with community members across the Madison area, informed us about other community projects, connected us with different community groups or resources, inspired us through others’ work, and demonstrated the strength and passion within communities across Madison. This experience has greatly influenced our work and how we think about the projects we are part of and are developing. The Grassroots Leadership College motto, “Everyone a Learner. Everyone a Teacher. Everyone a Leader.” is something we should all take to heart when in engaging in community organizing to better serve our communities.

If you are interested in attending a future semester, check out [www.grassrootsleadershipcollege.org/](http://www.grassrootsleadershipcollege.org/) for more information! Feel free to contact Mara or Melissa with any questions as well.

### Save The Dates

December 8-9  
WEASSP Conference  
in Lake Geneva

December 16  
VISTA Check-In Webinar



# Collecting Family Involvement Data

by Ruth Anne Landsverk

The time and thought you give to measuring family involvement at your site can pay big dividends later in the school year and beyond. Initial measures, however simple, set a baseline and allow planners of future events or efforts to understand what was attempted, how it was received, and how to build on it. Simple evaluative data also allow you to claim success or progress in your partnership efforts. Here are some tips and tools to help you collect a few, straightforward measurements about which, how many, and how well families were involved.

## Ideas for Measuring Family Involvement

- **Take attendance** at partnership events. Count heads, have a sign-in sheet, or, for online items, monitor site usage.
- **Ask!** Have someone take notes when you ask an audience what they liked or how it could be improved. Hand out very brief evaluations before participants leave. Post parent surveys online for easy access/return.
- **Use volunteers to collect data.** Ask students equipped with notepads or questionnaires to circulate among participants. Do spot check phone calls of families who attended an event or participated in an initiative.
- **Make it user-easy.** Feature tear-off corners of the school newsletter for families and post suggestion boxes at school entryways so families can easily offer feedback. Publish phone numbers and e-mail or Internet addresses frequently in school documents so families know how to comment and offer ideas.
- **Track progress.** Parents can record minutes in a daily reading log or write comments to the teacher in the weekly take-home folder. Teachers can track the rate of homework completed or how well students performed on report cards, tests, and assignments. The principal or school counselors can keep tabs on numbers or students disciplined or referred for behavior issues.
- **Hold a focus group session with families.** Meet with a small group of family members in a relaxed setting to explore more complex issues of quality or access to school information and events.
- **What are you evaluating?** Take some time to think about what you want to accomplish by doing an

evaluation. Are you counting heads or discerning changes in attitudes? Polling opinion or gauging if learning occurred? Evaluations should be constructed to help you figure out if and how partnership goals were reached.

- **Post results of your evaluations.** The best way to make sure that people complete your next survey is to show them the results of the last one. This very important step demonstrates to participants that their efforts (and yours) were worthwhile. Publicizing evaluation results – whether from a survey, anecdotally, or the suggestion box – also documents and creates a body of interest in your partnership goals.

And don't forget, all VISTAs are required to distribute the Measuring your School-Family-Community Partnerships Inventory twice during the year- once by the Thanksgiving break and once by the end of the year in June. While this will help the project gather some data on the impact of VISTA in Wisconsin schools and districts, it's still important to consider year long, continual evaluation and progress monitoring as well.

## Tools for Measuring Family Involvement

- **Sample surveys from DPI VISTAs.** On the DPI VISTA Google page: <https://sites.google.com/site/dpivistaproject/resources-1/surveys>
- **School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action** (3rd edition), Chapter 9, Evaluate Your Partnerships, pp. 307-341.
- **Seeing is Believing: Promising Practices for How School Districts Promote Family Engagement** from the Harvard Family Research Project: <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/seeing-is-believing-promising-practices-for-how-school-districts-promote-family-engagement>

# A Week In the Life at the DPI VISTA Project

by Betsy Prueter and Katherine Foster



“What do you do exactly?” is not an uncommon question for DPI VISTA Project staff to get! We thought we’d take you all through a little tour of a “week in the life” of the DPI Project staff (Betsy and Katherine) so you have a better sense of what we do, who we are, and why we are here. We picked the week of November 7th for the “sneak peak.”

