



Building and Strengthening Neighborhoods and People

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Strong 2018 – 2019 AmeriCorps VISTA Project Request for Project Proposals

Deadline: Thursday, January 18, 2018 by 9:00 AM

In partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Strong City Baltimore is soliciting proposals from nonprofit agencies, government agencies, and community organizations throughout the state of Maryland for AmeriCorps Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA) projects. Strong City-sponsored VISTA projects receive a full-time volunteer for one year. For this application cycle, members will serve from July 2018 to July 2019.

For more than four decades, Strong City has secured the resources of VISTA members to fight poverty through sustainable change. Since partnering with CNCS to become a VISTA sponsor, Strong City has supported over 100 projects across Maryland. Strong City Baltimore's mission is to build and strengthen neighborhoods and people. Strong City works through an Anti-Racist and Anti-Discriminatory lens to reinforce the pillars of vibrant urban living: safe streets, desirable and diverse housing stock, quality public schools, a robust and educated workforce, and a deep sense of civic engagement. Much like the neighborhoods we serve, our programs are interconnected and bolster our holistic approach to fulfilling our mission.

To be considered for a VISTA project placement, potential service sites must demonstrate a significant need for AmeriCorps VISTA resources, an understanding of the AmeriCorps VISTA model, and a well-conceived VISTA project. Potential service sites should also prioritize the following:

- A specific anti-poverty focus in their work, addressing the needs of low-income communities.
- A commitment to volunteerism and sustainability-oriented thinking as a strategy for addressing local issues.
- Building and strengthening neighborhoods and people.

WORKING WITH AMERICORPS VISTA MEMBERS

VISTA is a federally-funded program specifically focused on eradicating poverty through engaging individuals in full-time community service. For more information about working with AmeriCorps VISTA, see the [CNCS FY18 Program Guidance](#), which you should have received along with these instructions.

Strong City supports the following VISTA values:

- **Anti-Poverty Focus:** As previously stated, *the mission of VISTA is to eradicate poverty*. As such, every VISTA project application must be conceived with the perspective of empowering individuals and communities to help themselves out of poverty.
- **Community Empowerment:** VISTA service sites have an affirmative responsibility to *engage members of the low-income community* in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of their project.
- **Sustainable Solutions:** All VISTA projects are to be designed with the *specific goal of phasing out VISTA involvement*, while strengthening the ability of the project to function without them.

- **Capacity Building:** *VISTAs do not provide direct service to communities, but work to build infrastructure, expand partnerships, secure long-term resources, coordinate trainings, and create systems that remain in place long after their project timeline ends. VISTAs provide communities with the necessary tools and training to help themselves for the long term.*

For 2018-19 proposals, VISTA continues to focus on specific areas of strategic priority. While all anti-poverty projects are considered for placement, proposals whose focus aligns with the following areas are preferred:

- **Economic Opportunity**, including financial literacy, access to safe and affordable housing, and improving employability. VISTA project activities should focus on the following objectives of Economic Opportunity:
 - *Employment/Workforce Development*
 - *Financial Literacy*
- **Education**, including school readiness for economically disadvantaged children, K-12 success in low-achieving schools, increasing student interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education, and post-secondary success for economically disadvantaged students. Projects should focus on the following objectives:
 - *School Readiness*
 - *K-12 Success, including STEM Programming*
 - *Post-Secondary Success*
- **Healthy Futures**, including improving access to nutritious food and access to health care for economically disadvantaged individuals. Projects should support the following Healthy Futures Objectives:
 - *Access to Health Care, including Opioid Addiction Prevention and Recovery*
 - *Food Security*
- **Veteran and Military Families**, including increasing economic, educational, and health opportunities specifically for these individuals and families.

Strong City also accepts applications that align with the following *Priority Populations and Regions*:

- **Vulnerable Youth**
- **Rural Communities**
- **Indian Country**

PROJECT DETAILS AND GUIDELINES

Submissions to this Request for Project Proposals will focus on the creation and execution of a specific, measurable, goal-driven VISTA project. VISTA members are expected to engage their whole focus on their specific project, as outlined in your proposal, and may not be assigned any general administrative or maintenance tasks by their service site.

VISTA members are provided an assignment description to complete their project goal, sufficient to provide no less than 35 service hours per week for one full year. However, VISTA members are expected to be available to their service site at all times and as needed.

Individual Service Sites will be responsible for overall project support and implementation, supervising their VISTA, and meeting individual project reporting deadlines as set by Strong City.

As the Sponsor Site, Strong City assists with the recruitment, training, continuing professional development, support for VISTA members (such as housing, health care, food stamps, etc.), and administers the grant from CNCS that makes VISTA projects possible.

Although federal funding supports the majority of VISTA costs, Strong City-sponsored VISTA project slots are considered “cost share” slots, meaning that Strong City has agreed to support a portion of the service related costs for the members covered under this grant. Cost share partnerships ultimately make it possible for more VISTAs to serve and, therefore, more organizations and local communities to benefit from the VISTA program each year! Strong City asks partner Service Sites under this grant to contribute an administrative fee to assist with the costs of managing the program. Strong City anticipates that **the total Service Site contribution will be no more than \$7,500 for the 2018-19 project year**. This contribution represents an investment, not only in the VISTA resource and demonstrates the service site’s commitment to the VISTA project. Each Service Site participating in Strong City’s VISTA Cohort will be required to sign a Memorandum of Agreement that will outline financial responsibilities and contingencies.

