

Ecolibrium3 AmeriCorps VISTA Program:

Program Guidelines

Thanks for your interest in the Ecolibrium3 AmeriCorps VISTA Cohort!

We are excited to potentially share our awesome VISTA members with your organization and to see what impact they can have in your work! This packet is a guide for interested host sites that contains the Eco3 Program Guidelines and guidance for completing the Program Application.

Please contact the VISTA Program Coordinator with any questions as you go through the process of creating your VISTA position!

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Eco3 VISTA Guidelines

What is AmeriCorps VISTA and who is Ecolibrium3?

AmeriCorps VISTA members serve for one year at organizations to increase their capacity to address poverty. VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a branch of the national AmeriCorps program that specifically focuses on capacity building by working with local organizations to build resources, develop systems, and increase the efficiency of their processes and programs.

Ecolibrium3 is a nonprofit in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Duluth and the leader of the Eco3 AmeriCorps VISTA cohort. Eco3 has served as the sponsoring organization of the cohort since 2017, coordinating the overall program while placing members at other organizations, or “host sites,” for a year of service. Eco3 applies for federal funds, coordinates host sites and members, and reports to the national AmeriCorps office.

Additional Resources:

- [About Ecolibrium3](#)
- [About Ecolibrium3's VISTA Cohort](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA 101](#)

What do VISTAs do?

All VISTA members' activities are aimed at building the capacity of your organization to continue to do the work you do to end poverty and its many effects. This means that while VISTA members may not be directly involved in implementing or carrying out a program, they are crucial in gathering the knowledge, resources, volunteers, and systems needed for you to be successful.

Capacity Building Activity Examples:

- Researching best practices
- Recruiting volunteers
- Creating effective communications
- Organizing a fundraiser
- Developing databases
- Setting up partnerships
- Creating curriculum

In short, VISTA members will not be directly building a house or mentoring a student, but instead will raise the money to build a house or train the volunteers that mentor a student. Behind many successful programs and projects, often you'll find the work of a VISTA!

[Read our 2019-2020 VISTA Community Impact Report](#)

When considering capacity building work, Eco3 and AmeriCorps understand that building effective programs goes beyond a VISTA member's single year term. That is why we generally expect that host sites establish a commitment to the VISTA Program for a three year cycle.

Is a VISTA right for my organization?

Ask yourself a few questions:

- Do you want to increase your ability to reduce or end poverty in your community?
- Do you have a dream project that addresses a community need but not the resources to get it off the ground?
- Could you use help raising funds, tracking members, recruiting volunteers, managing communications, or developing other systems that build your capacity to meet the needs of the low-income community?

Eligibility Requirements and Terms:

- Your organization is a nonprofit or public agency
- You have paid staff with the capacity to oversee a VISTA member's work
- You can support a member's professional development and engage in yearly cohort meetings and trainings
- You can pay the yearly cost of a VISTA member (\$6000) or enter into conversation with Ecolibrium3 about affordability
- You can commit to the three year VISTA Project timeline with Ecolibrium3
- Your VISTA Member will not replace the duties of an existing staff member
- Your VISTA Member will not perform political or religious advocacy .
- Your VISTA Member will not perform direct service activities.

Roles and Responsibilities

As the Project Sponsor, Ecolibrium3 will:

- Serve as the Fiscal Agent and overall administrator for the grant and provide overall supervision of the grant, provide assistance to the Project Host Sites and VISTA member(s) in support of grant implementation, and be the liaison between Project Host Sites, VISTA member(s) and the Corporation for National and Community Service.
- Comply with the provisions of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Corporation for National & Community Service and Ecolibrium3.
- Assign VISTA placements (as specified on page 1, paragraph 2) to the Project Host Site for the duration of this Memorandum of Understanding subject to the availability of funding and recruitment/training deadlines for VISTA Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) set forth by the CNCS.
- Assist the Project Host Site with the development of VISTA member(s) work plans and assignment descriptions. Provide final approval of all VISTA work plans and assignment descriptions prior to VISTA candidates attending Pre-Service Orientation and beginning their term of VISTA service.
- Assist with the recruitment, screening, interviewing, and selection of VISTA candidates when requested by the Project Host Site.