## Off we go to Beloit

On Monday we made a site visit to Amanda and Katelyn in Beloit- we got to see all three of their schools, meet their principals, get tours, talk with them about successes and challenges and of course, take them out to lunch! Site visits are always a highlight of our job- we love visiting all the VISTAs out “in the field.” Usually they are an all day affair so by the time we got back; it was some email and voicemail checking (we love calls and emails- so thanks!) before it was time to head home.

## Meetings galore

Tuesday was a day in the office. We met in the morning at our weekly meeting to talk about what we’re working on, how things are going at VISTA sites, and upcoming trainings and events. We also had a meeting with some other DPI staff to prepare for the State Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Council meeting. This is a group that we help to staff and support, which provides feedback to DPI staff on how to consider the family perspective. On Tuesday nights both Betsy and Katherine (along with some other DPI and WiCC VISTAs) attend a class at the Grassroots Leadership College on community organizing. The fun never stops!

## Check-Ins

We try to check in with VISTAs as often as possible (at least every two weeks) but we also check in with supervisors. On Wednesday, we had a supervisor conference call (one of three this year). We shared some updates, made some announcements and talked to them about how important it is to provide feedback to their VISTAs to help them grow their own professional skills.

Then, just to show what great role models we are (just kidding, we do this anyway) we went for coffee to chat about how things are going with Katherine in her VISTA Leader role. This allows both of us to give some feedback to the other.

## Getting feedback from Parents

The State Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Council meets three to four times throughout the year and we help to prepare for and run the meetings. The PAC members are also some of our VISTA Advisory Board members so it’s a great opportunity to get feedback and suggestions! Parents come together from across the state to discuss what is happening in their schools and communities. At the November meeting Betsy, Katherine and a few other VISTAs talked to parents about the VISTA program and its impact. The parents also participated in a short review of their school websites to see how family friendly the websites are. The meeting was a great success- we had some good discussion.

## Orienting new VISTAs

The DPI VISTA project has two new VISTAs, Kiralyn Bradford and Laura Weaver, who started their years of service on November 4th so on Friday morning of this week Betsy and Katherine orientated them to the VISTA Project via webinar. In addition to covering the goals of the project and what they will be doing as VISTAs, Betsy and Katherine also presented information on the structure and framework of the family school community partnerships model. It was a lot of information to cover but overall the four of us had a great conversation. Kiralyn and Laura walked away feeling more confident in their VISTA role and got all of their questions answered.

Whew. That’s a wrap! We love our work but like you all, we look forward to the weekend!

## VISTA to Supervisor with Heather Keyes and Cindy Janecek



### Interview with Heather:

**Cindy:** If you could give \$100,000 to any charity or cause what would you do with it and why?

**Heather:** I probably would split the money over various cancer organizations and foundations. Like Susan G. Komen for the cure, the Skin Cancer Foundation, Choose Hope for Kidney Cancer, and the American Cancer Society.

**Cindy:** If you could live in any city for a year where would you live and why?

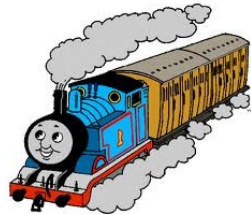
**Heather:** I think I would like to live in Vienna, Austria. Any place really outside of the United States would be interesting to me.

**Cindy:** If you could trade places with any person for one week who would it be and why?

**Heather:** The President of the United States. I think it would be really awesome to see everything that goes on in the white house.



**Cindy:** If you had the power to change one thing about the world today what would that be?



**Heather:** I would change our dependence on oil and cars and everything else oil is used for. Make mass transit a mandatory way of travel for all communities.

