HOUSING ACTION ILLINOIS AMERICORPS NETWORK

2021 Instructions & Resources Packet

BREAKING DOWN THE COSTS
AmeriCorps Members & AmeriCorps Summer Associates

	AmeriCorps MEMBER	AmeriCorps SUMMER ASSOCIATE
Project Participation Fee	**$4,000 per AmeriCorps member**	**$850 per AmeriCorps Summer Associate**
Ventra or Metra Monthly Transit Pass for Chicagoland Positions	**$100–$180 per month** *Depends on distance*	**$100–$180 per month** *Depends on distance*
Housing Action Membership Dues	**$50–$300 per year** *Based on annual budget*	**$50–$300 per year** *Based on annual budget*

Organizations must be in good standing with and up-to-date on Housing Action membership dues in order to apply to host an AmeriCorps position.

These costs are the minimum required for host sites. **Housing Action strongly encourages organizations to offer supplemental benefits to AmeriCorps Members and Summer Associates, such as a housing stipend and/or gift cards to local establishments (grocery stores, gas stations, etc.)**. Doing so greatly increases the chances of securing a candidate for your AmeriCorps position.

There are other, less predictable costs you should keep in mind, as well: the staff time it will take to supervise and support a position, reimbursement for work travel, and the cost of marketing the position for successful recruitment.

KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE
Direct & Indirect Service

Direct Service: Activities that provide an in-person, measurable benefit to an individual, a group, or a community. Working directly with people to make change, or work that is involved in making that direct change.

Indirect Service: Activities that build the capacity of an organization to enhance its mission, strategy, skills, and culture, as well as the systems, infrastructure, and human resources of an organization that is fulfilling unmet community needs. Capacity-building activities help an organization gain greater independence and sustainability.

INDIRECT SERVICE	DIRECT SERVICE
• Write Grants and Organize Fundraisers • Community Organizing • Enhance Marketing Tools • Recruit Volunteers to Build Houses • Write a Financial Literacy Course Curriculum • Setting Up Partnerships in the Community • Create Volunteer Management System for an Overnight Shelter	• Tutor Children in Reading • Reorganize a Food Pantry • Client Intake & Case Management • Build Houses • Teach a Financial Literacy Course • Deliver Meals on Wheels

KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE
AmeriCorps Members & AmeriCorps Summer Associates

	AmeriCorps MEMBER	AmeriCorps SUMMER ASSOCIATE
Term of Service	Full-time, 12-month commitment	Full-time, 8–10-week commitment (June–August)
Project Focus	• Affordable Housing • Supportive Housing • Homelessness Prevention • Housing Counseling • Community Development • Financial Literacy	• Affordable Housing • Supportive Housing • Homelessness Prevention • Housing Counseling • Community Development • Financial Literacy • Youth Summer Education • Hunger (Food Insecurity)
Positions per Organization*	Usually no more than two	No limit, but usually no more than six
Service Type**	Indirect service	Indirect or direct service
Host Site Fee	$4,000 per Member	$850 per Summer Associate
2021 Start Dates	6/7, 7/6, 7/19, 8/2, 8/16, or 8/30	6/7 & 6/21

Benefits
 	
Click Here for Full Description
	• Living allowance
	• Choice of:
	  o Education Award ($6,095), or
	  o End of Service Stipend ($1,803)
	• Non-competitive eligibility status for federal jobs
	• Healthcare allowance
	• 10 health leave days
	• 10 personal leave days
	
	If Eligible:
	Relocation payment ($750)
	Child Care Assistance
		• Living allowance
		• Choice of:
		  o Education Award ($1,289), or
		  o End of Service Stipend ($345)
		• 1 or 2 sick days may be granted, but must be made up by serving extra hours before the term of service ends

Organizations can apply for/host both AmeriCorps Member and Summer Associate positions.
**See page 3 for a description and examples of indirect service and direct service.*

HOST SITE FEE, APPROVAL, & RECRUITMENT
AmeriCorps Members

Host Site Fees & Reimbursement
Host sites are required to pay a project participation fee to Housing Action Illinois. This fee covers match requirements with the federal agency that oversees the AmeriCorps program and helps offset administrative expenses for the project.

- The host site project participation fee is $4,000 per position.
- Your organization will pay the project participation fee by March 26 if the position is approved.
- Organizations that do not successfully recruit for their position will receive a full refund of their project participation fee ($4,000 per position), provided they meet our recruitment requirements (see below).

Approval & Recruitment
Housing Action will approve as many positions as we determine are eligible. Twenty-eight full-year AmeriCorps Members will be placed at host sites for the 2021–2022 program term. The 28 slots will be awarded to the first organizations to successfully recruit an AmeriCorps member. We will notify all organizations when every slot has been filled, and any organization that has not successfully recruited an AmeriCorps member (but has met all recruitment requirements) will be reimbursed for the full project participation fee.

A minimum of four slots are reserved for positions located outside of the Chicago metropolitan area (Cook, Lake, McHenry, DuPage, Will, Kane, and Kendall counties).

