



































SBC recruited two VISTAs, one national and one local to fill two of the slots; the third slot remained unfilled. When the VISTAs, John and Penny, started Gwen was away at a housing training and so the SBC secretary, Phyllis, told the VISTAs to take the first week they were in town to “settle in.”

When Gwen returned, she met with the VISTAs and reviewed some of the upcoming SBC projects. There were a couple of grants due, SBC’s annual fundraiser to organize and an annual report to write, publish and distribute. Gwen told the VISTAs that because SBC was low on staff right now that she’d really appreciate it if they could pitch in and help out until they were able to increase staff. John and Penny agreed and split the project work for the annual report, the logistics for the fundraiser and drafting two of the grants.

When John and Penny asked Gwen when they might have access to a computer and phone, they were told to share with the Phyllis and, “If you do well with that application to the Lagios Foundation, we’ll be able to purchase a new computer and put in another phone line!”

That afternoon Penny and John sat down to try and organize their work. Penny would draft the grants and find entertainment for the fundraiser. John said he would take on the fundraiser raffle, draft and find a printer for the annual report.

John and Penny asked Phyllis where they could find past annual reports and grants so that they could get a sense of what SBC had done before. Phyllis found a few grant applications for housing projects (the two grants Penny was working on were for small business) and an annual report from 1996. Working with what she had Penny drafted two grant proposals, John edited them and then they submitted them to Gwen. When Gwen had a chance to review the grants she said “Nice first draft, but I don’t think the grants capture what we are trying to accomplish with our micro-enterprise program.” When Penny asked for some suggestions and direction about how she could revise the grants, Gwen told her that she didn’t have time to go over it with her this week and that she should be focusing her efforts on the SBC fundraiser. Penny put the grants aside and went in search of band for the fundraiser.



John had a similar experience when he met with Gwen to talk about the fundraiser and the annual report. He told Gwen he was finding it difficult to elicit donations for the fundraiser raffle because he often didn't have access to a phone. He said his big accomplishment was getting a local restaurant to donate a gourmet meal for four. Gwen was annoyed that John had gone to the restaurant owners because they were large donors to SBC and said it wasn't appropriate to ask them to donate additional goods. Gwen picked up the phone, called the restaurant owners and apologized for the request, citing that, "John is a new volunteer and doesn't know better."

Disappointed but not deterred, the VISTAs continued to work on their projects. Penny found a local band to play at the fundraiser and John finished a draft of the annual report and had twenty items donated for the raffle. Both John and Gwen attended the fundraiser and had a chance to meet community members who were involved in SBC activities. The typical questions from the evening were "What's a VISTA?" or "Are you taking over the office manager's position?" At the end of the night, SBC had raised \$5,000 from raffle and dinner ticket sales. John and Penny were thrilled that their hard work had helped SBC.

Over the weekend, one of SBC's housing units had major water damage and five families were without homes. Gwen called John and Penny and asked them to help with clean up and to try and find temporary housing for the families. John and Penny spent the next week tracking down housing options for the families, getting food and clothing to them, helping with insurance claims, and finding furniture for the families. At the end of the week all of the families were situated in temporary housing and had their basic needs met. The following Monday, Penny realized that one of the grants was due by the end of the week. She spent two days trying to get an appointment with Gwen and when they did meet Gwen said she would review the drafts and get back to her. On Friday morning Gwen rushed into the office and told John, Phyllis and Penny to drop everything. "We need to re-do the grant and get it to the post office by five o'clock and if we run later, someone can drive to Federal Express in the city and we'll have until ten o'clock." Gwen said as she rushed to find the latest draft of Penny's grant on her desk. For the next eleven hours everyone in the office ran around copying material, tracking down board members for signatures, calling local agencies for letters of support and



revising the program goals for the micro-enterprise program. Penny took the grant to Federal Express, paid the mailing charges with her own money and headed home.

The next month was challenging for the VISTAs. When a crisis arose they had lots of work to do but when there wasn't a crisis they didn't have any specific projects to work on. They tried meeting with Gwen who was very busy with a capital campaign and didn't have a lot of time to give to give them. When she did meet with them she told them, "Hang in there, when we get those grants, we'll have lots of work to do!"

When it came time to write the first quarterly report, Gwen asked the VISTAs to draft it. As they reviewed the AmeriCorps grant material they realized that the report was based on a workplan for their project which they had never seen. Both John and Penny were unhappy with their placement and decided that they would meet with Gwen to discuss their concerns. Gwen canceled the meeting twice because of other obligations, and when she was able to meet with the VISTAs they were fired up. "Why has it taken two and a half months to see this workplan?" John asked. "This workplan doesn't even mention grant writing!" said Penny. Gwen was surprised by the VISTAs' reaction and said that she would take some time to review the workplan and come up with projects for them to work on.