**Cindy:** What is your favorite childhood Christmas memory?

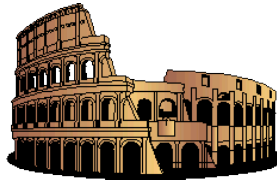
**Heather:** I really like this time of year. To see family and friends that I haven't seen in a while is a real treat. I have many special Christmas memories but if I had to pick one it would be the year my sister was born. She was a December baby so that Christmas brought extra joy with a newborn in the family.



### Interview with Cindy:

**Heather:** If you could travel anywhere where would you go for the holiday's?

**Cindy:** If I could go anywhere for the Holidays I would want to travel probably to somewhere like Rome or Bethlehem. Why? Well I think these places would really focus on the true meaning of Christmas and not be so wrapped up in the material part of what Christmas has become.



**Heather:** If you could eat lunch with one famous person, who would it be?

**Cindy:** As cheesy as it sound I would like to eat lunch with Oprah. I think she is down to earth and very smart and up to date about almost everything. She also has interviewed so many people that I could ask her about them as well.

**Heather:** If you became a multi-millionaire overnight, what would you buy?

**Cindy:** First I would take a long vacation so I could think about what to do with all the money. Then I would make sure my

family would be taken care of. Then I would look at charities that I would want to support. I most likely would do charities in the United States mostly addressing children's issues. I probably would be a bit selfish and buy a new house.

**Heather:** Do you have any family traditions for the holiday season?

**Cindy:** Thanksgiving usually is spent with just my husband and children. We get so busy throughout the year, we just take Thanksgiving to be with each other. We usually go away somewhere. Christmas we have our family over. My family does a "White Elephant" gift exchange which gets really crazy!!

**Heather:** What is one thing scientists should invent for the holiday season?

**Cindy:** A Robot Clone that will do all my shopping, wrapping and running around!!



## VISTA to VISTA with Liz Klapheke and Amanda Scherer



### Interview with Liz:

**Amanda:** What is the kindest thing anyone has done for you?

**Liz:** I had a really bad sunburn when I lived in South Africa, and they don't sell aloe there... but we had a big aloe plant outside of our house. My friend would go to the plant every few hours, cut off part of it, and make it into a paste for my sunburn.

**Amanda:** What has been your biggest challenge in life, and how did it change you?

**Liz:** My biggest challenge has been overcoming certain life circumstances, but overcoming them has definitely changed me for the better. I am happier and more confident now.

**Amanda:** If you could go anywhere tomorrow, where would that be?

**Liz:** Cape Town, South Africa



**Amanda:** What is most fulfilling about being a VISTA?

**Liz:** Knowing that I am making a difference in my community, and that what I am doing will continue on to help the community.

**Amanda:** Where do you go when you need to be alone? Do you have a thinking spot?

**Liz:** I bike to the river and sit.

**Amanda:** What is the best piece of advice you've received either life/job advice?

**Liz:** To have confidence in yourself. Especially when you're interviewing for a job... you're getting a feel for them as much as they're getting a feel for you.

**Amanda:** What is the craziest thing you've ever done?

**Liz:** Skinny dipping in the Indian Ocean



### Interview with Amanda:

**Liz:** What has been your biggest challenge in life, and how did it change you?

**Amanda:** As an eighteen year old I was diagnosed with a medical condition while abroad. Through that process I became much more confident and strong.

**Liz:** If you could go anywhere tomorrow, where would that be?

**Amanda:** Salzburg, Austria

**Liz:** What is most fulfilling about being a VISTA?

**Amanda:** Being able to wear many different hats within the community I work, and seeing the impact. I also really enjoy working in a community that I am passionate about.

**Liz:** If you could have any super power, what would it be?



**Amanda:** I don't think I'd want a super power, because with great power comes great responsibility! Actually I'd love to have wings, and be able to fly!