Recruitment Requirements
- Publicize the position on at least two websites.
- Attend a Site Supervisor Training (exact timing and location TBD).
- Respond to communications from your assigned AmeriCorps Leader and Housing Action staff within 5 business days.

HOST SITE FEE, APPROVAL, & RECRUITMENT
AmeriCorps Summer Associates

Host Site Fees & Reimbursement
Host sites are required to pay a project participation fee to Housing Action Illinois. This fee covers match requirements with AmeriCorps and helps offset administrative expenses for the project.

- The host site project participation fee is $850 per position.
- Your organization will pay the project participation fee by March 26 if the position is approved.
- Organizations that do not successfully recruit for their position will receive a full refund of their project participation fee ($850 per position), provided they meet our recruitment requirements (see below).

Approval & Recruitment
Housing Action will approve as many Summer Associate positions as we determine are eligible. Thirty Summer Associates will be placed at host sites on a first-come, first-served basis to organizations that successfully recruit for their positions. We will notify all organizations when every slot has been filled, and any organization that has not successfully recruited for their position (but has met all recruitment requirements) will be reimbursed for the full project participation fee.

A minimum of four slots are reserved for positions located outside the Chicago Metro-region (Cook, Lake, McHenry, DuPage, Will, Kane, and Kendall counties).

Recruitment Requirements
- Publicize the position on at least two websites.
- Attend a Site Supervisor Training (exact timing and location TBD).
- Respond to communications from your assigned AmeriCorps Leader and Housing Action staff within 5 business days.

WRITING STRONG APPLICATIONS
Application Section II

Key Questions Explained

For Section II of the application, we most frequently receive requests for guidance regarding the Project Outline question, which is broken down into four parts. We will focus on the Project Outline in this section of the Instructions and Resources Packet. Please contact the Housing Action AmeriCorps team at vista@housingactionil.org or join our webinar on January 15, 2021 if you need guidance or advice on other parts of Section II.

Project Outline: Questions A & B

- Use one or a combination of the four bullet points (scale/reach, effectiveness, efficiency, and leveraged resources) to describe the short- and long-term goals of the position.
- Think about the broader reasons for the position. You will have plenty of opportunity to get into the details of the position's goals, objectives, and responsibilities in Section III.

Project Outline: Question C (Quantitative Impacts Chart)

- Input hard numbers: use actual numbers. If you include percentages, be sure to reference the corresponding number.
  - o Acceptable response: We will increase the number of clients in our rent relief program by 50%, which would mean 50 new individuals.
  - o Not acceptable: We will increase the clients in the rent relief program.
  - o Not acceptable: We will increase the clients in the rent relief program by 50%.
- All positions must include the number of individuals receiving housing-related services or the number of housing units made available, developed, or repaired.
- If you have a broad systems developer position (volunteer recruitment, grant writer, communications and outreach, research and partnerships, etc.) you may use the number of individual people receiving housing-related services or the number of units made available, developed, or repaired through the program that ultimately benefits from the volunteers recruited, funds received, etc.
- Numbers that are included here must be clearly cited in the VISTA Assignment Description (in Section III of the application).

Project Outline: Question D

- We want to know how you plan to track or measure the progress on the quantitative goals listed in Question C (the Quantitative Impacts Chart)—for example, will you be using a CRM database, sign-sheets at events, etc. When answering Question D, refer to the instructions in the chart for how to keep track.

WRITING STRONG APPLICATIONS
Application Section III

Terms, Purposes, Best Practices, & Examples
All responses to the three questions in this section are submitted verbatim to AmeriCorps for review of the proposed position. In contrast, responses to other sections of the application provide Housing Action with critical information used to determine whether your organization is eligible to host a position and whether the position is a good fit for our program.

If you do not follow the word and character limits, we will not be able to submit your position for AmeriCorps' review. Failure to adhere to the word and character counts will result in your application being returned for edits in February. Failure to address word and character count issues after the application is returned may result in the application being automatically denied.

This portion of the Instructions & Resources Packet will provide best practices for completing Section III of the application.

Need Statement
Responses to this set of questions are kept internally at AmeriCorps and Housing Action Illinois. This is your opportunity to demonstrate why your community and organization requires the support of an AmeriCorps position and how the project you have in mind will be effective.

- **Question A:** Cite sources for the response, as you might for an academic research paper. If your organization has development or grant writing staff, they may have standardized language or sources you can use. Some commonly referenced sources of data include the NLIHC Out of Reach Report, local Continuum of Care data, Quality of Life plans from your organization or for your community, 2019 State of Rental Housing in Cook County, and the Census and other governmental data.
- **Question B:** This question asks which specific populations will be served by the project within the community described in Question A.
    - For example: in response to Question A, you use governmental data sources to cite the poverty rates in your county. When responding to Question B, you would explain how a certain demographic in your community is especially in need of support because they are experiencing the majority of the poverty in your county.
- **Question C:** Responses to this question should explain why an AmeriCorps position is needed for this project, as opposed to traditionally-employed staff members, or why your organization is needed to accomplish this work, as opposed to other nonprofit organizations or governmental agencies.

