

Host Site Information

Organizational Information

The Wisconsin DPI Family-School-Community Partnerships AmeriCorps*VISTA Project began in 1998 and is funded by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service. The grant allows for 19 AmeriCorps*VISTA members to serve as family-school-community partnership coordinators in low-income Wisconsin schools and a VISTA leader located at the DPI in Madison. The project goals for the sites are to:

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

The project design is based on the research of Joyce Epstein, director of the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University.

Department of Public Instruction and Community Learning and Partnerships Team (DPI – CLP)

The Community Learning and Partnerships Team of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction administers this grant, which provides for AmeriCorps*VISTAs to work in schools serving a high proportion of low-income students. Under the leadership of the elected state superintendent, the DPI advances the cause of public education and public libraries and provides technical assistance to the public schools so that all school age children have access to quality educational programs that meet high standards of excellence and all citizens have access to comprehensive public library resources and services.

The mission of the CLP Team is to work with communities to ensure learner success and stronger communities through family-school-community partnerships. The CLP Team brings together staff and programs that focus on helping to build strong communities. The core team includes staff in community education, early childhood education, nutrition education, service-learning, and family-school-community partnerships. The team works with other teams and programs in the

agency to promote the work of the VISTA grant, including reading, Title I, Family Literacy/Even Start, student services, SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education), school and public libraries, and special needs. The resources of the DPI are available to the VISTA sites.

The CLP team is part of the Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning (DLTCL) at the DPI. Find the DLTCL website at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/dltcl/index.html> and the CLP team website at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fscp/index.html>. The program director, VISTA leader, and program assistant are located here to help you with technical assistance with your site responsibilities and work plan-related concerns, payroll questions, conference registration, and reimbursement for on-site training-related expenses.

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. VISTA is now a program under the umbrella of AmeriCorps, a national service initiative started in 1993. The Corporation for National and Community Service (www.cns.gov), also created in 1993, oversees all AmeriCorps*VISTA programs.

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 three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Members and volunteers serve with national and community nonprofit 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.

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 www.partnershipschools.org for more information on NNPS, conferences, promising partnership practices, a bulletin board, meeting NCLB requirements, and current research.

AmeriCorps*VISTA Application and Enrollment Process Overview

Once a site has been approved, an AmeriCorps*VISTA enrollment packet will be forwarded to the on-site supervisor. This enrollment packet will explain the member enrollment process in greater detail and contain all relevant paperwork. Once a candidate is selected, the site supervisor will complete the enrollment paperwork with the candidate and return it to the DPI before the deadline. This does not guarantee the site a placement, as the final approval rests with the CNCS State Office. More information about AmeriCorps*VISTA eligibility is available at www.AmeriCorps.org/vista/index.html.

AmeriCorps*VISTA members’ term of service is for one calendar year, and begins immediately following the Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) required by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which will take place in Chicago. Because most host sites are schools, the DPI will start all new VISTA members in August. PSO dates and other deadlines are listed below

Event	Date/Deadline
Potential host sites submit “Host Site Application” to the DPI CLP Team	April 1, 2007, and ongoing
Program Director and VISTA Leader orients potential Site Supervisors by phone	May 2007
VISTA Leader(s) visit potential host sites	Ongoing, as needed
Sites notified of application status	By May 1, 2007, and ongoing as needed

Event	Date/Deadline
Approved host sites recruit and select VISTA candidates VISTA Leader(s) screen candidates as applications received	As needed
Candidates accept the recommendation for VISTA membership and host sites complete and return all enrollment information to the DPI	June 30, 2007
The DPI sends enrollment information for all selected candidates to the CNCS State Office for approval; approved candidates are notified of their enrollment in the program.	July 6, 2007
Pre-Service Orientation (<i>required and subject to change as determined by CNCS</i>)	Aug., 2007
DPI VISTA and Supervisor Orientation, Madison, WI	Sept., 2007

NOTE: *Your site’s approval for a VISTA does not guarantee your having a VISTA, since you must also recruit a qualified candidate by the deadline date. Because of the challenge of recruiting high-quality candidates, the DPI will approve more than 20 sites with the understanding that the first 20 sites to recruit and approve a qualified candidate will serve as host sites for the 12-month period. To increase the chances of securing a VISTA, host sites should begin recruiting early. The VISTA Leader(s) will forward any applications received online, but host sites should not rely on this source alone to find candidates. Some of the best candidates are recruited from your community.*

AmeriCorps*VISTA Position Description

The overall goal of the DPI AmeriCorps*VISTA Project is to 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. The project uses AmeriCorps*VISTA members in the following capacities:

- To develop and expand ongoing collaborative partnerships between schools and their respective families and communities
- To involve families in learning at home, volunteering, communication with teachers and administrators, and decision-making processes that affect students’ education
- To facilitate an Action Team for Partnerships that designs, implements, and sustains partnership practices

Responsibilities

Each individual project site should adapt the position description and work plan to the needs of the school and local community (these modifications need to be approved by the program director). For example, DPI VISTAs may be expected to:

- Participate in an assets mapping project in collaboration with school 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 school community.
- Help families understand school structure and to feel welcome in the school.
- 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.
- Recruit families and other community members to volunteer in school community events.
- Encourage parents to participate in school activities, including attending school board and site council meetings.
- Involve local service groups in the school.
- Recognize and celebrate community involvement in schools.
- Work with local AmeriCorps members to design and implement projects on national days of service (e.g., MLK Day, Make a Difference Day).
- Promote school partnership efforts through various media, such as local newspapers, radio stations, or community bulletin boards.

- Write grant proposals to support partnership activities.

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 to promote partnerships.
- Commitment to the mission of the project and its impact on schools and communities.

The VISTA reports directly to his or her site supervisor but will also be responsible for communicating regularly with the DPI 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.

Benefits

To support them in their service, AmeriCorps*VISTAs receive:

- A living allowance, amount depends on location.
- Health benefits.
- Child care, if eligible.
- Option of an end-of-year cash stipend or an Education Award.
- 10 personal leave days and 10 sick days.
- An option to purchase life insurance.

- A relocation allowance (depending on the distance of the move).
- Training opportunities.

Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

The following information outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the Wisconsin DPI Family-School-Community Partnerships AmeriCorps*VISTA Project.

DPI Community Learning and Partnerships Team

- The DPI allocates a monthly living allowance. Checks are deposited directly into the VISTAs' bank accounts bi-weekly. This money comes from the project's CNCS grant.
- The DPI screens all candidates and coordinates enrollment procedures for selected VISTA candidates by forwarding all enrollment paperwork to the CNCS.
- The DPI helps sites in recruiting candidates for available positions through the online AmeriCorps recruitment system and other venues, though the primary recruiting responsibility lies with the host site.
- The DPI provides an orientation at the beginning of the year and various training opportunities throughout the year for VISTAs and their site supervisors.
- The DPI provides networking opportunities to members via e-mail, regional meetings, and various trainings.
- The DPI conducts regional and individual site visits.
- The DPI acts as a liaison between sites and the CNCS to provide information to all VISTAs and site supervisors.
- When VISTAs elect the end-of-year cash stipend, the DPI provides the stipends through the grant from CNCS.
- The DPI provides information on grant opportunities, workshops, and other topics.
- The program director and VISTA leader provide technical support and guidance.

Host Sites

- Host sites must recruit, interview, check references for, and select their own VISTA members.
- Host sites must identify a site supervisor who will provide daily supervision. Supervisors must be available to meet with their VISTAs to discuss projects, goals, and actions.
- Site supervisors must attend VISTA supervisor training (before the VISTA's term of service begins), as well as certain required trainings with their VISTA during the year. All costs incurred by supervisors must be covered by the host sites.
- Site supervisors must design an On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) to acquaint their VISTA with the school, staff, community, and position. Obtaining "buy-in" for the VISTA position prior to applying is necessary for the success of the program.
- Host sites must provide office space with access to a phone, voicemail, printer, fax machine, computer, and the Internet. Host sites must also provide an individual e-mail account/address to the VISTA.
- Host sites must allocate a budget to cover work-related transportation costs and other appropriate expenses for members and supervisors to participate in agreed-upon activities and training. The site has the option of contributing a set amount to the DPI for reimbursing the indicated expenses. Upon request of need from the site, the DPI will provide financial assistance within its budget capacity.
- Site supervisors must write a work plan for their VISTA *prior* to his/her arrival and ensure that it is followed throughout the year.
- New host sites must complete a New Host Site Application when applying for a VISTA member; returning host sites must complete a Continuing Host Site Application for each year they apply for a VISTA.
- Host sites must not expect or ask VISTAs to perform direct service activities at their site (i.e., work that is normally done by a paid staff member, such as substitute teaching, answering phones, lunch/recess/bus duty, etc.; or by a volunteer, such as copying, filing, data entry, etc.).

NOTE: Host sites may provide additional benefits, such as room and board, school lunches, tuition waiver, scholarship, subsidized housing, or utility assistance; however, sites may not supplement or increase the living allowance provided by the DPI CLP or provide any other monetary compensation (per federal law).