**Liz:** What is the best piece of advice you've received either life/job advice?

**Amanda:** Don't give up on your dreams.

**Liz:** What is the best thing about being a VISTA? The best thing about Wisconsin?

**Amanda:** All the people I get to work with/meet. So inspiring! The beautiful parks, rivers, lakes, and also cheese!



**Liz:** What is your most embarrassing moment?

**Amanda:** Not sure, I've had many! But I honestly don't get that embarrassed, even when I probably should.

# Fun'tivities: Potlucks



by Amanda Scherer  
photos courtesy of Mark Freker

This past weekend I participated in a co-op potluck and I couldn't help but think it was a perfect VISTA fun'tivity! If you are tired of cooking for yourself, this is a great community builder, and you get to eat lots of yummy food. This event was a collaboration of several food co-ops in Beloit. My house, (four Beloit College Alums ), and another house, which consists of Beloit College Seniors, makes up one of the many Co-ops. For this event, I made sandwich bread: <http://www.food.com/recipe/julia-childs-white-bread-9032>. The great thing about potlucks is that even if you invite 10 people, those people will

probably bring friends, which means you get to meet more of your community! This particular potluck focused on bringing the area co-ops together, but your potluck could have any theme: Thanksgiving, or other holidays, a certain kind of food, etc... It could be an excuse to get VISTAs in a certain region together, or to get to know the staff at your site better! Additionally, this event transitioned into a jam session of a few of the more musically inclined co-op members. This is another great way to get to know others and get to play your instrument of choice, or merely dance to the music! Have fun!



## Recipe of the Month Summer Garden Chicken Stir Fry

Recommended by Sam Aguirre



**In denial about the coming winter months? Try one last summer recipe!**

### Ingredients:

- 1 lb. boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped gingerroot
- 1 medium onion, cut into thin wedges
- 1 cup ready-to-eat baby-cut carrots, cut lengthwise in half
- 1 cup fat-free chicken broth
- 3 tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 2-3 teaspoons sugar
- 2 cups fresh broccoli florets
- 1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms (3 oz)
- ½ cup chopped bell pepper (any color)
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- Hot cooked brown rice, if desired

### Directions:

Heat 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken, garlic and gingerroot; cook and stir 2 to 3 minutes or until chicken is brown.

Stir in onion, carrots, ¾ cup of the broth, soy sauce and sugar. Cover and cook over medium heat 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Stir in broccoli, mushrooms and bell pepper. Cover and cook about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until chicken is no longer pink in center and vegetables are crisp-tender.

In small bowl, mix cornstarch and remaining ¼ cup broth; stir into chicken mixture. Cook, stirring frequently, until sauce is thickened. Serve over rice.

Makes 4 servings. Prep time: 30 minutes.



## Questions for Katelyn???

By Katelyn Zilles

Dear Katelyn,

I'm already stressed out about holiday shopping! I always have bought my friends and family nice gifts and this year I just do not have the money on my AmeriCorps budget! Do you have any inexpensive gift ideas?

Sincerely,  
Concerned Consumer

Dear Concerned Consumer,

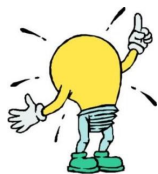
It is easy to say that the holidays are all about your friends and family and gifts are the last thing to worry about for the season of giving. However, it may be awkward to receive gifts and not give anything in return. Or you may take pride in being a great holiday giver! Either way, at that point it is important to keep in mind that it is not about the money spent but the thought that counts. You do not need to go tit for tat this season – if someone usually spends \$30 on a gift for you, keep that in mind and put forth the effort that you feel your gift would then match up, rather than matching their price. It is also acceptable to be open and honest with your financial situation. Tell your friends and family that you're on a tight budget this year, they should understand. I tend to be crafty with my gifts as homemade presents are always thoughtful. Hit up your local craft store (make sure you bring coupons from weekend ads) and walk around for some crafty inspiration! This year I plan on going the "food stamp route." This means buying as much on my food stamps for a gift but then disguising it in creative ways! Gourmet coffees, roasted nuts, cocoa mix, popcorn, etc. can all be put into decorative containers with a ribbon tied around and a gift tag attached for a super low budget present. Dry recipes for baked goods and soups can also be layered in inexpensive jars and decorated with holiday cheer! Below are some great websites with similar ideas. Happy (low-budget) gifting!