- **Question D:** This question is fairly straightforward. Provide your organization's mission statement, and explain how achieving the goals and objectives of this project aligns with that mission.
- **Question E:** As with Question A, you need to cite sources. AmeriCorps is looking for evidence that completing a project like the one you are proposing is likely to be successful. Your cited source can be from your own organization's strategic plan, quality of life plan, or from organizations that have carried out similar projects in other geographic areas.

AmeriCorps VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) Terms

VADs are unique in their use by AmeriCorps. However, their general content is familiar to non-profit organizations, government agencies, and the various other organizations that host AmeriCorps positions. VADs are reframed and reorganized Outcomes Approach Logic Models for the specific position at the host organization.

Below, we will break down the three main portions of the VAD that you need to complete and explain how they relate to logic model terms.

Goal of the Project = Goal Statement

A Goal of the Project is a very broad statement of intended accomplishments or long-term outcomes. A well-defined goal will establish the overall direction and focus for the project, define what the program will achieve, and serve as the foundation for developing program strategies and objectives (recruiting good candidates and coaching positions during their terms of service). Goals are not always achieved during one service year or summer. Goal statements should be specific to the community, population, hosting organization, and type of poverty to be addressed.

Objectives = Short-Term and Intermediate Outcomes

Outcomes specify the impact or specific intended results of the project. Objectives in the VAD may be short-term or intermediate, depending on the nature of the position.
- Short-term outcomes are the immediate results of the project: number of clients helped, research being completed, staff being trained, etc.
- Intermediate outcomes specify what individuals do with the short-term outcomes: implementation of a pilot program, increase in grants successfully awarded, ensure the sustainability of the project, etc.
- Long-term outcomes may also be identified. Typically, but not always, the objectives mirror the goal statement. It is important to identify the order in which outcomes will be attained.

Member Activities = Outputs

The outputs specify what the AmeriCorps Member and Summer Associate, program staff, and partners will do during the service year. They are typically more general statements: conduct RFP process, develop training materials, conduct training of trainers, provide technical assistance, etc.

Action Verbs to Create a Strong VAD

When writing a VAD, one common mistake is to frame the position's responsibilities and goals in terms of assisting a staff member in implementing a program or acting primarily in administrative or clerical roles. This can easily be prevented by showing how your position focuses on building the capacity of your organization.

Avoid verbs like "help" or "assist," which can indicate a lack of leadership in the position to AmeriCorps.

Here is a list of action verbs to use instead:

Analyze	Ensure	Present
Assess	Establish	Promote
Build	Evaluate	Recommend
Collect	Generate	Recruit
Communicate	Identify	Refine
Compile	Implement	Research
Coordinate	Launch	Secure
Create	Market	Suggest
Develop	Measure	Update
Distribute	Monitor	Use
Engage	Plan	Write

Sample VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

Title: Program Development Associate VISTA
Sponsoring Organization: Housing Action Illinois **Project Name:** Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project **Project Number:** **Project Period:** 09/01/2021 – 09/01/2022
Site Name (if applicable): Southeast Supportive Housing

Focus Area(s)
  Primary: Economic Development
  Secondary:

<mark>**Note:** *If your VAD is not accepted, the State Office will note the reason(s) why here.*</mark>

VISTA Assignment Objectives and Member Activities

Goal of the Project: Southeast Supportive Housing (SSH) provides permanent supportive housing for youth ages 18 – 24. Research shows that financial literacy builds the economic empowerment and self-sufficiency of youth. In 2021, SSH will launch a financial education program designed to provide supportive housing tenants with the basics of financial management, household finance, and banking. The VISTA member will design and implement the pilot program. In doing so, the VISTA will build a program that will help supportive housing tenants to break the cycle of poverty. <mark>*Goal of the project includes a description of the organization, communicates a community need, and states how the work of the AmeriCorps member directly addresses this need and how this need can help break the cycle of poverty.*</mark>

Objective of the Assignment (<mark>*08/15/2021 – 12/15/2021)*</mark> ← <mark>These sections are filled out to show the timeframe.</mark>
By December 2021, the VISTA will have conducted community outreach and finalized curriculum for a pilot Youth Financial Literacy Program.

Activity 1: The member will understand existing financial literacy program and conduct community outreach in support of a new Youth Education module.
  a. Member will become familiar with agency services and work with management to assess the state of Financial Education programming.
  b. Survey potential beneficiaries ages 18-24 with the purpose of identifying gaps in youth supportive services.

Activity 2: The VISTA member will research best practices and finalize existing curriculum based on findings and outreach survey.
  a. Research best practices in Financial Literacy and Youth Supportive Services making any necessary updates to existing program materials.
  b. Develop a manual for Youth Financial Education program administrators and Resident Leaders.
  c. The member will finalize all service materials pending staff approval.

Objective of the Assignment (*08/15/2021 – 12/15/2021*)
By December 2021, The VISTA will create an advisory committee composed of SSH members and community partners in order to establish support and guide the direction of the Financial Education Program.

Activity 1: Create a database of current people and projects in financial literacy to track and gauge interest in program development.
   a. VISTA member will identify and establish partnerships with 5 local financial institutions.
   b. Create a tracking and coordination system to support regular communications and project updates.