The following week Gwen gave the VISTAs a list of projects for the economic development program. The two projects Gwen wanted the VISTAs to work on were to run an interest session to find out how many local residents might be interested in participating in the program and to find local business people who would be willing to serve as mentors for the project. John and Penny went to work organizing advertising an information session and began contacting local business people to find out if they would participate. Fifteen residents showed up for the meeting and were very interested in the potential of the program. Some residents began asking if SBC could help them get computers or if they could help with small loans and others, current business owners, wanted to know if this kind of work was going was going to affect their business. John and Penny took notes and asked if residents would be willing to attend a follow-up meeting to discuss their concerns and questions and update them on the progress of the economic development program. After the meeting Gwen said that John and Penny should



hold off on the next meeting until they found out whether or not they had won the economic development grant funds.

For the next month, the VISTAs continued to do crisis work here and there and Gwen continued to rush around trying to manage all of the SBC projects. Just before Thanksgiving SBC received word that they had not been awarded either economic development grant. At this point, John and Penny decided to call the state office and resign. The state program officer, Ken, was surprised by their decision because this was the first he had heard of their concerns. Ken offered to do a site visit and meet with Gwen, but both of the VISTAs felt that they were too disenchanted with SBC to stay.

Penny decided to take another VISTA position at a literacy project in California; John stayed in town and was accepted at the local college for a degree in business.

Gwen was named permanent executive director of the Sandy Beach Corporation and is thinking of applying for RSVP volunteers to help out with office work. The economic development program was never pursued further.



## Yates Literacy Council

### Cast Of Characters:

Stephen: Yates Literacy council's Executive Director

Carlos: Locally recruited VISTA

Susan: Locally Recruited VISTA

Ed: Nationally Recruited VISTA

Penny: Nationally Recruited VISTA

Jenn: Stephen's Replacement

Carla: Ed's Mentor

Yates Literacy Council (YLC) is located in Morrison, a suburb of San Francisco. Established fifty years ago to help immigrants increase their language skills, YLC has expanded its efforts to include tutoring programs for children, citizenship classes and job readiness programs. YLC's director of the past five years, Stephen, applied for a VISTA grant to expand YLC's tutoring program so that each of the five local schools in the district would have their own site-based program. Stephen applied for four VISTAs: two program coordinators, one grant writer and one volunteer coordinator to help implement these "satellite sites." Two local people, Carlos and Susan, were recruited as VISTAs and two national recruits Ed and Penny, who had transferred there from Sandy Beach.

When the VISTAs arrived, Stephen ran a week-long orientation program for them. The orientation included an overview of YLC's history, programs and administrative policies, a tour of Morrison, an interagency nonprofit meeting, an intercorps council meeting with other local AmeriCorps members, a client panel where

### Suggested Process CONTINUED

2. Ask the groups to read Yates Literacy Council story and use the following questions as a guide for the small group discussion:

- ❖ How is this story different from Sandy Beach?
- ❖ What role does a community play in ensuring sustainability?
- ❖ What are some of the reasons the Yates program was successful?



participants discussed their experience with YLC, a meeting with school administrators and reading teachers and a day when VISTAs reviewed the goals and objectives of their workplans and discussed expectations, roles and responsibilities. The week ended with a dinner with board members and YLC volunteers. At the dinner, VISTA was assigned to a mentor whose role was to introduce the VISTA to the community and help the VISTAs with their project.

Penny and Ed, the nationally recruited VISTAs who had relocated to serve, spent some time with their mentors finding affordable apartments, learning where to shop and bank and generally getting the lay of the land. Over the next month all of the VISTAs were encouraged to attend a series of community events from the Morrison Elk's Club Chili Cook-off to the local peewee soccer tournament. At these events, VISTAs met community leaders and learned a great deal about how the town felt about YLC and its programs.

During weekly VISTA staff meetings Stephen reviewed the progress of the VISTAs on their individual projects and assessed what resources they needed and wanted. In the second VISTA meeting Stephen addressed the issue of sustainability by talking with the VISTAs about what they want their projects to look like in a year. "Who is going to participate? Who is going to run it? How is it going to be? These are questions you should be asking yourself daily," said Stephen. "The goal is to work yourself out of a job. I know that might sound odd, but you need to make sure there are resources and networks in place before you go so that all of your work doesn't end when you leave. The other thing you need to think about is what you need to be effective this year. It's important that you let me know what resources you need to so that you can complete your workplan." Over the next week each of the VISTAs thought about what type of training and resources they thought would be helpful to them. Carlos wanted to attend a grant-writing seminar, Penny found a nonprofit program development workshop offered by a national technical assistance provider, Ed wanted to attend a literacy conference in San Francisco and Susan decided to take Spanish lessons at the Morrison Community College. Stephen worked with each VISTA to make it possible to participate in these events.

