



VISTA
Volunteers in Service to America

AmeriCorps VISTA Quick Guide for Recruitment 2018

College Recruitment Strategies

If you have...
30 minutes: Search for colleges and universities in your area (state) and decide where to target your efforts. Things to consider in your targeting: size of student body, types of majors/programming, diversity of students, campus organizations where you may have an affiliation.
1 hour: Use this <u>template</u> to email the college career counselors, student organizations, and any other key contacts at your selected schools, promoting your opportunity listing(s).
½ day: Once you have established a contact at a school, plan a recruitment visit for the day. Do an info session and also set up a table in the student union/ post flyers on campus.

As of FY 2016, over 65% of VISTA applicants nationwide had the minimum of a bachelor's degree; 50% of all applicants were between the ages of 20-25. The reality for most volunteer programs is that college students and soon-to-be graduates are more inclined to apply for VISTA opportunities.

With limited time for recruiting, building a strong base of applicants from nearby college campuses is a great strategy. Invest in relationships with college gatekeepers such as career service centers, student union workers, and service-learning groups. This increases the odds for a steady stream of applicants from institutions and will cultivate a pipeline of potential VISTA members.

The best place to start engaging on a college campus is with any personal contacts you may have. You should also see yourself as an "employer." Therefore, a great place to start is with career centers and career counselors on campus. Developing a connection with these offices will allow you to gain access to a variety of places on campus, beyond career fairs. The following is a short-list of ways to engage college students once you have established relationships with offices on campus:

- Place an advertisement for your position in the college newspaper. Most college newspaper ads offer digital and print options, as well as a range of pricing.
- Ask one of your members to give an interview on a campus radio station or newspaper to describe the VISTA experience--bonus points if they are an alum of the college.
- Set up a table at a career fair or in the student union.



- o Hang posters advertising your positions in the student union or other common spaces. You can either order VISTA posters [here](#), or make your own using the templates.
- o Connect with faculty, student government, campus clubs and request to give a brief talk to their students about your organization.
- o Connect with departments that align with your organization’s programming, and ask to give class talks or send messages to their juniors and seniors about your opportunities. For example, if your program recruits mentors for at-risk youth, consider reaching out to a School of Social Work or Education.

With college students, focus your pitch on benefits (professional development, AmeriCorps Education Award, [Non-Competitive Eligibility for federal jobs](#), the opportunity for hands-on program management). For most college-aged applicants, if you are able to tell the story of just how impactful their year of VISTA service can be, you are going to pique their interest.

Community Recruitment Strategies

If you have...
30 minutes: If your organization has a newsletter, place an advertisement of your opportunity listings during recruitment season. You never know who in your network may be interested in serving, or have a friend/relative looking for opportunities.
1 hour: Create flyers for your opportunity listings using one of these two fillable templates. Visit local businesses and see if they would be willing to place these flyers up on their bulletin boards. Coffee houses and libraries often have community bulletin boards.
½ day: Contact one of the community organizations listed below, and schedule a presentation, chat, or meeting. There are thousands of local organizations around the country serving diverse constituents who would love to hear about your opportunities.

Effective recruitment is about building relationships. Taking the time to cultivate one-on-one conversations regarding your program could result in a new applicant. While recruiting on college campuses can generate interest in a program, the following are additional ways to engage your community in direct recruitment:

1. Search for local farmer’s markets in your area and inquire about hosting an educational booth during one fair or throughout the summer. Keep in mind, fairs may charge a nominal fee to host an “educational” table (as opposed to a vendor table). Whether you are talking to prospective applicants, or giving parents the opportunity to pass info along to their children, this is a great place to get the word out to community members, especially for Summer Associate positions.



VISTA
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2. Contact your local library and ask to host a presentation. Utilize one of your VISTA members or Leaders and have them give a public talk about their service. Many libraries look for community programming and would be happy to publicize an event. Have your member think of a creative way to present her/his service experience and include the personal and professional benefits of VISTA service.
3. Reach out to your local FFA (Future Farmers of America), HOSA (Future Health Occupation Professionals), and 4-H chapters; many of them have college-age cohorts. Offer to give a presentation about your organization. Coordinate a service day with your organization and pair up members from FFA, HOSA, 4-H, and other community service groups with currently serving VISTA members so they can gain an insider's view of what service is like.
4. Forge connections with the Rotary Club, Lions Club, Links, Top Teens of America or other social organizations in your area. Ask to give a presentation about your program and any VISTA openings during one of their meetings. Position VISTA as a wonderful opportunity not only for recent college graduates, but also parents who are re-entering the workforce and retirees.
5. Use your own non-profit contacts! Consider posting your opportunity listings on the job boards of local philanthropic or community organizations. Reach out to your project partners and ask them to email their constituents with information about your listings.
6. Set up a booth at a local fair, parade, or festival in your town to distribute information on your program and any current openings. Some of the more common summer community events include cultural festivals, Independence Day celebrations, parades, etc.
7. Conduct "coffee chats" where current members in your project can set up informal opportunities to meet at local coffeehouses to answer any questions about AmeriCorps service and provide applicants with "the insider's view" of the program. This is also an excellent strategy to keep candidates engaged who have accepted a position but have yet to complete VISTA Member Orientation (VMO).

