



## Prevention Resource Center AmeriCorps VISTA Service: “Things You Should Know”



*If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees.  
If you want one hundred years of prosperity, grow people. Old Chinese Proverb.*

### **Congratulations! Welcome to the Prevention Resource Center (PRC) Project.**

You have taken the first step in participating in an important national service initiative. AmeriCorps VISTA projects address a multitude of needs in low-income communities nationwide. We thank you for your interest in service and “getting things done.”

#### **PHILOSOPHY OF AMERICORPS**

The mission of AmeriCorps VISTA has not changed since it was mandated by Congress in 1964, “*to strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate poverty and poverty-related... problems.*”

For over 40 years VISTAs have actively served in low-income areas by mobilizing people, businesses, and organizations with the goal of creating sustainable, healthy community.

#### **PHILOSOPHY OF THE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER**

The goal of your PRC VISTA Project is to assist support the mission of the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) for State Prevention Programs to: build a comprehensive prevention system in Montana. The work you and your VISTA will do is an exciting component of a federal, state and local partnership. To that end, we have embraced a Community Building Process and this is woven throughout the PRC Work Plan, with the goal of creating and sustainable local prevention programs.

#### **HOW EVERYTHING FITS TOGETHER**

The PRC is the working arm of the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC). The ICC has set statewide goals and benchmarks toward reducing youth risk behaviors in the areas of child abuse and neglect, youth use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs; youth violence, school drop-out and teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The PRC partners with the ICC’s prevention policy-making efforts and with AmeriCorps VISTA to build community infrastructure for planning and implementing community based solutions. Since July 1996, over 390 VISTAs have served with the PRC project, and this includes the January 2015 group. We are proud to have low attrition and one of highest retention rates of VISTAs in the nation with only losing approximately 40 individuals since 1996. Also, many VISTAs stay in the state upon completing their service year. This speaks well that VISTAs find meaningful work and like Montana.

## THE VISTA BASICS

1. The VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) has been developed for your specific site position to serve as the basis for your year of service. You should be thoroughly familiar with the contents of the VAD. *By completing the Assignment in the front of your PRC Binder and PRC On-site Orientation you will become more familiar with your specific work plan.*
  - A. Position Description and On-site Orientation were mailed to you...go over them first thing with your site sup on your first day. *(see assignment)*
  - B. Work Plan (handout) – drives the action; PRC/local site need to match...go over the first week you are on site. *(see assignment)*
  - C. Quarterly Report (online) – Reviewed by Supervisor. In order to measure progress, quarterly reports are due 1/15, 4/15, 7/15, and 10/15 to the PRC.
  - D. New VISTA Questionnaire *(see assignment)*
  
2. The term of service is one full calendar year and requires a full time commitment of 40 hours per week (minimum). Congress defines the benchmark for full-time commitment as “24 hours a day, 7 days a week.” This translates into being available to the community at all times without regard to regular working hours, except for periods of approved leave. Note: There is no Compensatory (“comp”) time if you are required to serve beyond the minimum 40 hours per week.
  - A. Individual site specify what is expected, check in/out system, working hours (weekend/evenings), flex time etc.
  - B. Can not take time off first 3 months and last month of service, if an issue than can be worked out on site basis
  
3. AmeriCorps VISTA service is a yearlong service opportunity; it is not employment, and you cannot finish early. During your service you will receive a small subsistence allowance.
  - A. Cannot finish early... unless site shuts down. Then we will try to set up the VISTA to complete the year. VISTA voluntarily resigns, or we find it necessary to remove the VISTA from the project loose/loose ... we are the conduit for these decisions with Jackie Girard at CNCS.
  - B. Part-time employment outside of VISTA service is allowed as long as it does NOT interfere with the VISTA project. Part-time employment must be approved by the PRC. Failure to receive approval or maintain VISTA service as your priority could lead to early-termination from VISTA service.
  - C. You may attend classes (part-time) during your year of service. You must sign a memorandum of understanding with Project Director Abby Zent stating that your classes will not interfere with your project.
  - D. Montana college credit for being a VISTA...VISTA ALIVE is available through the University of Montana. Applications are on-line.

4. Due to the nature of your position, you may not register people to vote or drive voters to the polls, take any action with respect to partisan or nonpartisan political activity, or provide religious instruction that would result in the identification or apparent identification of you as an AmeriCorps VISTA member.
  - A. Your position as a VISTA is an extension of the federal government and the state of MT...and us at the PRC, participant in a federal/state and local program!
  - B. Politics – whether you agree with a position or not, you are serving in a non-political capacity for one year. During this time you should refrain from activities that may result in having your picture on front page of the paper (eg VISTA sent e-mail out inadvertently), networking activities that promote issues through rallies (eg. Press conference attendance, materials, placement in the crowd, clothes), work on campaigns, etc.

**5. Dirty Socks Lecture...**

You are a highly visible representative of the program and, as such, you are responsible for using good judgment in your overall appearance and exercising good role model behavior. Therefore, we have a zero tolerance for the use of alcoholic beverages when representing or traveling for your project. We all lead by example, so you need to take responsibility for your actions as a VISTA with the PRC.