YLC's office manager became rather ill and had to take a medical leave from work. In his absence, each of the YLC staff members was asked to take a shift covering the phones and helping with clerical duties. In the staff meeting Stephen asked if each



VISTAs would be willing to cover a slot, noting that he was covering the Wednesday 1-2:30 p.m. slot and Friday 9-10 a.m.. Penny was hesitant at first to do this when she worked at Sandy Beach she often had to do clerical work and it often wound up taking up all of her time. Penny was really excited about the satellite program the VISTAs were developing and didn't want her year to be detoured by office coverage. After the meeting she voiced her concerns to Stephen, "You know I'm feeling like this year is going by really quickly and I'm concerned that I have enough time to do the work laid out in my workplan. Is office coverage necessary for the VISTAs?" Stephen thought for a moment and replied, "I appreciate your concern and commitment. A year is a short time to take on such a project. Office coverage isn't mandatory but it would help out. If you feel you have the time to cover a slot that would be great. If you don't have the time I'll respect your decision." Penny took one slot on Thursdays for the month duration of the office manager's leave and wound up getting to know several staff members better and learning the office filing, phone and computer system. She thought this wasn't the preferred way of doing things but she was glad she could help out and that it didn't last long.

Setting up the school-based satellite programs was going really well. Carlos, the fundraiser, had met with a local foundation that had donated \$1,000 to get the programs started. A large bookstore chain offered ten boxes of remaindered books that the VISTAs thought might be useful to their project and his mentor, the head of the local Kiwanis Club offered the proceeds of their Christmas tree sales to the project. Susan, the volunteer coordinator, was organizing a volunteer fair and was in the process of designing a volunteer program that would suit YLC's needs. Penny and Ed were working together to find space in each of the five schools and to develop a program schedule for the schools. They had bimonthly meetings with the high school principals and reading teachers to update them on the progress of the program.

As the weeks progressed the VISTAs really got to know one another's talents and strengths. When Ed commented that one of the school satellite rooms was really dull and depressing Susan chimed in "Well, I used to paint murals. What do you think about me painting something in the room?" In a staff meeting Carlos said he was feeling as if he was always begging for money and that he was afraid that any time a community member saw him they thought that he would ask them for a donation and run the other way. Penny said that she'd like to try a little fundraising



and put some of the skills she learned in the community development workshop into practice. Carlos, an avid rollerblader, befriended a group of teen skaters and convinced them that they should sign up as YLC volunteers. He made it “cool” to volunteer and increased Susan’s volunteer base by fifteen members.

Stephen set up a mid-year evaluation meeting with each of the VISTAs to find out where the VISTAs were with their projects, what resources they needed, review and re-evaluate the goals and objectives in the workplan and to find out what each of the VISTAs planned on doing after their service year. The first question Stephen asked was, “What are you doing as far as sustaining your project?” Carlos had found three funders to make five-year commitment to the satellite program. Susan said she had drafted a training manual and developed a volunteer database so that YLC staff members or a lead volunteer could run the program if need be. Ed and Penny said that they were working with each of the schools to formalize the partnerships to develop a long-range vision for the program—one that did not include VISTAs. The other question Stephen asked was “What are you thinking about doing after your service year is over?” None of the VISTAs had a clear idea of what they wanted to do so Stephen suggested that they tap into a partnership he had set up with the career services office at the local college. One of the career counselors offered to meet with each of the VISTAs to set up a post-service plan of action. The career center was willing to let the VISTAs use their library, let them attend career fairs and followed up with calls and meetings as needed.

In a staff meeting two months before the grand opening of the satellite schools, Stephen told the VISTAs that he had been offered a job at a local foundation. “It’s a great opportunity, I can really help the nonprofit community in this position—I just can’t turn it down,” he said. Stephen told the VISTAs that YLC’s assistant director, Jenn, would be taking over supervision of the VISTA program. Stephen said that he would give her an orientation to the VISTA projects and would appreciate the VISTAs input and participation in the process. While the VISTAs were disappointed by Stephen’s departure, they understood his decision and immediately started thinking of a proposal that they could submit to the foundation as soon as he started.

The week before Stephen left, Ed received a call from his father saying that his mother was very ill and he was needed at home. Ed’s family owned a small



hardware store in Florida. With his mother ill they really needed Ed to come back and help out. Stephen and Jenn worked with the state office to arrange for Ed's trip home and to close out his service. At Ed's going away party, Ed's mentor Carla, said, "In a short time you've done so much for us. I hope that you'll always consider Morrison a second home. Thank you for your service." The other VISTAs presented Ed with a box of macaroni and cheese and a can of beans so he wouldn't forget the staple VISTA diet.