Activity creates tools that can be used by staff and future AmeriCorps members, ensuring the overall sustainability of the project produced by the member.

Activity 2: During October and November 2021, plan and help facilitate at least five focus groups to gather input about potential program and direction.

Activity 3: Coordinate and help facilitate monthly advisory meetings throughout the year.

Objective communicates a finite timeframe and includes separate schedules for individual activities. Having milestones allows for the most efficient use of the AmeriCorps member's time, and prevents the member from being diverted to perform non-AmeriCorps related tasks.

Objective of the Assignment (*01/30/2022 – 09/01/2022*)
Help modify pilot curriculum for Youth Financial Education Program for Summer 2021 in order to engage students learning and provide long term financial practices.

Activity 1: Meet with partner pilot classroom to monitor and gather feedback best fit for new curriculum.

Activity 2: Document feedback and best practices on shared resources folder.

Objectives include activities documenting the work of the AmeriCorps member; ensuring that the project developed by the member can be easily sustained by future AmeriCorps members and/or staff.

Activity 3: Revise existing curriculum based on implementation feedback and conduct required research to support the finalization of program curriculum.

Activity 4: Present the status of the pilot Youth Financial Education program to advisory committee for review and approval.

Objective of the Assignment (*02/28/2021 – 05/30/2021*)

The VISTA member will develop program administration guides and train one Youth Resident Leader to Facilitate Financial Services Curriculum.

Activity 1: VISTA will document program processes, update administrator's manual, and create presentations for training.

Activity 2: Work with program staff to identify candidates for program facilitation training.

Activity 3: Conduct one full training and certify a Resident Leader as a Youth Financial Education program facilitator.

Sample VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

Title of the Position: Volunteer Recruitment and Management Systems VISTA	

Sponsoring Organization: Housing Action Illinois
Project Name: Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project
Project Number:
Project Period: 08/28/2021 – 08/27/2022

Site Name (if applicable): Peoria Cares

Focus Area(s)
  Primary: Economic Opportunity
  Secondary:

VISTA Assignment Objectives and Member Activities

Goal of the Project (no more than 750 characters with spaces):

Peoria Cares provides holistic support to the individuals and families that are experiencing homelessness in the Peoria area to help these people break the cycle of homelessness and poverty. To help ensure that individuals and families that are experiencing homelessness receive the broad spectrum of support they need to break the cycle of poverty, the VISTA project will build the capacity of Peoria Cares by developing a sustainable volunteer recruitment and management system for its overnight emergency shelter program.

Goal of the project directly states how the project will address a specific need in the community. The goal also addresses how the work of the AmeriCorps member directly relates to ending poverty. There is a description of the organization, too.

Objective of the Assignment (*08/15/21-12/20/2021*) ← These sections are filled out to show the timeframe.
No more than 1,000 characters with spaces.

By December 20, 2021, assess the current state of Peoria Care's efforts in reaching, selecting, and supporting volunteer mentors and create or revise policies, procedures, and documents to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the management system of the overnight emergency shelter.

Objective is geared toward building capacity within an organization, and creates a timeline for when the implementation of the project should begin. Having milestones allows for the most efficient use of the AmeriCorps member's time, and prevents the AmeriCorps member from being diverted to perform non-AmeriCorps related tasks.

  Member Activities (no more than 2,500 characters with spaces):

    1. Research the history of volunteer programs at Peoria Cares.

      a. Review and become familiar with internal policies, procedures, and documents related to the mentor recruitment and matching system by September 20, 2021. Identify the current program's strengths and challenges.

b. In collaboration with Peoria Cares leadership, develop a written plan for improvement by October 20, 2021.
Member activities show how the AmeriCorps member will focus on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the program, and will not be administering the program themselves.

2. Refine or develop systems for screening and scheduling volunteers.

   a. Develop or revise documents related to internal policies and procedures regarding volunteer recruitment and scheduling by November 20, 2021.

   b. If needed, participate in online training on how to build a database in Excel by November 20, 2021.

   c. Create Peoria Cares Excel database to track mentor screening and scheduling by December 20, 2021.

Objective of the Assignment (*01/01/22-08/15/2022*)
No more than 1,000 characters with spaces.

By 8/15/2022, set up outreach systems and build partnerships with at least 10 community organizations—and then develop targeted marketing materials—to increase public awareness of the volunteer program.
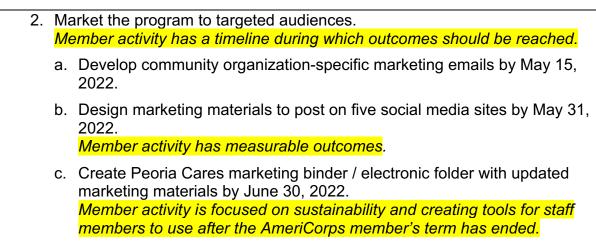
Objective shows how the program will create a sustainable and effective volunteer program that can continue without the support of an AmeriCorps member and has a specific goal of 10 community organizations.