- A. Prevention – see notes, difference between legal and illegal.
- B. Please don't wear your t-shirt, polo, and/or sweatshirt to the bar.
- C. Use caution/protection in relationships (health insurance covers contraception)
- D. Alcohol abuse and illegal drug use adversely affect health and performance on projects, create potentially dangerous situations, and serve to undermine the community's confidence in AmeriCorps VISTA. Therefore, AmeriCorps VISTA prohibits illegal drug use and alcohol abuse by its Leaders and members. Some sponsoring organizations may require AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders and members to pass a drug screening test before or upon arrival, or during service at the project site. Failure to submit to drug screening, or a positive test result for illegal drugs, may lead to deselection of the AmeriCorps VISTA candidate or early termination of the member.
- E. Montana is a small town. If you smoke pot or getting sloppy drunk in the bar, the word will get around. Coming hung over to training is unacceptable. Your Site Supervisor will be informed; Jackie Girard will recommend that we send you home and your relationship with VISTA will be terminated. You will not receive an Education Award/Stipend.
- F. Internet policy/email usage – all PRC VISTAs need to sign off on the DPHHS policy! Internet/email is to be used as a tool to do the VISTA job, and any personal use is to be limited. Inappropriate use (i.e. Conducting a business, viewing/sending pornographic material, etc.) will result in immediate removal from the PRC VISTA project.

**VISTA BENEFITS**

1. You are authorized 10 personal and 10 medical leave days per year. Personal leave is not approved in the first three months of service, unless prior approval from your site

supervisor and the project supervisor. Emergency leave is also available...as well as an emergency loan advance of up to \$500 is available through the PRC.

2. You will receive a monthly subsistence allowance of \$973/month before taxes and other withholdings.

3. You will receive an end of service benefit of \$5730 Education Award or \$1500 year-end stipend. You will make this selection prior to PSO. During your service you will have only one opportunity to switch your Education Award election to the cash Stipend prior to the 10<sup>th</sup> month of your service term. But if you have selected the Cash Stipend you cannot switch to the Education Award. It is your responsibility to keep track of any necessary changes.

4. You will receive basic health insurance (for yourself only) and eligibility for group life insurance.

5. Income Exclusion.

Your VISTA subsistence allowance shall not in any way reduce or eliminate the level of or eligible for assistance you are currently receiving under any other government program prior to becoming a VISTA. We encourage you to apply for food stamps. (Call if you need help) If wait to apply after swearing-in, your VISTA living allowance will be counted as income; whereas if eligible prior to becoming a VISTA, the living allowance is not counted.

- If eligible based upon income, child care reimbursement of up to \$400 per month per child through CNS.

6. Quarterly trainings will be offered by the PRC either as a stand-alone training or in concert with the Office of Community Service and other AmeriCorps projects.

A. Your presence is required at these trainings. We ask that you be ready to learn and engaged and attend with out distractions such as family, friends, pets or a hangover!

B. Absences need prior approval from your site supervisor and the project supervisor.

C. Make sure that your work plan for the year takes into consideration the training calendar; training is a priority over a site event or requirement.

D. We will ask you to car pool and share sleeping rooms, thus bringing along family is not appropriate to the trainings.

E. Site has invested resources financial and human (VISTA) in the training!

7. Technical Assistance:

A. Site Visits – pick date/time within next two months (Abby Zent and VISTA Leader try to do 2 per year. Planning for March- May; September-November. Let us know if anything special is going on that you would like us to know about or be there.

B. Our web site is: <http://prevention.mt.gov>

- C. Resource Directory
- D. PRC Resource Library
- E. Trainings – (handout Events Calendar)/ Web site/mandatory/excused absences.
- F. VISTA Campus, [www.vistacampus.org](http://www.vistacampus.org)
- G. Resource Center, <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/>

### **HAVING PROBLEMS?**

You need to let us know...

- It is human nature to avoid conflict... there will be some.
- We want conflict resolved at the lowest level possible. Abby and the VISTA Leader's goal is get it resolved in 24 hours.
- There will be conflict along the way, usually due to unmet or unclear expectations.

Where should you direct initial inquiries about your service and/or benefits?

- VISTAs: Your first point of contact with the PRC is your VISTA Leaders.
- Site Supervisors: Your first point of contact is Abby Zent.

We will first try to facilitate a site-based solution, and will come and help if necessary. It is a lose lose situation for everyone if it cannot be resolved.

Also, your contact at the Corporation for National and Community Service is Anna Yeagle. Their office is located at: 208 North Montana Avenue, Suit 206, Helena, MT 59601. Office phone: (406) 444-5404. ***DO NOT contact CNCS without contacting Abby or the VISTA Leader at PRC FIRST.***

### **Q/A**

Finally, as stated before, AmeriCorps VISTA is a one-year commitment to service. It is about stewardship over self-interest. Re-enrollment or extension beyond one-year is not automatic, but may be generated if you have served in an above average manner. Completion of service will be one (1) year from the date you enter into service.

Thank you for being here!

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