Jenn's first week as the VISTA supervisor was a challenging one. The satellite school sites were a month away from opening and there was a lot of work to do. The VISTAs' morale was low because of Ed and Stephen leaving. Jenn decided to have a staff retreat and closed the office for a day and took everyone to a conference facility owned by the college. The staff spent the morning doing team-building activities and in the afternoon they developed a team strategy for the next six months of projects. In her journal that night, Penny wrote, "I learned a lot about leadership skills today. The ropes course was really challenging but by the end of it my trust and respect for the staff grew so much. The whole experience taught me a lot about program management and the importance of overcoming my fears and finding constructive solutions to challenging situations. I miss Stephen and Ed, but I know the program will go on without them. It's a good reminder to know what a gap not having them here makes in the program. In four months I won't be here any more and I want to make sure the satellite programs are up and running and that they won't rely on me in to continue. All in all a good day – free pizza, feeling a part of a team and knowing what the difference our program is going to make in Morrison. It doesn't get much better than this."

The satellite programs opened with great fanfare. At the open house to kick off the beginning of the programs one of the school principals said, "This is our community at its best. We appreciate the work of the VISTAs and of the marvelous partnerships they've created to make the literacy satellite programs a reality."

For the next four months the VISTAs were busy running tutor training programs, tracking down donations, working with the media and running the satellite programs. At the end of the year, Carlos was hired by YLC, Susan went back to school and Penny decided to do another year of service as an AmeriCorps Leader. In her final report to YLC she wrote "Serving as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member



has given me a confidence in my abilities to coordinate community-based projects. It's given me the practical, hands-on experience that I would not have gained at an entry-level position directly out of college. I've been able to take charge of my own projects and to put the skills and knowledge I gained in school to use; I've proven to myself that I can transfer my knowledge into action."

The Morrison satellite program has been running now for seven years. The first three years the VISTAs served as program developer, during which time money was raised to hire a full-time staff member to administer the program and a part-time volunteer coordinator. The program has now served more than 2,000 students in the town of Morrison.

### **Suggested Process** CONTINUED

3. Ask each of the participants to identify three sustainability strategies that they could use in their project (it could be for their members, their project or a combination of the two). Have participants write these strategies on an index card.
4. Have participants share their strategies (if they are willing) and make a master list of these on a flipchart.
5. Wrap up activity by looking for common themes, strategies and resources that participants have identified.





## The Right Ingredients: Wisdom from the Field

### Purpose:

The Right Ingredients activity is based on lessons current and former volunteers have shared about their service experience. The wisdom activity illustrates the fundamental community development principles around the sustainability model – showing the important connections between VISTA, the workplan and the host organization.

### Major Themes:

- ❖ Importance of merging the one-year VISTA service commitment to the host community’s long-range vision.
- ❖ What happens to a community when you don’t build a sustainable project – negative impact of short-sighted community programming.
- ❖ Ensuring community buy-in and involvement with the workplan.
- ❖ VISTAs using the time in service to find out about themselves and build a vision of what type of a community member/leader each would like to be.

*Time: 50 minutes*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>
Review sustainability model	2 min.
Go over wisdom from the field points and ask for examples	40 min.
Wrap Up	8 min.

### Materials Needed:

Flipchart and Markers

## VISTA

*New Perspective.* VISTAs come into the community with optimism and energy to address an issue. They bring a new perspective to host organizations but are not always working with the same motivations (money, status) as the rest of the staff. This new perspective can be refreshing but sometimes it can be threatening to people. It's important for VISTAs to realize this and to work with staff to understand the roles and responsibility of a VISTA.

*Know Yourself.* It's important to realize and articulate your strengths and weaknesses. Let your supervisor know what kind of supervision you need to work effectively, what your work style is and what motivates you. It's also important to consider what your "baggage is" (stereotypes, expectations for service year). Think about how this might effect your work and what steps you can take to address these concerns.

*Be Yourself.* VISTAs may serve in communities they aren't familiar with or where they may be a minority (race, gender, socioeconomic). This may be challenging to the VISTA but it's important that they not apologize for or hide who they are or aren't or feel guilty about advantages they may have had that people they are working with haven't. The key to quality VISTA

## Suggested Process

*This section is a listing of advice from VISTA alumni.*

*Workshop participants have a list of the key words in their Guidebook but you'll need to elaborate on them. Next to each of the key points are some suggestions of how you may want to explain alumni advice.*

1. Review the VISTA Sustainability Model again and let participants know that this activity looks at the three foundations of the model: the VISTA, the workplan and the host organization.
2. Review each of the points below. Encourage participants to share examples from their project and service experience as you go and suggest that they take notes in their Guidebooks about how they could address this theme in their project.
3. Wrap up the activity by asking participants about common themes, e.g. make sure your project is community driven, important to communicate your expectations for a project. Have people go around the room and say what they've learned from the "Wisdom from the Field" session.

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community development is being genuine. Know who you are and how you can help. Especially important early in the service term, one of the best strategies for handling a new situation is the next suggestion.