<http://www.oprah.com/food/Homemade-Treats-That-Make-Great-Gifts>

<http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/holidays/gift-ideas/diy-stocking-stuffers#slide-1>

<http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/holidays/christmas-ideas/homemade-food-gift-ideas#slide-1>

**Have a question for Katelyn???** Email her at [k8lynzilles@gmail.com](mailto:k8lynzilles@gmail.com)!



## Tips & Advice From The Field

Consider the benefits of using all of the free resources Google provides. A Google site is a great way to work towards sustainability, raise visibility of your program and disseminate information to school staff, parents and the community. (Jon Peters)

If you feel distanced from the learning that is going on in the classrooms at your site, you might want to consider learning and reading more about classroom instruction, curriculum and the role of the educator. It can help you feel connected to what everyone at your site is trying to do- improve student achievement! (Amanda Scherer)

Don't forget how valuable (and sustainable) an email list serv can be. It's fairly simple to set up but can help you communicate with a lot of people (i.e. parents easily and quickly). It can also be a great way to get conversation going among parents. If your site doesn't have a list set up you could always use a yahoo or google group. (Melissa Stephenson)

You need to make sure that you are learning as much about the culture of the families you work with as possible. If there are opportunities for trainings or professional development, take advantage of them! In Beloit, we have a Latino Service Providers Meeting that recently sponsored a workshop called "Walk A Mile in My Shoes" on the Latino culture and values. Find out if there might be something similar in your community! (Katelyn Zilles)

Other AmeriCorps members are a wonderful resource! Be sure to seek out fellow AmeriCorps members at your site or in your community. They might help you with an event, recruit or share volunteers, and they can be some of the most valuable partnerships you make this year! (Margot Geisthardt)



## Art Alley

by Katherine Foster

### New Year's Reflections By Joanna Fuchs

Looking back on the months gone by,  
 As a new year starts and an old one ends,  
 We contemplate what brought us joy,  
 And we think of our loved ones and our friends.  
 Recalling all the happy times,  
 Remembering how they enriched our lives,  
 We reflect upon who really counts,  
 As the fresh and bright new year arrives.  
 And when I/we ponder those who do,  
 I/we immediately think of you.

Thanks for being one of the reasons I'll/We'll have a Happy New Year!

### Color, Caste, Denomination By Emily Dickinson

Color -- Caste -- Denomination --  
 These -- are Time's Affair --  
 Death's diviner Classifying  
 Does not know they are --  
 As in sleep -- All Hue forgotten --  
 Tenets -- put behind --  
 Death's large -- Democratic fingers  
 Rub away the Brand --  
 If Circassian -- He is careless --  
 If He put away  
 Chrysalis of Blonde -- or Umber --  
 Equal Butterfly --  
 They emerge from His Obscuring --  
 What Death -- knows so well --  
 Our minuter intuitions --  
 Deem unplausible --



## Books Around The Corner

The Snowman

by Raymond Briggs

This book was a favorite of our family year round when the kids were small. It is a wordless book and the pictures are done in a really soothing manner. There is also a movie that they really enjoyed. In the story, a little boy wakes up on a snowy day, and builds a huge snowman. That night, he can't sleep, so he opens the front door and discovers that the snowman has come to life. He invites the snowman into the house to see what life is like inside. Afterwards, the snowman takes the little boy on a similar adventure outside in the world of snow. The next morning, the little boy wakes up to find the snowman has melted.