Member Activities (no more than 2,500 characters with spaces):

1. Plan for outreach and recruitment.
Member activities act as a work plan for the AmeriCorps member.

   a. Identify the skills, abilities, and experiences sought in volunteers by January 30, 2022.
   Member activity ensures that the AmeriCorps member's work focuses on community empowerment.

   b. Write volunteer task descriptions that include qualifications, activities, benefits, time commitment, and other expectations by February 28, 2022.

   c. Attend 10 community events, as well as identify and develop partnerships with 10 community organizations whose members are possible volunteers or who can otherwise support the organization, by March 30, 2022. Continue to update the internal database to track volunteer screening and scheduling.
   Member activity has measurable outcomes and focuses the AmeriCorps member's work on increasing collaboration among organizations.

2. Market the program to targeted audiences.
   Member activity has a timeline during which outcomes should be reached.

   a. Develop community organization-specific marketing emails by May 15, 2022.

   b. Design marketing materials to post on five social media sites by May 31, 2022.
      Member activity has measurable outcomes.

   c. Create Peoria Cares marketing binder / electronic folder with updated marketing materials by June 30, 2022.
      Member activity is focused on sustainability and creating tools for staff members to use after the AmeriCorps member's term has ended.

Sample VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

Title of the Position: Communications and Resource Development VISTA	
Sponsoring Organization: Housing Action Illinois **Project Name:** Illinois Affordable Housing Support Project **Project Number:** **Project Period:** 08/28/2021 – 08/27/2022	
Site Name (if applicable): Midwest Alliance to End Homelessness	

Focus Area(s)
  Primary: Economic Opportunity
  Secondary:	

VISTA Assignment Objectives and Member Activities

Goal of the Project: Our region is dealing with housing insecurity for homeowners and stretched demand for rental housing. Midwest Alliance to End Homelessness (MAEH) works to alleviate poverty through housing-related services and public advocacy. The Communications and Resource Development VISTA will help us communicate with our partners, community stakeholders, and funders by developing print and digital materials, as well as aid us in building our capacity and influence by cultivating supporters, expanding our outreach, and diversifying our resources.

The goal shows how the work of the AmeriCorps member directly relates to addressing a specific need in the community, and provides a brief description of the organization. The goal of the project also directly states how building capacity in the organization will help it fight poverty.

Objective of the Assignment (*08/15/21-08/15/22)* ◄——— These sections are filled out to show the timeframe.

Work with Communications Manager and Staff to expand and develop communications materials (print and digital) that will raise MAEH's profile, reinforce member and donor involvement, and educate and activate the public around ending homelessness and affordable housing.

Objective is related to how the AmeriCorps member will achieve the goal of the project. Having objectives and member activities that are goal-focused prevents the AmeriCorps member from being diverted to perform non-AmeriCorps related tasks.

Member Activities

1. Work with Communications Manager to assess our current digital content and strategy (email, website, and social media); help develop consistent branding and messaging across platforms.

2. Collaborate with staff to develop promotional materials as needed. Potentially contribute to publications such as fact sheets, annual report, email newsletters, etc.

3. Update social media content and strategize ways to expand to new

audiences. Plan and launch social media campaign for Affordable Housing Month and identify other events and awareness holidays with campaign potential. Create content for social media kits to share with our supporters.

4. Aid MAEH and our partner agencies in collecting stories that demonstrate our impact and explain our issues, as well as shaping and sharing those narratives with the public, funders, and policymakers.
   Member activity ensures that the AmeriCorps member's work focuses on community empowerment.

5. Monitor media for housing-related news; help develop/execute media strategy and solidify a network of media contacts.

Objective of the Assignment (*11/30/21-08/15/2022*)

Collaborate with staff and Board on campaign to gain 3,000 new MAEH Housing supporters, and cultivate them for increased future engagement.

Member Activities

1. Aid in planning and execution of email campaigns and in-person events intended to activate new supporters.

2. Help create welcome materials for new supporters that will raise their level of engagement.

3. Identify prospective partner organizations, develop strategic plan for approaching them, and help create/test new welcome materials. Begin to implement plan and revise as necessary.
   Member activity focuses the AmeriCorps member's work on increasing collaboration among organizations.

Objective of the Assignment (*10/15/21-06/15/2022*)

Work with Executive Director, Board, and staff to expand and develop resource base.

Member Activities

1. Research and produce summaries of potential funding sources. Investigate new foundations and initiatives that might fund our work; research fee-for-service models that other organizations have implemented, and then recommend strategies for MAEH.

2. Contribute to the development and editing of funding proposals.

3. Collaborate with Executive Director and Communications Manager on planning, implementing, and assessing new fundraising strategies
   a. Plan and execute a #GivingTuesday campaign.
   b. Investigate local business partnerships or sponsorships, recommend ones worth pursuing, and begin outreach to establish relationships.

c. Research and brainstorm ways to increase our individual donor base.

Member activities act as a work plan for the AmeriCorps member. Member activities should not include things like "other duties as assigned."

Objective of the Assignment (*08/15/21-12/15/2022*)

Assess staff use of our database and email marketing system, then help establish streamlined processes for data collection, cleanup, maintenance, and integration.