***Listening.*** When in doubt in a new situation – listen. The VISTA’s first few months of service should be spent getting to know their host organization and host community. Whether they are from the community and taking on the position of a VISTA or a person relocating to service in the community, it’s really important to take the time to hear what’s going on in your community. Find out how your community feels about the issue you are working on. Find out how much they know about the mission of your host organization and what they know about national service. Learn how your community operates by listening. The next tip is one of the best strategies to do this.

***Pancake Breakfast Community Development.*** During your first couple of months of service it is really helpful to attend as many community events as possible. Pancake breakfasts, sporting events at the local schools, meetings of civic associations, hang out at the post office, spend some quality time at the local diner – find out where your community tends to gather, and spend some time getting to know people outside the walls of your host organization. Spending this time at community events builds trust and respect. People get to know who you are and what you hope to accomplish in the community. This is key to building a successful project.

***The Frustration Is the Education.*** Service is challenging, and when it’s the most difficult is probably when you are learning the most about yourself and your community. VISTAs need to understand that adversity is part of the VISTA experience, and working through these challenges is when VISTAs can learn new personal and occupational skills and endurance.

***The Happiness Factor:*** One of the best ways to deal with the frustrating moments of a service year is to make sure that you know what’s going to make you happy during your service year. Make sure that you include athletics, art – whatever tends to bring a balance to your life to your service year. VISTAs need to know what they need out of the experience to make them happy



with their service year. It's important to talk to your VISTA supervisor about what your expectations are for the year and what makes you happy. More about this during the workplan section.

***Build Your Soapbox.*** The service year is a great opportunity to build your own soapbox. Let people know what's important to you and why. During the service year, VISTAs will find out what issues and ideas are meaningful to them and learn ways that they can tackle these issues. The service year is an empowering time and it's important to take time to reflect upon what's important to you and why.

***You Get What You Give.*** Almost all VISTA alums will tell you that they got much more out of their service year than they gave. The year can be self-indulgent, and while the financial gains might not be there, what you learn in terms of risk taking, looking at challenging issues from different perspectives, creative problem solving and becoming empowered to make change on big issues are life-long lessons and skills. While this may not always be apparent during your service year, the benefits and impact of your VISTA experience will likely become more obvious in your post-service years.

***Sustaining Service.*** Sustainability of service is not just about the VISTA project; it's also about the member. Hopefully, a service year will motivate members to make a life-long commitment to service.



## The Workplan

**Community Ecology.** Find out what's been done in your community on your project's particular topic. Learn what organizations, funders and programs have been involved with your organization and your issues. Spend time learning the political and social networks of your community.

**The Two-Person Rule of Thumb.** To create a sustainable network that will last once the VISTA grant is over, it's important for the VISTA to have at least two people know what they are doing, where their files are, who they are talking with and the details of their programs and projects.

**Direct vs. Indirect Service.** It is important for VISTAs and VISTA supervisors to talk about what kind of a balance needs to be struck between the amount of direct vs. indirect service—the earlier in the service year the better. If there is a difference in opinion on this balance, it's good to bring the state office into this discussion to help clarify roles and responsibilities and how this balance relates to the workplan.

**Talents and Interests.** VISTAs should make sure host sites know about any talents and interests they have. Many of the workplans and VISTA job descriptions are general and may not specifically mention the need for or interest in specific talents, but most host organizations would be thrilled to know that they have a VISTA who is a photographer, a juggler, has an accounting background, is interested in welfare reform, etc. Make talents and interests known early on so that they can be incorporated into the workplan.

**VISTA Vision.** VISTAs have a one-year project agenda in a host community that has been there long before and will be there long after their service term. It's important for VISTAs to take the time to adjust their work tempo to the community and host organization's pace so that they don't bowl people over in the excitement of trying to complete their project in a short period of time. Workplan timelines should reflect and adjust to this concern.



**Balance.** When designing and reviewing a workplan, make sure there is a balance of short-term and long-term projects so that community members, VISTAs and the host organization can all see how their work is contributing to a much larger project. It's critical for people to feel a sense of success when working on a project that may take years to implement.

**Don't Reinvent the Wheel.** Spending time in the community helps a VISTA find out what resources are out there to help with their project. It's equally important for VISTAs to spend time finding out who else has worked on similar projects, either locally or nationally. Locally, VISTAs can meet with other nonprofits, government organizations, schools, social service networks, etc. to find out who has worked on the issue. Nationally, VISTAs can tap into the national service network to find out what other AmeriCorps projects have worked on similar projects. From any of these resources VISTAs can receive sample workplans, training suggestions, funding ideas, project forms, and what-I-would-have-done-differently advice. Spending time finding out what's out there means a VISTA can spend more time adapting and refining material to meet the unique needs of the host community.

**Flexibility.** The workplan is a formal agreement between the Corporation for National Service and the VISTA host organization, but it can be modified to reflect new ideas and talents the VISTA might have.

