

Ecolibrium3 VISTA Corps Host Site Program and Application Guide

Updated October 2026



Introduction

The Ecolibrium3 VISTA Corps places full-time AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers with partner organizations across Northeast Minnesota. These partner organizations are called host sites. Each VISTA volunteer serves for one year at a host site. Their job is to build the organization's long-term capacity to fight poverty.

This guide explains what it means to be a host site, what it costs, and how the application process works. It also goes through the application form question by question. Please read it before you start the [Host Site Partner Application](#).

What AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteers Do

VISTA volunteers do capacity-building work. That means they don't provide services directly to the people your organization serves. Instead, they build the systems, partnerships, and resources that help your organization serve those people better, both during their year and after it ends.

Capacity-building work can include:

- Researching best practices
- Recruiting volunteers and building volunteer programs
- Creating communication materials
- Planning fundraising for specific programs (not for general operating funds)
- Developing databases and tracking systems
- Setting up partnerships
- Creating curricula

For example, a VISTA volunteer would not tutor students. They might design and launch a volunteer tutoring program, recruit and train its first group of tutors, and write the manual that keeps it going after they leave.

Who Can Apply

To host a VISTA volunteer through the Ecolibrium3 VISTA Corps, your organization must:

- **Be located in Northeast Minnesota.** This includes Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis counties. Organizations outside these counties may apply, but may not be selected if distance or accessibility is a concern.
- **Be an eligible type of organization.** That means an IRS-designated nonprofit, a public agency (city, county, state, or school district), or a Tribal Nation or Tribal agency. Organizations that focus mainly on advocacy or lobbying are not eligible.
- **Focus on poverty.** Your organization must work with low-income people or communities. The VISTA project should create long-term pathways out of poverty, not short-term relief.

- **Involve the community.** Volunteers from the community you serve should help plan, carry out, or evaluate your programs.
- **Have supervision and resources.** You need a supervisor with time for weekly one-on-one meetings. You also need to provide everything the volunteer needs to do their work.

What Host Sites Are Responsible For

As a host site, your organization agrees to:

- Work with the Ecolibrium3 VISTA Project Manager to write the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD). The VAD is the official list of the volunteer's responsibilities for the year.
- Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Ecolibrium3.
- Pay the costs of hosting a volunteer, described in "What It Costs" below.
- Help Ecolibrium3 recruit, interview, and choose a candidate.
- Give the volunteer an orientation and onboarding when they start.
- Provide daily supervision, with a one-on-one meeting every week.
- Use the approved VAD as the source for all of the volunteer's tasks.
- Make sure the volunteer serves full-time for their entire term.
- Provide workspace, a computer, a phone, internet access, software and accounts, office supplies, and transportation for service-related travel (or reimburse mileage).
- Follow all AmeriCorps rules, including the rules on prohibited activities, nondiscrimination, record keeping, and branding.

What It Costs

Host sites pay these costs for each VISTA position:

Cost	Amount	When and how
Cost-share fee	\$3,000	Ecolibrium3 invoices this when the MOU is signed. Payment is due within 30 days. If the position isn't filled, \$2,000 is returned.
Housing stipend	At least \$250/month (\$3,000/year)	Paid by one of four methods (see below).
Professional development stipend	At least \$150	The volunteer uses it for training they choose, working with their supervisor.
Service-related travel	Varies	Reimbursed to the volunteer under your organization's travel policy.
Minimum total	\$6,150, plus mileage	

Housing stipend payment options. Your organization can pay the housing stipend in any of these ways:

1. **Pay Ecolibrium3 once for the full year.** Ecolibrium3 then pays the landlord or reimburses the volunteer each month. If the volunteer leaves early, Ecolibrium3 will refund the balance.
2. **Pay the volunteer's landlord directly each month.**
3. **Reimburse the volunteer each month** after they provide the required documentation. Direct support may only be provided as a reimbursement.
4. **Provide housing your organization owns.** If the volunteer chooses to live there and the housing is worth at least \$3,000 a year, the stipend is waived.

A volunteer can't receive more housing assistance than their actual housing costs.

How the Process Works

The timeline changes each year, so this guide doesn't list specific dates. The steps happen in this order:

1. You submit the application.
2. The Ecolibrium3 VISTA Project Manager reviews it and follows up with next steps. How long that takes depends on Ecolibrium3's needs during the cycle. Decisions are also based on those needs.
3. Once selected, you sign the MOU and Ecolibrium3 sends the \$3,000 cost-share invoice.
4. Using your application content, the Project Manager will write the Volunteer Assignment Description (VAD) and send it to AmeriCorps for approval.
5. Ecolibrium3 writes and posts the position listing based on the VAD. You help recruit by sharing the posting through your networks, doing outreach in your community, and suggesting people who might apply.
6. Ecolibrium3 screens applicants and recommends candidates to you.
7. You interview the candidates and choose one.
8. Ecolibrium3 recommends your chosen candidate to AmeriCorps, and AmeriCorps gives final approval.
9. The volunteer completes AmeriCorps' online orientation.
10. The volunteer starts at your organization, beginning with your orientation and onboarding.
11. The volunteer serves for a full year and meets with their supervisor every week.
12. Near the end of the year, the volunteer completes AmeriCorps' Future Plans Form, and their supervisor completes the second part, an evaluation of the volunteer's service.