Member activities are focused on sustainability and creating tools for staff members to use after the AmeriCorps member's term has ended.

Member Activities

1. Work with Communications Manager to assess current staff use and capabilities of our database and email system, as well as the state of current data.

2. Research and implement plan for data cleanup, propose new procedures for data entry and relationship tracking, and help integrate the systems so that they work together.

3. Revising, building, and improving contact lists for community partners, media, and donors.

Opportunity Listings

Below are the definitions of the specific sections, as well as screenshots of the AmeriCorps Portal to show what the content of these sections looks like in the portal.

AmeriCorps Portal: What USAJobs is to federal employment, the AmeriCorps Portal is to AmeriCorps positions. Every single AmeriCorps position nationwide is posted through this platform.

Opportunity Listing: The job description posted on the AmeriCorps Portal describing your position's role, responsibilities, benefits, and expectations. This listing has sub-categories that are defined starting below.

Two-Liner: This is the brief description of your position underneath the title of the position. It is used to attract candidates. As you can see in this screenshot, when applicants search for positions, the positions are listed next to each other. Great two-liners make your position stand out so that applicants want to see the full description.

If a candidate clicks on a position from the listings shown in the previous screenshot, they are brought to the Opportunity Listing (below).

⌂ HOME

My AmeriCorps

☐ Member Home
☐ Applications
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☐ Contact My AmeriCorps

* BMVP - Habitat Housing in Red Lodge, MT!

As a small resort community, affordable housing is a big issue for the local workforce, many of whom live in poverty and low-income situations. According to the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS), 16.3% of households in Red Lodge fall below the poverty level. According to a 2016 Housing Assessment, about half of respondents reported spending more than 30% of their income on housing, which becomes even more burdensome for low-income households. According to Zillow.com, the median home price is over $220,000; however, the median household income is $46,786 – leaving a large gap between what people can afford and what is available. There is a housing stock of just over 1,000 units, but of those units, less than one hundred are unoccupied and available for rent or for sale, without taking affordability into account. In addition, due to its location and recent office closures, the city lacks many public service resources available to assist the local workforce with housing needs. By increasing the stock of permanently affordable rentals and homes for sale, providing training and education, creating programs to address home owner and renter needs, and building awareness of these programs, the organization will be providing incremental and long-term benefits for the community. This project will help alleviate poverty by helping to increase permanent affordable housing stock, providing financial education opportunities, and connecting people to programs and services that support their housing goals. For the local workforce struggling with housing costs, increased knowledge of financial management and access to sustainable housing will ultimately lessen the housing cost burden that many low-income families experience.

Further help on this page can be found by **clicking here**.

Member Duties : Assist the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation to bring people out of poverty by connecting them to housing services and housing opportunities! The overall goal of the project is to help low-income individuals and families that work in the Red Lodge Area, secure quality affordable housing, increase their knowledge of financial management, and increase community engagement in upcoming housing opportunities. Capacity will be built for this project through creating an effective outreach plan to connect people to existing housing assistance programs and services, and by increasing community engagement and awareness of the upcoming development of single family homes and multi-unit housing. The VISTA member will also participate in the development of local financial counseling or Homebuyer Education (HBE) events to benefit households seeking education in support of their housing goals.

Program Benefits : Childcare assistance if eligible , Living Allowance , Relocation Allowance , Training , Choice of Education Award or End of Service Stipend , Health Coverage* .

*For details about AmeriCorps VISTA healthcare benefits, please visit **http://www.vistacampus.gov/healthcare**

Terms :
Permits working at another job during off hours , Permits attendance at school during off hours , Car recommended .

Service Areas :
Entrepreneur/Business , Homelessness , Children/Youth , Education , Hunger , Health , Community Outreach , Community and Economic Development , Housing .

Skills :
Communications , Writing/Editing , Public Speaking , Community Organization , Leadership , General Skills , Fund raising/Grant Writing , Counseling .

Apply Now!

Return to Search Results | Search Again

SUMMARY	
Program Type:	AmeriCorps VISTA
Program	* BMVP - Habitat Housing in Red Lodge, MT!
Program Start/End Date	03/16/2020 - 03/15/2021
Work Schedule	Full Time
Education level	College graduate
Age Requirement	Minimum: 18 Maximum: None
Program Locations	MONTANA
Accepting Applications	From 11/14/2019 To 02/14/2020
Contact	Carly Collins 2825 3rd Ave N Billings MT 59101 4062478675 collinsc@billingsmt.gov www.CityofBillings.net/vista
Listing ID	77147

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You, the member organization, are also able to edit the following parts of the listing: the Position Description (the first paragraph of the listing), Member Duties, Skills, Terms, and Benefits (only if you offer additional benefits; otherwise this section is standardized by Housing Action). The rest of the sections are input by Housing Action with the approval and consideration of the member organization.

Position Description
Describe your organization, community, and the project the AmeriCorps member will work on, and provide a narrative description of your ideal candidate. In the application, you will notice there is a required section, which Housing Action provides, that ensures the applicants are aware that the position is a part of the Housing Action AmeriCorps Network.