Recommended by Juanita Peck



The Girl Who Fell from the Sky

by Heidi Durrow

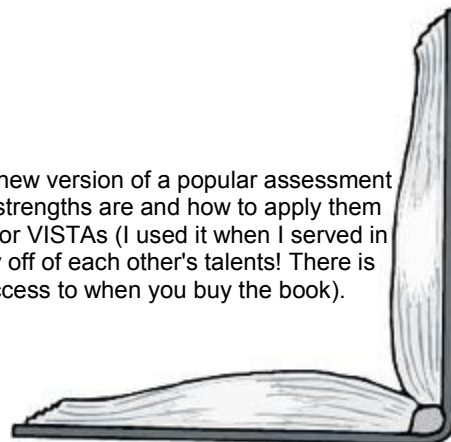
I read this book recently as part of a book club I belong to in Madison. It brings some critical social issues to the surface including racial integration, society's conception of beauty, and the challenges of coming of age. The main plot revolves around Rachel, a bi-racial girl who goes to live with her African American grandmother after a family tragedy. This is definitely one to talk about with others!

Recommended by Betsy Prueter

Strengths Finder 2.0  
by Tom Rath

In Strengths Finder 2.0, Gallup unveils a new version of a popular assessment to help you determine what your biggest strengths are and how to apply them to your work and life. This is a great tool for VISTAs (I used it when I served in MN) and Supervisors to learn how to play off of each other's talents! There is also an online portion (which you have access to when you buy the book).

Recommended by Katherine Foster



## Grant Opportunities

### Whole Kids Foundation & FoodCorps School Garden Grants

**Deadline: December 31**

The Whole Kids Foundation and partner FoodCorps offer \$2,000 grants, along with curriculum, resources and mentorship, to 1,000 schools. FoodCorps' expertise in gardening, and its ongoing support will help schools build and sustain their gardens to ensure long-term success. All schools and garden-related nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for grants to support the launch or expansion of school gardens that will help children engage with fresh fruits and vegetables. Garden projects may be at any stage of development; planning, construction or operation. <http://bit.ly/rrUU7K>

### Captain Planet Foundation: Grants for the Environment

**Deadline: January 15, 2012**

The Captain Planet Foundation funds hands-on environmental projects to encourage youth around the world to work individually and collectively to solve environmental problems in their neighborhoods and communities. Maximum award: \$2,500. Eligibility: U.S.-based schools and organizations with an annual operating budget of less than \$3 million.

<http://captainplanetfoundation.org/>

### Campbell's: Labels for Education

Labels for Education has been awarding free educational equipment to schools in exchange for proofs of purchase from the Campbell family of brands. It's a fun, easy program where students, families and members of the community work together for a common goal.

Learn more at <http://www.labelsforeducation.com/About-the-Program/about-the-program>

### Lowe's Toolbox for Education

Lowe's will donate \$5 million to public schools and public school parent teacher groups - at more than 1,000 different public schools per school year.

<http://www.toolboxforeducation.com/>

### ING Unsung Heroes

**Deadline is April 30, 2012**

Are you an educator with a class project that is short on funding but long on potential? Do you know a teacher looking for grant dollars? ING Unsung Heroes® could help you turn great ideas into reality for students. Each year, 100 educators are selected to receive \$2,000 to help fund their innovative class projects. Three of those are chosen to receive the top awards of an additional \$5,000, \$10,000 and \$25,000. Applications for the 2012 awards are now available.

Learn more at <http://ing.us/about-ing/citizenship/childrens-education/ing-unsung-heroes>

## Important Resources

### National Center for Family Literacy

<http://www.familit.org/>

### Improving Family and Community Involvement in Secondary Schools

<http://www.nassp.org/Portals/0/Content/56190.pdf>

### Family Guide for Serving on Groups

<http://wispdg.org/pl/groups.html>

### School Reform Initiative

<http://schoolreforminitiative.org/protocol/>

### CREATE Wisconsin

<http://www.createwisconsin.net/>

### The VISTA Hub

<https://sites.google.com/site/dpivistaproject/>

### Volunteer Management Webinar (archive)

[https://www.livemeeting.com/cc/wi\\_dpi/view](https://www.livemeeting.com/cc/wi_dpi/view)  
Recording ID: Z3TC93