**Bringing People to the Table.** VISTAs should make sure they have community buy-in on their workplan. Take the time to have community meetings, put articles in the local newspaper or school newsletter letting the community know what the VISTA project is all about and inviting the community to participate in developing and implementing it. At community meetings, when you feel you have community buy-in, ask the attendees to bring one new person with them when they come to the next meeting. Community buy-in is an ongoing process, so it's important to keep involving new people. The broader the community support base you have for your project, the more likely it is to succeed and sustain itself after the VISTA grant is up.



*You Come on the Shoulders of Others.* This is an old religious saying meaning that your work is supported by those who have come before you and that future of your project also rests on what is accomplished during your service term. Be sure to document what you've done, why you did it, who you worked with and where the program could head. When VISTAs leave a program, it's important for them to help the new VISTA, volunteer, or staff member orient themselves to the program. VISTAs can: write a letter of introduction for the person who will be taking over their work, create a binder of project materials, list grant opportunities that are coming up, leave a list of important contact people and information about how they have been involved in the project, and help outline an orientation for the new person.



## Host Site & Community

*Gate Keepers.* Every community has people who know the inter-workings of the community. These people know the history of the community, how to approach people about new ideas and are often looked to by the community to give the thumbs up or down to new ideas and people. Find out who these people are in your host community and find out what their thoughts are on your project.

*Community Education and Empowerment.* VISTAs work on difficult issues that often feel insurmountable to the general public. When working with your host community to educate them about the issue you are addressing make sure that you provide them an opportunity to take action on it. For example, if you are talking to a community member about a recent increase in homelessness in your community, mention that the food bank could really use some more food donations and perhaps the next time they go shopping they could pick up a couple of things to donate to the food bank. Give people a tangible way to help a problem that may seem too huge or too depressing for them to get involved in. Personalize the impact of their donations—be sure to let people know how their actions will help address the problem in specific, localized terms, for example “Thanks so much for your donation that will feed a local family for a week.”

*Progressive Responsibility.* Once your community members are aware of your issue and how they can help, slowly give them increased responsibility on the issue. A person might start out purchasing food for the food bank, then helping with distribution, then writing a letter to the editor talking about an upcoming fundraiser for the food bank and eventually wind up managing the public relations committee for your organization. Tap into people’s talents and have them bring what they are comfortable with to your organization. Review material produced by volunteers and try to avoid changing much of it—it’s their story and you can learn a lot from their new perspective. By building up individual responsibility you increase the sustainability of the project as well as increase community buy in.



***The Invisible VISTA.*** When running a program, ask yourself, "What is this going to look like when I'm not here?" Think about what it's going to take for your work to become invisible. Do you need to recruit more volunteers? Do you need to find funding to hire a project manager? Do you need to develop a partnership with another organization to help support the program? The goal of a good VISTA experience is to work yourself out of a job.

***Partnerships.*** One of the best ways to sustain a project is to make sure you have built cross sector partnerships. Looks for different ways to include members from the public and private sector in your project. Think of ways that your program benefits the local bank, the local hardware store, the Mayor's office, the parent-teacher association, nonprofits etc. and meet with these organizations to discuss how they can become involved in your work. Make sure to add people to newsletter lists, holiday card mailing, special events, this adds to their sense of inclusion and connection to the project.

***Thanks Yous.*** The power thank you notes is immeasurable. It's important to let the community know how they have helped and how their assistance has positively affected the community. Thank you notes let people know that they were appreciated, that they can help tackle challenging issues and helps pave the way for the next time you need to go to the community for resources.

***Trust.*** Trust is the key factor in developing lasting relationships and creating change within a community. Trust is the most powerful community development tool you have as a VISTA.





## Finding the Kettle that Works for You : Dot Activity

### **Purpose:**

This activity illustrates the concept of paradigms and how they influence our problem-solving skills.

### **Major Themes:**

- ❖ Learning how to think outside of the box
- ❖ Creative problem solving for challenging community problems

*Time: 20 minutes*

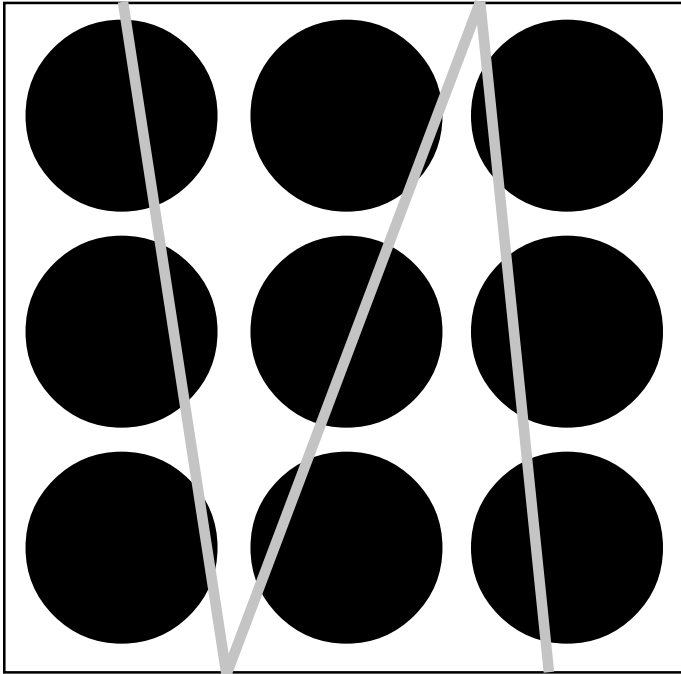
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>
Read instructions and participants work on dot exercise	5 min.
Review solutions	5 min.
Paradigm discussion	10 min.
Community paradigm discussion	10 min.

