

# Hosting a VISTA



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

# 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**.

# National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)

- Established by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, NNPS brings together schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing and maintaining comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships. Joyce L. Epstein, director, and the 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.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)



NATIONAL NETWORK OF  
**Partnership Schools**  
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

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

# Process

- Potential host sites submit “Host Site Application” to the DPI
- Potential site supervisors “meet” with DPI
- Host sites recruit and select candidates
- DPI, CNCS approve candidates
- VISTAs and supervisors participate in training

## Note on Recruitment!

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. Some of the best candidates are recruited from your community.

# 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

# Benefits to the VISTA

- A living allowance of either \$809/month or \$840/month, depending on location
- Health benefits
- Child care, if eligible (max \$300/month)
- Option of an end-of-year cash stipend of \$1,200 or an Education Award of \$4,725
- Ten 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



# 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.

# Broad Duties

- 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

# DPI Responsibilities

- Help recruit candidates
- Provide various training opportunities throughout the year for VISTAs and their site supervisors
- “Pay” living allowance to VISTAs from federal grant
- Provide networking opportunities
- Conduct regional and individual site visits
- Act as liaison between sites and the CNCS and reports on performance measures
- Provide information on grant opportunities, workshops, and other topics
- Provide technical support and guidance

# Site Responsibilities

- Complete host site application
- Recruit VISTA
- Provide supervision and support
- Participate in VISTA Supervisor Orientation
- Provide On-Site Orientation and Training
- Provide office space with access to a phone, voicemail, printer, fax machine, computer, and the Internet
- Allocate a budget to cover work-related transportation costs
- Support project for sustainability

# School Project 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

# District/Organization Project Plan

- Goal 1: Lay the groundwork for partnerships
- Goal 2: Participate in DPI trainings and meetings, and contribute to the DPI group to optimize the efforts
- Goal 3: Serve as a facilitator to support the Action Team process in identified schools, 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

# 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?

## Site resources

What resources will you commit to the VISTA project?

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

# Sustainability

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