Project Development Timeline

- Project Proposal Development Workshops: December 14, 2017, and January 4 and January 11, 2018
- Project Proposal Submission Deadline: January 18, 2018
- Project Proposal Submission Review: February 2018
- Projects Notified: March 2018
- Member Recruitment: March – May 2018
- Members Enter Service: Late July 2018
- Members Serve: July 2018 – July 2019

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE PROPOSAL

Project Proposal Development workshops will be held on Thursdays December 14, January 4, and January 11, at 6:00 PM at the below address. Attendance at one of these workshops is highly encouraged, and although all submitted proposals will be accepted, priority consideration will be given to applicants who attend a workshop, or make alternative arrangements with Strong City staff to discuss their proposal.

Please RSVP at the site below to reserve a space at one of the scheduled workshop sessions. Please contact Lily at lross@strongcitybaltimore if you have any questions about accessibility; we do our best to make accommodations available when requested.

<https://www.strongcitybaltimore.org/our-work/amicorpsvista/servicesites/>

To ensure that each response to this Request for Project Proposals receives the appropriate consideration, all responses are to be submitted **by Thursday, January 18, 2018 NO LATER THAN 9:00 AM**. Proposals should be submitted to Lily Ross via email (lross@strongcitybaltimore.org), via mail, or in person to the below address:

Strong City Baltimore
ATTN: Lily Ross
3503 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218

A completed proposal must include the following:

- Proposal Cover Page
- VISTA Project Proposal

STRONG CITY VISTA PROJECT PROPOSAL COVER SHEET

Organization Name: _____

Fiscal Sponsor (if applicable): _____

Organization EIN Number: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, County: _____ Zip: _____ Ext: _____

Site Supervisor Name: _____

Supervisor Title: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Application Writer Name
(if different): _____

Application Writer Title: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Project Name: _____

Project/Organization Website URL:

Projected Length of Project (between 1 – 3 years): _____

I understand that AmeriCorps VISTA supports capacity building, anti-poverty projects. If assigned a VISTA member sponsored by Strong City Baltimore, I accept that service site responsibilities include but are not exclusive to: recruiting and selecting VISTA candidates, providing VISTA members with daily supervision, workspace, and adequate resources, reporting progress and challenges to Strong City, adhering to the rules and regulations as stipulated by AmeriCorps VISTA and the Strong City VISTA Program, and participating in the mandatory VISTA Site Supervisor Training in July 2018.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROJECT PROPOSAL

In paragraph form, please address each of the following, using the bolded text from each bullet as a section header. We recommend that each of the below narratives be no more than 500 words in length.

- **Executive Summary** – Provide a basic statement of the project’s overall goal, as well as an overview of what the VISTA volunteer’s duties would be.
- **Need Statement** – State in measurable and quantifiable terms the specific poverty-related population and need(s) that your VISTA project will address. Include the number of low-income people directly affected by the problem(s) you are addressing, and any relevant statistical data.
- **Goal Statement** – Your Goal Statement should clearly and concisely state the measurable objective of the project is intended to accomplish through use of the VISTA resource. Strong City recommends developing your Goal Statement based on your answer to this question: What do you want to specifically accomplish (implement, build, or improve) through this VISTA project, and what will be in place at the end of your work on this project to demonstrate your success? *A well-articulated goal statement is one of the most important elements of your proposal.*
- **Project Timeline** – VISTA project goals are generally expected to be completed in one to three years. Please include a timeline for the proposed project to roadmap significant activities and their benchmarks towards the execution of your Goal Statement, and the project’s end date.
- **Anti-Poverty Focus** – Describe how your project’s success will ultimately give communities and individuals the tools and skills they need to bring themselves out of poverty and/or break the cycle of poverty.
- **Sustainability** – Describe the measures in place, or that your site will implement, to ensure that the project will continue past the time of a VISTA member’s involvement. How will you involve organizational staff or the community to ensure the project’s sustainability?
- **Strengthening Communities** – Describe current activities your organization is undertaking to address the problems identified in your need statement, and how the proposed VISTA project will complement this work.
- **Organizational Capacity** – Describe the resources that will be devoted to your proposed VISTA project, including daily in-person supervision, workspace, phone, computer, and internet access, as well as direct agency support, community support, available administrative or supervisory support, etc. Also describe how your organization is prepared to work specifically with a VISTA volunteer, including the mandates for capacity building and sustainable solutions.
- **VISTA Alignment** – Explain your site’s reason for working with a VISTA member to accomplish the project goal. How do you envision that a VISTA member will fit into your organizational structure? Why are you interested in partnering with VISTA, opposed to other resources?

Please contact Lily Ross, Director of VISTA Programming, at (410) 261-3618 or lross@strongcitybaltimore.org with questions regarding the development of a VISTA project or specific questions regarding this Request for Project Proposals.