### **Materials Needed:**

Flipchart and Markers

### Suggested Process

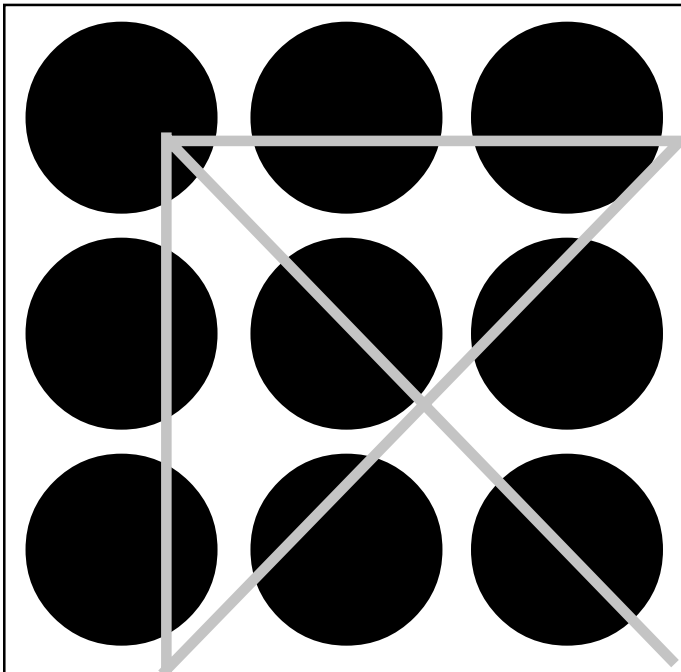
1. Read the instructions to the dot activity: "Below are nine dots in the shape of a square. Try to connect all nine dots using only four straight lines and without picking up your pen/pencil." Have participants complete the activity on in their guidebook. Two possible solutions to the activity are shown here.



2. Ask if anyone has a solution to the puzzle.

3. Post the solutions to the puzzle.

CONTINUED 



Some examples of paradigms that you might want to use are:

❖ **A sports paradigm.** Bill Boomer, a soccer coach, attended his son's swim practice. While watching his son do a flip turn he asked "Why do you do it that way? Wouldn't it be faster to try it this way?" The swim coach had never thought about a different way of trying a flip turn because, "That was the way we've always done it." Boomer, with an athletic background but a swimming novice, was able to look outside the box and see how the flip turn could be improved. With this comment Boomer revolutionized the flip turn, becomes a swim coach and ultimately winds up as a coach for the US Olympic swim team.

❖ **A business paradigm.** A Swiss watchmaker went to his superiors with an idea for a digital watch. His superiors responded, "Digital, no; we are known for our classic style of traditional watches. This is the way we've always made watches and we won't change our methods." That spring at the world watch convention a small Japanese watch company unveiled a digital watch and thus digital timing and the Casio company was born.

4. Talk about the how the box around the dots serves as a paradigm, e.g., "The box is there, therefore we feel we must stay within its lines." Community development is often like this and VISTAs are in a position to ask "Why do you do things this way?" and to suggest different approaches. Give some examples of paradigms and ask participants for paradigms in their community.

5. Brainstorm with participants about what paradigms exist in their communities. Write responses on the flipchart. Brainstorm with participants on ways to address these paradigms and write responses on the flipchart. Wrap up the session by asking VISTAs how they could use some of these strategies in their projects.



❖ **A community development paradigm.** A VISTA was looking for pro-bono dental care for low-income, uninsured families. Every week she called the local dentist in town and say, “Would you please donate services to our organization?” Every week the dentist said no. One week the VISTA noticed the dentist outside of his office building raking the pine cones from the office yard. When the VISTA stopped to chat, the dentist complained about how he spent so much time picking up pinecones and that he really disliked the task. The next week when the VISTA called to ask the dentist to help, she said, “If you’ll donate three hours a month to our dental care program, I’ll make sure that your office lawn is clear of pine cones.” So a successful barter was born. The nonprofit the VISTA worked for was in charge of supervising youth community service hours (for first-time juvenile offenders) and twice a month three youths went to the dentist office to clear his lawn of pinecones. The youth knew that their work was meaningful and that people in the community would benefit from their labor, the dentist was thrilled with his clean lawn as well as with the nonprofit and youths’ work and became a business mentor (another of the nonprofit’s programs) to at-risk students.