Partnering with Diverse Organizations

There are many national organizations which have local chapters representing a diverse constituency of both students and professionals. Below is a sample list of organizations with local chapters across the country. Start by reaching out to these organizations to set up a meeting with a local representative and explain why you want to engage their members. Reinforce why AmeriCorps VISTA is an amazing professional opportunity and a chance to make a difference at the local level. In addition to the organizations listed below, consider expanding your outreach to local churches and other faith-based organizations.



Name	Website	About
Unidos US	www.unidosus.org/affiliates/	Formerly known as the National Council of La Raza, Unidos US is the national non-partisan voice of the Latino community. Unidos has local chapters across the US.
National Urban League	http://nul.iamempowered.com/	The mission of the Urban League movement is to enable African Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights.
NAACP	www.naacp.org/	The mission of the <i>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People</i> is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans	www.ncapaonline.org/	A coalition of national Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations striving for equity and justice by organizing its diverse strengths to influence policy and shape public narratives.
National LGBTQ Centers	www.lgbtcenters.org/LgbtCenters	Directory of every LGBTQ-serving center in the U.S.
The Links, Inc.	www.linksinc.org/index.php	A large volunteer service organization of women who are committed to enriching, sustaining and ensuring the culture and economic survival of African Americans and other persons of African ancestry. Over 280 chapters worldwide.
AARP	www.aarp.org/giving-back/aarp-chapter-locator/	The largest non-profit dedicated to advancing the needs of Americans aged 50 and older has hundreds of local chapters around the U.S.

Opportunity Listings

Opportunity listings should accurately reflect information provided in the Volunteer Assignment Description (VAD). The tone of your listing should invite, engage, and convince the reader to apply. Think of this like a property listing on a real estate site. We highly recommend that projects use other platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Indeed, and Idealist) to advertise their opportunity listings, in addition to the my.americorps.gov portal.

Opportunity Listing Elements



In addition to the required fields such as start dates, location, and contact information, there are three major elements to an opportunity listing which you will want to include: the two line-teaser, the program description, and the member duties. See samples of each of these elements, below.

1. **Two-Line Teaser** (200 characters or less). This is a short description of the position that an applicant first sees, and the information that comes up in the initial listing search. Find creative ways to make your two-line teaser stand out from the rest, such as this example:

- **Opportunity listing title:** *Communications and Fundraising AmeriCorps VISTA - The Women's Place*
- **Good Two-Line Teaser:** The AmeriCorps VISTA member will raise funds from multiple channels, including individual donors, grants and events. The member will also get the word out via email blasts, newsletters, and social media.
- **Better Two-Line Teaser:** Help families in need! As our AmeriCorps VISTA member, you will help with fundraising and telling our story. This is a great opportunity for a writer or budding fundraiser to serve with a domestic violence shelter in McCabe County.

2. **Program Description** (2,000 characters or less). This is the main informational section of your opportunity listing, and it is tricky to get this right. Try not to overwhelm this section with too much information about the many layers of your organization. You should identify what the issue is and how the position will address it. You want to answer the who, what, when, and where of your project in this question, but most critically, the why. Why should someone apply to this position, and what is the anticipated impact of the role?

See the sample below for a well-written and compelling program description:

- **Opportunity Listing Title:** *Communications and Fundraising AmeriCorps VISTA - The Women's Place*
- **Program description:**

Annually, over 4 million women will experience physical violence from an intimate partner, and domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness among families. In McCabe County, over 5,000 families will be displaced due to domestic violence this year. Individuals and organizations across the state are working tirelessly to change this but don't have the time or resources to work together strategically. The Women's Place convenes and trains volunteers to assist families with domestic violence, as well as provides safe and supportive housing to transitioning families. We're looking for individuals to strengthen local community efforts, get people to collaborate, and affect large-scale, positive change through fundraising and outreach efforts. Help ensure that all families have a safe and healthy environment in McCabe County. Because when we all come together, we can help families heal and rebuild in the wake of domestic violence.



VISTA
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3. **Member Duties** (1,000 characters or less). This section of the opportunity listing is where you briefly describe the duties outlined in the VAD. Avoid directly copying the VAD language and pasting it in list form. Instead, take your VAD duties and craft a short narrative piece, such as the sample below:

- **Opportunity Listing Title:** *Communications and Fundraising AmeriCorps VISTA - The Women's Place*
- **Member Duties:** As an AmeriCorps VISTA member at the Women's Place, you will help ensure a safe environment for women and families by supporting and promoting programs and resources for those experiencing domestic violence. Major functions will include crafting external and internal communications, pursuing donations by developing a funding plan and securing donors, and ensuring our community members have access to our services through in person and online outreach.

Opportunity Listing Best-Practices

Ensure that the basic information is accurate: start and end dates, contact info, living allowance amount, terms, conditions, and benefits of service.

- Reference benefits unique to VISTA, such Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE) for federal employment.
- Mention any additional benefits your program may offer, such as transit passes, housing stipends, gym memberships, etc.
- Reference the technical skills VISTAs will develop or gain during service, and emphasize the importance of such information on future resumes.
- What does your audience want to hear? They want to know about the impact they could have, the details of the project, and how the VISTA position contributes to your organization's goals and the applicant's future employability.
- Try to keep your language plain, and stay away from service-world jargon. Translate terms into what makes sense to your audience for example:

INSTEAD OF THIS	TRY THIS
Capacity Building	Sustainable or Organizational Development
Indirect Service	Professional or Office Setting
Fundraising and Development	Grant Writing and Partnership Development