AmeriCorps VISTA Project VAD (Volunteer Assignment Description)

Introduction, Checklist and Resources

What is a VAD?

- Provides a broad outline of what a VISTA will work on during the year of service. Similar to a position description, it's valuable in recruiting members and as the basis of a detailed work plan.
- Breaks down the objectives identified in the Project Application into a realistic set of activities to reach those objectives.
- Is written yearly, per assignment. A unique VAD is required for each VISTA member each year.
- Can be adapted as the project evolves and the unique strengths of the VISTA become apparent. (Significant changes to tasks and timelines must be approved by your CNCS state office.)

The VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) is integral to the success of the member and the success of the VISTA project. It is a critical tool in planning and executing recruitment, selection, onboarding, orienting, reviewing performance, reporting, and more. The VAD is the roadmap for the member prior to and during their service. A well-written and understandable VAD contains appropriate capacity-building VAD activities and is a foundational element in helping the member comprehend their assignment and how it fits into the overall objectives and goals of the VISTA project.

Overall:

- Sequence VAD activities to begin with those that build skills and knowledge and then slowly move toward more challenging and complex activities.
- Be aware of character limits for each section of the VAD.
- Before submitting the VAD, review it to check that there is a clear and direct connection between the project goal, objectives, and activities. If the VISTA completes the activities, will that be enough to accomplish the objectives? If not, what's missing?
- Note that a VAD must be reviewed and approved by the AmeriCorps before the position can be published for members to apply.
- Is the goal of the Project related to breaking the cycle of poverty?
- Is the goal related to outcomes for the low-income population rather than improvements for the sponsoring organization?
- Is the VAD readable – are there incomplete sentences, misspellings or typographical errors?
- If this is the 2nd year or beyond that the organization has had a member doing these activities, how does the VAD compare to previous years? Has it been updated to include the accomplishments of previous members or is it a complete duplication of the activities of the previous member?

Title: Give each VAD a distinct title related to the position to be filled. If you are creating multiple, similar VADs, create a naming system that includes the service year or a unique identifier for each position in addition to the description title. Moreover, be sure to clearly indicate whether the VAD is for a member, a leader or summer associate.

Objectives: Articulate what the member will achieve through the assignment in order to reach the project's goal. Include multiple objectives that link the overall project goal and the VISTA member's activities. Include a

period of performance with a clear beginning and end for each objective. Be specific, rather than using the entire service year as period of performance.

- o Is there more than 1 objective?
- o Are objectives achievable within the year – is there too much or too little for 1 individual to accomplish?
- o Would the objectives and activities lead to the fulfillment of the anti-poverty goal listed?
- o Do the objectives have at least one goal per quarter?
- o Do the objective dates listed align with the VISTAs service term?
- o Are objectives focused on the low-income population or are they general to all individuals within the population or service territory?
- o Do objectives flow and build upon one another, progressing through the year?
- o Is there overlap in the period of performance dates of the objectives? If so, are the objectives independently achievable, or would one objective need to be accomplished before the other was started?

Activities: Identify the specific activities the member will carry out to achieve the objectives. Activities that include the desired outcome or deliverable are most informative and effective. Avoid vague statements, such as the VISTA "will assist with…" Activity statements should be specific enough that someone unfamiliar with the project can understand the expectations of the member.

- o Are the listed Activities:
    - o Written clearly and specifically?
    - o Sustainable activities?
    - o Not direct service in nature. If there is any direct service listed, is it minimal and directly related to sustainability of the project?
    - o Written so they do not include generic terms, 'etc.' or 'other duties as assigned'
- o Are there any duties listed that would be supplanting of staff responsibilities?
- o Are there any duties listed that would be inappropriate for the VISTA to do? For example: handling of agency funds, reprimanding staff or volunteers, establishing organizational policies.

Resources:

- AmeriCorps Webinar: About your VAD: Understanding the Big Picture to Get You Started
  - https://vistacampus.gov/resources/about-your-vad-understanding-big-picture-get-you-started
- Creating Effective VADs:
  - https://www.vistacampus.gov/creating-effective-vads
- AmeriCorps Webinar: The Importance of the VAD in VISTA Projects
  - https://www.vistacampus.gov/resources/importance-vad-vista-projects
- Action Verbs
  - https://www.vistacampus.gov/sites/vistacampus/files/Action_Verbs_List.pdf