Before You Start the Application

The application form can't be saved partway through. Write your longer answers in a separate document first. Then copy them into the form once you're ready to finish in one sitting. You can look through all of the form's questions before you begin.

Have these ready before you begin:

- Your organization's legal name, address, EIN, and mission statement
- Your annual operating budget and number of paid staff (full-time equivalents)
- Name, title, email, and phone number for the main contact on this application
- Name and email for your Executive Director or CEO

- Name, title, and email for the person authorized to sign the MOU
- Name, title, and email for the proposed VISTA supervisor
- Local data showing the poverty-related need your project will address

You don't need to submit documents with your application. Ecolibrium3 may ask for these later in the process:

- Your IRS determination letter, or documentation of your public or Tribal status
- Your current organizational budget
- Your travel or mileage reimbursement policy

Submit a separate application for each VISTA position you want to host.

Going Through the Application

Section 1: Organization Information

This section confirms that your organization is eligible.

- **Legal organization name:** Use the name exactly as it appears on your IRS determination letter or official documents.
- **Organization type:** If none of the listed types fit, choose “Other” and describe your legal status. Only public agencies, Tribal Nations, and IRS-designated nonprofits are eligible.
- **Mission statement:** Use your official mission statement.
- **Budget and staff size:** These help Ecolibrium3 understand your organization's size and your ability to support a volunteer.
- **Advocacy or lobbying:** Organizations that focus mainly on advocacy or lobbying can't host VISTA volunteers. If your organization does some advocacy alongside direct programs, answer based on your primary focus.

Section 2: Contacts

You'll list three contacts: the main contact for this application, the Director or CEO of the organization, and the person authorized to sign the MOU. These don't have to be three different people. One person can fill more than one role. Make sure the signatory has the authority to enter agreements on your organization's behalf.

Section 3: Anti-Poverty Focus and Community

This section shows whether your project fits VISTA's anti-poverty mission. It's one of the most important parts of the application.

- **Who you serve:** Be specific about the low-income people or communities you work with. Include details like where they live, their age groups, and their circumstances.
- **The poverty-related problem and evidence of need:** Use local data, such as census figures, county health rankings, school district statistics, or your own program data. Describe a long-term goal, like more stable housing, jobs, or better access to education. Avoid goals focused on short-term relief, like one-time food distribution.
- **Primary issue area:** Choose the one closest to your project.

- **Your experience:** Describe your track record with this population and this issue. Include how long you've been doing the work and what you've achieved.
- **Community involvement:** AmeriCorps requires meaningful involvement from the community you serve. Give concrete examples, such as program participants serving on advisory committees or your board, community feedback sessions, or participant input on program design.

Section 4: Proposed VISTA Position

This section describes the VISTA volunteer's work. What you write here becomes the starting point for the VAD.

- **Working position title:** Keep it short and descriptive, and include "VISTA." For example: "Volunteer Engagement VISTA."
- **Project goal statement:** In 3 to 5 sentences, cover four things:
 - who the project will serve
 - how the volunteer will build capacity (starting with "The VISTA volunteer will build capacity by...")
 - how the project addresses poverty
 - what lasting result it will produce
- A clear, specific statement is stronger than a broad one.
Key capacity-building activities: List 3 to 5 activities. Start each one with an active verb, like develop, design, establish, create, or recruit. Avoid "assist with." It suggests support work rather than building something. Every activity should be indirect, capacity-building work, not direct service or tasks your staff normally do.
- **What will remain after the term ends:** Name specific, concrete results, such as a volunteer management system, a training manual, a partner network, a program fundraising plan, or a database.
How you'll sustain the work: Explain who will take over the systems the volunteer builds and how they'll be funded or staffed. A strong answer names a specific person or role.
- **Preventing displacement:** A VISTA volunteer can't replace paid staff or existing volunteers, nor take on regular staff duties. Explain why this work isn't being done now and why it wouldn't otherwise be a paid staff position.
- **Service arrangement:** Choose fully on-site, or on-site with occasional teleservice. Fully remote service isn't allowed. If you choose teleservice, describe your organization's current teleservice policy and how the supervisor will stay in touch with the volunteer.
New or continuation: If this continues an earlier VISTA project, describe what past volunteers accomplished and how this year builds on their work.