Member Duties
Describe the objectives, goals, and activities for your position. This section can be used to provide additional narrative description regarding your ideal candidate beyond the character limit in the Position Description. Many organizations share the objectives and key member activities from the VAD in this section.

Skills
There is a specific list of skills to choose from using the AmeriCorps Portal. There is a section for "other," but it only allows for one additional skill. If there is more than one skill that you would like to add to the list, add those skills in the Member Duties or Position Description.

Terms
Housing Action usually completes this section because the responses are the same for all hosting organizations. Please let us know if you will:
- Not allow AmeriCorps positions to have an outside job.
- Not allow AmeriCorps positions to be enrolled in academic coursework.
- Require AmeriCorps positions to wear a uniform.

Service Areas
Housing Action typically completes this section because the responses are the same for all hosting organizations. Feel free to highlight any of the other options provided in Section III of the application, under AmeriCorps Portal Posting subsection.

How to Write Compelling Opportunity Listings

Diversity and Inclusion
The diversity of those who generally serve in AmeriCorps programs is an asset for organizations that also serve diverse communities and individuals from many different backgrounds and identities. 83% of AmeriCorps VISTA members were born after 1982,[1] and AmeriCorps VISTA members are the oldest AmeriCorps alumni cohort, with an average age of 37, compared to NCCC at 28, and State and National members at 34. Out of the AmeriCorps programs, AmeriCorps VISTA members have the highest proportion of female alumni at 73 percent. AmeriCorps alumni are 63% white (non-Hispanic/Latinx), 15% Black, and 12% Hispanic/Latinx, with the remaining 10% another race.[2]

Having a diverse cohort of AmeriCorps VISTA members, which reflects the diversity of the populations they serve, "will bring many different perspectives, ideas and thinking that will inform and enrich the AmeriCorps VISTA program and projects."[3] AmeriCorps service provides an opportunity for community members to increase their ability to succeed in diverse environments. AmeriCorps alumni have high levels of cultural competency, reporting that they are "skilled at working with people different than themselves, and they believe that the AmeriCorps experience helped increase this skill."[4]

However, current marketing resources, strategies and materials from AmeriCorps are not sufficient to connect effectively with and engage diverse populations, leaving communities and organizations without the benefits of diverse AmeriCorps VISTA member cohorts. Therefore, it becomes necessary for AmeriCorps VISTA programs and member organizations to take on the responsibility of reaching out to diverse candidates, avoiding writing job postings that can shrink your candidate pool, while also keeping a high-quality candidate pipeline.

Job Requirements and Skill Sets
List only the most relevant skills to avoid discouraging potential candidates from applying. Use caution with qualifications—while you may know that there is some flexibility in which qualifications a candidate possesses, not all candidates will interpret it that way.

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[1] Corporation for National and Community Service (2016) *Who are the VISTAs?*
[2] Friedman, E., et al. (2016*). New Methods for Assessing AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes: Final Survey Technical Report.* (Prepared for the Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation). Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates Inc. p.22
[3] Stevie Chilcote, Caitlin Epsing, Rhea Johnson and Kevin Kenneally (2017) *Recruiting for Diversity: A Resource for VISTA Program Sponsors and VISTA Leaders* Corporation for National and Community Service. p.4
[4] Corporation for National and Community Service (2016*) Research Report Brief: AmeriCorps Alumni Pilot Outcomes Study: Findings on Cultural Competency and Diversity Skills*.

For skills that are not required, but will help a candidate stand out, consider using language such as:
- "familiarity with.."
- "bonus points for"
- "working knowledge of…"
- "comfortable with…"
- "if you have any combination of these skills…"[5]

Ask whether you need the candidate to be an expert, or someone who has the potential to become an expert. Consider the things that your organization may use to screen out candidates at the application review stage. Certain things, such as gaps in employment history, typos, or grammar usage may not be relevant to the position, but can create a negative impression of a candidate.[6]

Language in job descriptions that assume a candidate has the same level of knowledge of your organization or field as you do can deter candidates by making them feel like outsiders. This can be especially true if your job description contains language that is used mostly in internal communications. When in doubt, spell out acronyms and provide brief descriptions of the programs the candidates will be working on.

Candidates may also be deterred from applying when job requirements rely heavily on credentials. For example, a job posting and opportunity listing may have a requirement for specific degrees or previous employment in the field rather than demonstrated skills. When creating job postings and opportunity listings, recognize that candidates from other fields may have relevant and valuable skills. Also, consider creating opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their skills during the application process or interview.

While many AmeriCorps applicants are recent college graduates, there is no age restriction for serving in AmeriCorps. However, many organizations primarily market their position to recent graduates. Language in job descriptions can make it seem that the position is only for younger people. For example, the term "digital native" can mean "we're looking for someone who is passionate about technology, but a reader might interpret this as 'someone who is under 25'."[7]

Beyond the education award, highlight other benefits that "are supportive of diverse workers. Ex: Flexible hours, accessible facilities and workplace environments,

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[5] Fleishman, Hannah (2017). *Your Job Descriptions Are Hurting Your Hiring Pipeline.*
https://thinkgrowth.org/your-job-descriptions-are-hurting-your-hiring-pipeline-52b5a406fb8f
[6] McNamee, Katherine (2018) *More Inclusive Hiring Practices Established at Small Nonprofit*. Association for Talent Development
[7] Fleishman, *Your Job Descriptions Are Hurting Your Hiring Pipeline*

mentoring, training opportunities, inclusive restrooms, childcare assistance, transportation reimbursement, etcetera."[8]

Transparency can improve the applicant experience. List items to include in cover letters, provide the exact amount of the living stipend to help manage candidate expectations, and directly address potential barriers to service. Also, proactively communicate the benefits associated with being an AmeriCorps member—don't wait for the candidate to ask.