- Transfer VISTA member(s) from one placement to another to comply with terms and provisions of the grant or upon the request of the VISTA member(s) with the approval of CNCS. In this scenario, Project Host Sites will be given 14 days' notice.

The Project Host Site (your organization) will:

- Provide a Site Supervisor to provide day-to-day supervision of the activities of the VISTA member(s).
- Recruit, screen, interview, select, and submit VISTA candidates to the Project Sponsor for approval and placement at pre-service orientation (PSO). The Project Sponsor will assist with candidate recruitment and selection upon request. VISTA candidate applications must be submitted to the Ecolibrium3 for approval by the Ecolibrium3 recruitment deadline, which is one week before the CNCS deadline. Final approval for all VISTA candidates to attend PSO is subject to review and selection by the Minnesota CNCS office.
- Submit a VISTA work plan for approval prior to the VISTA member(s)'s start date.
- Submit a proposed budget detailing member(s) mileage reimbursement, professional development, the project participation fee, and in-kind assistance.
- Provide the VISTA member(s) individualized On-Site Orientation and Training at the beginning of their term of service.
- Use the approved VISTA work plan as the source of tasks and responsibilities for the VISTA member(s) to empower the capacity building activities of the member(s).
- Ensure that VISTA member(s) dedicate an average of 40 hours per week to their approved VISTA work plans and member(s) descriptions to address the community needs identified in the approved Project Sponsor Application. Project Host Sites should use their existing policies and procedures to account for a VISTA member(s)'s actual work schedule and hours served.
- Schedule regular meetings (preferably weekly) with the VISTA member(s) to discuss the project and other concerns.
- Provide adequate working space, materials, supplies, and access to a phone and computer to permit the VISTA member(s) to perform his/her assigned duties.
- Ensure that the VISTA member(s) is reimbursed for all local travel associated with the project. Mileage reimbursement should be done in accordance with the Project Host Site's existing policies and procedures. Ensure the Form V-81 is completed in My AmeriCorps.
- Allow the VISTA member(s) to participate in scheduled professional development and training opportunities, site visits, and conference calls. It is recommended that Project Host Sites budget \$750 in professional development and training funds for their VISTA member(s). The VISTA member(s) will be required to attend a training identified by the Ecolibrium3 Director for the purposes of completing In-Service Training (IST) requirements as set forth by CNCS.
- Allow the VISTA member(s) to participate in disaster relief/emergency response efforts as directed by CNCS.

- Allow the VISTA member(s) to participate in Days of Service (e.g., MLK Day of Service, National Volunteer Week, Make A Difference Day) should activities be organized by the Ecolibrium3 or in the community where the VISTA member(s) is serving.
- Inform Ecolibrium3 of any changes in status of the VISTA and other concerns related to the VISTA Project.

Both the Project Sponsor Ecolibrium3 and the Project Host Site will:

- Make every reasonable effort to ensure that the health and safety of the VISTA members are protected during the performance of their assigned duties. Neither the Project Sponsor nor the Project Host Site shall assign or require VISTA members to perform duties which would jeopardize their safety or cause them to sustain injuries.
- Ensure that persons selected as VISTA members are not related by blood or marriage to Project Host Site staff, Project Sponsor staff, officers or members of the Project Host Site's or the Project Sponsor Site's boards of directors, or responsible program staff at CNCS.
- Neither the Project Sponsor nor the Project Host Site has the discretion or authority to dismiss or separate a VISTA member(s) from service; CNCS is the sole authority that can terminate a VISTA member's term of service. The Project Site should document any performance or behavior issues and immediately report them to Ecolibrium3. The Director of Ecolibrium3 will report such incidents to the state CNCS office and resolve them in accordance with rules governing the grant. This is necessary to provide VISTA members due process.

AmeriCorps VISTA Project Cycle

Eco3 and AmeriCorps follow a three year long VISTA Program Cycle, generally creating a VISTA partnership with our host sites for no longer than three years. This cycle helps you consider how to best use the temporary capacity of a VISTA member to build lasting change in your work and the community.