Section 5: Supervision and Support

This section shows whether your organization can support a volunteer through a full year.

- **Proposed supervisor and their experience:** Choose a staff member who has time to supervise. Describe their experience supervising or mentoring staff, volunteers, or AmeriCorps volunteers.
- **Weekly check-ins:** Weekly one-on-one meetings between the supervisor and the volunteer are required.
- **Orientation and onboarding plan:** Describe what the volunteer's first weeks will look like. That could include introductions to staff and partners, a review of your organization's history and programs, training on your systems, meetings with community members, and a review of the VAD.

- **Resources:** You're expected to provide everything the volunteer needs: a dedicated workspace, computer, phone, internet access, software and accounts, office supplies, and on-the-job transportation or mileage reimbursement.
- **Past AmeriCorps experience:** You don't need experience to apply. First-time host sites are welcome.

Section 6: Financial Commitment

This section confirms that you can cover the costs described in “What It Costs” above.

- **Cost-share fee:** If you're unsure whether you can meet the \$3,000 commitment, contact Reese before you apply.
- **Housing stipend method:** Choose the method that works best for your organization's accounting. If you choose housing your organization owns, describe it and give its estimated annual value.
- **Professional development stipend:** The minimum is \$150.
- **Mileage policy:** If you don't have a travel reimbursement policy, explain how you'll reimburse the volunteer for service-related travel.
- **Funding source:** Name where the money will come from, such as your general operating budget or a specific grant. If you're relying on a grant that's still pending, say so.

Section 7: Compliance Acknowledgments

Each item here is a legal commitment that will also appear in your MOU. Read each one carefully and share it with your supervisor and leadership before you check it.

- **Prohibited activities:** As part of their service, VISTA volunteers can't take part in any of the following:
 - partisan or candidate-related political activity, including voter registration
 - attempts to influence legislation
 - labor or anti-labor organizing
 - religious instruction or proselytizing
 - hiring processes for your staff
 - administrative work unrelated to the VAD
- **Direct service limits:** The volunteer's time goes to the capacity-building work described in the VAD.
- **Nondiscrimination and harassment:** Your organization will not discriminate against the volunteer and will prevent and address sexual harassment.
- **Records retention:** You'll keep project records for three years after the project ends, in case of an audit.
- **Financial responsibility:** If AmeriCorps finds that VISTA resources were misused at your site, your organization may be held financially responsible.
- **Branding:** You'll display the AmeriCorps name and logo on public materials related to the project, following AmeriCorps brand guidelines.
- **Recruitment:** You'll actively recruit candidates together with Ecolibrium3.
- **Nepotism check:** A volunteer can't serve at a site where they're related to staff who manage the project, to a board member, or to AmeriCorps regional staff. This includes immediate family, like a spouse, partner, parent, or child. It also includes close relatives, like a grandparent, aunt or uncle, niece or nephew, or first cousin. The same rules apply to the supervisor. If the answer is “Yes” or “Unsure,” explain the situation. Answering “Unsure” is better than guessing.

Section 8: Certification

The person submitting the application types their name, title, and the date. This certifies that the information is accurate and that they're authorized to submit it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can the VISTA volunteer run our programs or work directly with clients?

No. VISTA volunteers build capacity. They don't provide direct service. A volunteer can design, improve, or expand a program, but they can't be the person delivering it day to day.

Can the VISTA volunteer write grants?

Yes, for specific programs. Researching funding sources, building fundraising plans, and developing grant proposals for programs are common capacity-building activities. VISTA volunteers can't raise general operating funds. Any grant or fundraising work must be included in the approved VAD.

What if the position isn't filled?

Ecolibrium3 returns \$2,000 of the \$3,000 cost-share fee. The remaining \$500 covers administrative and recruitment costs.

What if the volunteer leaves early?

If you paid the housing stipend to Ecolibrium3 for the full year, the unspent balance is returned to you.

Is the VISTA volunteer our employee?

No. VISTA volunteers are AmeriCorps volunteers, not employees of Ecolibrium3 or the host site. Your organization still provides daily supervision and support.

Can the volunteer work remotely?

Occasional teleservice is allowed if your organization has a teleservice policy and the supervisor stays in regular contact with the volunteer. Fully remote service isn't allowed.

Can we host more than one VISTA?

Yes. Submit a separate application for each position.

Can we suggest someone we know for the position?

Yes. Suggesting potential applicants is part of helping with recruitment. However, the nepotism rules still apply. A relative of project staff, a board member, or AmeriCorps regional staff can't serve at your site.

We've never hosted an AmeriCorps volunteer. Can we still apply?

Yes. First-time host sites are welcome.

Questions?

Contact Reese Van Houten, Ecolibrium3 VISTA Project Manager, at reese@ecolibrium3.org.