Additional Barriers
Job postings can create barriers to potential applicants. If English is a second language, the AmeriCorps Portal application may contain words and instructions that an applicant may not understand. The applicant may also be concerned that their level of English proficiency may create a bias against their application, preventing them from seeking help. Written language barriers may also include blindness or other sight issues, and dyslexia. Consider making recruitment materials and communication in large print and dyslexia friendly fonts, and in the most common languages spoken in your community – including sign language.

An additional barrier during the application process can be computer literacy and access. An applicant can find the online application intimidating depending on their level of experience with computers. Applicants may also not have regular access to the Internet, and have to spend time or money to travel to a library or pay to use the Internet. Consider accepting resumes, cover letters, and references in alternative formats, while they finish the online application at their own pace.

Communicating Benefits
Because applicants are assessing whether AmeriCorps is a good fit for them during the screening conversation, it is important to directly address potential barriers with all candidates. Do not present them as barriers, but offer up how your organization supports their AmeriCorps members in light of potential barriers to successfully completing a term of service. Then mention additional support options. These could include:
- Relocation/settling in allowances (if applicable)
- Outside employment
- Whether your organization offers additional benefits
- Federal or state assistance available in your area
- Healthcare benefits
- Explaining Education Award/end of service stipend and provide exact amounts
- Explaining childcare support option

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[8] Chilcote et. al. *Recruiting for Diversity* p. 13

- Be very honest with candidates about the steps of your hiring process, especially if you are hiring on a rolling basis
- Let candidates know who is making the final decision
- Honestly and respectfully ask candidates if they have any hesitations about the position that they'd like to address.

[Adapted from Stevie Chilcote, Caitlin Epsing, Rhea Johnson, and Kevin Kenneally, *Recruiting for Diversity: A Resource for VISTA Program Sponsors and VISTA Leaders*. (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2017), 24.]

Use Inclusive Language in Your Outreach
Inclusive language is important when conducting outreach strategies. Using inclusive language can broaden your efforts and help you reach a greater number of diverse applicants. You can find this definition along with several other definitions in the definition section of this tool kit.

Your outreach and marketing efforts are often the first-time potential AmeriCorps candidates become aware of your organization and AmeriCorps. Due to this reality, it is of vital importance that inclusive language is embraced in every single advertisement, position posting, and outreach that you do on behalf of your AmeriCorps program.

What is inclusive language?
Inclusive language is language that avoids the use of phrases and terms that devalue other people. Using inclusive language places value on all experiences and identities. Using inclusive language helps us to reflect on our own unconscious biases surrounding what we perceive to be "normal." Language can reinforce inequity based on dominant cultural norms.

Inclusive language changes over time and it is important to acknowledge this. What is considered appropriate and inclusive language now could change.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and only provides some examples of areas you need to consider when using inclusive language in your own outreach strategies.

Gender and Sexual Orientation
- Be aware that there is a difference between gender and sexual orientation.
- Gender exists on a continuum. Trans and transgendered refer to gender identity rather than sexual orientation.
- Be aware of the fact that not everyone uses he/his and she/her as their pronouns. An individual's pronouns should be used and never assumed, so try to avoid using phrases like "his or her" in your outreach efforts.

Race and Ethnicity
- Make sure to avoid references that draw unnecessary attention to race. When a reference is relevant, make sure to learn the appropriate terminology. Using a phrase like "people of color" is appropriate because it places people first.

Disability
- Use language that focuses on the individual, not the disability. Do not define others by their disability.
- Say "people with muscular dystrophy," not "the disabled."

Language
- The importance of providing outreach material in different languages is something often overlooked to those of us that only speak one language. Position listings often ask for people who speak a second language, but rarely create outreach material in the desired second language.

[Adapted from Stevie Chilcote, Caitlin Epsing, Rhea Johnson, and Kevin Kenneally, *Recruiting for Diversity: A Resource for VISTA Program Sponsors and VISTA Leaders*. (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2017), 10–13.]

Additional Resources

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Lexicon
http://institutionaldiversityblog.com/glossary
From the Institutional Diversity Blog, this is a deeper dive into the principles and definitions around diversity.

Importance of Diversity in Marketing
http://smallbusiness.chron.com/importance-diversity-marketing-24765.html
Provides several articles highlight the importance of diversity in marketing, and includes marketing tools and more.

List of Diversity-Focused Recruitment Resources
http://hr.fas.harvard.edu/files/fas-hr/files/diversity_recruitment_resources.pdf