As you apply for and design your VISTA position with the Eco3 VISTA Program, we ask that you consider how a member's role and responsibilities will shift throughout this cycle and that you strategize for how your programs can sustainably continue after your partnership with VISTA. This cycle is not one size fits all, but offers some general guidance for designing your own position!

VISTA Project Timeline			
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Program Stages and Goals	Identifying community and	Project Implementation	Evaluating project performance.

	<p>organizational capacities and needs</p> <p>Planning project goals, objectives, and activities</p> <p>Establishing Program best practices and guidelines</p>		<p>Program iteration</p> <p>Creating project sustainability</p>
<p>Potential VISTA Activities</p>	<p>Survey</p> <p>Needs assessment</p> <p>Research</p> <p>Grant Writing</p> <p>Fundraising</p>	<p>Volunteer recruitment and management</p> <p>Systems building</p> <p>Communications</p> <p>Process Tracking</p>	<p>Participant surveys</p> <p>Reporting</p> <p>Fundraising</p> <p>Grant writing</p>

Eco3 VISTA Application Instructions

Please use the following instructions to help you complete [the online application for the Ecolibrium3 VISTA Program](#). Contact the Eco3 VISTA Program Coordinator with any questions.

Steps to Apply

1. Review the Eco3 VISTA Program Guidelines
2. Complete the [Online Application](#); including
 - a. Organizational Information and Narratives
 - b. Create a [Volunteer Assignment Description](#)
 - c. Create a [Position Description](#)
 - d. Select [Performance Measures](#)
3. Consult with the Eco3 Program Coordinator

Next Steps after Acceptance:

4. Recruit position!
5. Conduct Interviews and select a candidate

Organizational Information and Narratives

Please answer the following questions:

1. Describe your organizational mission and specific project goals.
2. Describe your organizational structure and how a VISTA member would be supervised.
3. Describe the capacity needs that a VISTA member would address.
4. Describe how a VISTA member would address or alleviate poverty.
5. Describe how your organization and a VISTA member would build lasting capacity, sustainable beyond a three year Eco3 VISTA partnership.

Creating Vista Assignment Description (VAD)

A VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) is the framework for a VISTA member's year of service with your organization. It provides the overall goal of their service, time bound objectives and activities to meet those objectives, and details that will be the basis for a member's service.

While some activities will necessarily be uncertain and can be changed as needed, being as detailed and specific in the VAD at the outset will help the VISTA program, your organization, and members ensure that the members' service is as beneficial and appropriate to everyone. Please note the character limits included in the template and the need for specific dates!

Character Limits:

- Goal: 750 characters
- Objectives: 1000 characters
- Description: 2500 characters

[Fillable VAD Template](#) - a document to help you craft the VAD component of your application offline.

Sample VADs:

[Community Action Duluth](#)

[VISTA Team Leader](#)

[AmeriCorps VISTA created Sample](#)

Creating a Position Description

A Position Description is the information that will be advertised to prospective members through the MyAmeriCorps portal, where individuals apply to positions. Here you will not only specify the duties and responsibilities of the position, but also list any special requirements, benefits, or terms involved with the position. Creating effective position descriptions means recruiting more and better candidates for your position, so consider using exciting language and key words that succinctly and accurately reflect the position and the opportunity for the member!

[Fillable Position Description Template](#) - a document that can help you craft your Position Description component of the application offline.

SAMPLE Position Description:

[Community Action Duluth](#)

[VISTA Team Leader](#)

Selecting Performance Measures

Performance measures are the metrics that evaluate a VISTA member's performance towards capacity building and antipoverty goals.

Eco3 collects these metrics directly from the member and reports them yearly to AmeriCorps National. Performance measures are selected by supervisors with the guidance of Ecolibrium3 at the outset of the recruitment process. They should match the goals, objectives and activities of the member's VAD. Note that you **MUST** select a capacity building output and outcome to reach your primary goal and a secondary goal with appropriate outputs and outcomes.

We understand that these performance measures are spoken in federal government bureaucratic language and can be confusing. If you are having trouble, focus on completing the VAD and contact the Ecolibrium3 VISTA Program Coordinator who can recommend performance measures.

[FY 2019-2021 Performance Measures](#)

Performance Measure Resources:

[Community Action Duluth](#)

[Performance Measure Guide](#)