## Setting the Table: Sustainability Workplan Exercise

### **Purpose:**

This session applies what's been learned in earlier sessions to participants' workplans. The session provides participants with a way to outline and organize their project workplan.

### **Major Theme:**

Developing a specific plan to ensure that the VISTA workplan is sustained once the VISTA grant is completed.

*Time: 1 hour and 20 minutes*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>
Overview of exercise and review sample workplan	15 min.
Participants develop their own workplan	50 min.
Report back and wrap-up	15 min.

### **Materials Needed:**

Flipchart sheet of paper per participant  
Magic Markers  
Sample Sustainability Workplan (either use the sample included or create one for your own project)

## Suggested Process

1. Introduce the session as an opportunity for participants to organize their service year and to think about ways to ensure that their work is sustainable.
2. Review the sample sustainability workplan. You can use the one below or develop your own. Depending upon your audience, participants might want to take a different approach to writing up the workplan. VISTA might want to write up a plan for their project, VISTA Leaders might want to write a plan that coordinates the efforts of all of the VISTAs on a project and a site supervisor might want to write a workplan that integrates the VISTAs work with the organization's efforts.
3. Start from the top down on the workplan. The first section is sustainability statement. The sustainability statement should be a two or three line sentence that states what program the VISTA wants to sustain and how the VISTA will accomplish this task.
4. Next, brainstorm on the big ideas behind the project. Are you working to increase community involvement? Are you working towards social justice issues? Are you trying to improve the reading skills of every fourth grader in a certain school district? Brainstorm about what the principles and philosophy behind the program that the VISTA is working on.
5. Once the big ideas have been laid out, think about who needs to be involved to make these ideas a reality – your stakeholders. It's good to remind people that the clients and the board of an organization are important to include in the process.
6. After the stakeholders have been identified, participants should begin to outline the project components and what needs to happen and when. Break the project into workable tasks and make sure that each stakeholder group is involved throughout the process.
7. You may not have time for participants to complete their timeline. Make sure people have their sustainability statement, the big ideas, stakeholders identified and can talk about what the program will look like after the VISTA grant is over. There is a reporting form in the participant's guidebook that maybe helpful to help participants structure their report.
8. Participants will have one minute to present their sustainability plan. Remind participants that they should be clear, concise and committed. Studies indicate that people make up their mind on whether or not they will donate services and/or time within the first sixty seconds of hearing someone's appeal, so it's important to keep it brief and to be clear about your project (remind participants that it's always okay for them to pass if they'd rather not share all or part of what they've written.)
9. Wrap up the activity by encouraging participants to continue working on the workplan and to make an appointment with their supervisor to discuss and review the plan when they go back to work.



## Instructions as listed in Participant's Guide

Using the template (page 45), please fill in the timeline starting with today's date and ending with the last month of your service year.

1. In the upper left-hand corner of the timeline write your sustainability statement. Your sustainability statement should say what program you plan to develop or sustain and how you will go about doing that. For example "The Springsteen Day Center will be a daytime shelter for the residents of Springsteen Township with medical, food, and legal facilities for participants. The Day Center will be managed by a full-time staff member, a corps of volunteers and clients." Make sure you outline what issue the program addresses, what services it provides and who will run the program when the VISTA grant is completed.
2. In the upper half of the template please write responses to the following questions about the Big Ideas:
  - a. What are the goals of your project?
  - b. What social justice ideas does your project address?
  - c. What impact do you want your project to have on your host community?
  - d. What will motivate people to become involved with your project?
  - e. What do you want to learn from the experience?
3. Identifying your stakeholders. Who needs to be involved in the project for it to become sustainable? Potential stakeholders could be your supervisor, your organization's board, clients, specific community organizations, etc. In the bottom left corner of your timeline list each stakeholder group in a different color.
4. Breaking Down the Big Ideas into Project Components:

Once you've got your big ideas then begin to organize them into projects.

  - a. What are the projects within each big idea?
  - b. What are the components of the project?
  - c. Who would like to serve as the coordinator for each projects?
  - d. What does a timetable look like for each projects?
  - e. Could any of these projects work together to share resources?
  - f. Deadlines for project components.



- g. How will you communicate your plan to others (clients, media, funders, etc.)?
- h. How will you evaluate your program?
- i. How will you address sustainability in your project?

Once you have discussed these components begin outlining your project on the timeline. Place project deadlines in one color and place the lead person for each component in another color and resource people in yet another color.

Things to keep in mind while writing up project timeline:

- a. What resources are needed?
- b. What resources could be shared?
- c. What training might be helpful?
- d. Are there potential partners who are not yet involved with the project?

*Most important, what does your project look like at the end of your service year when you are no longer there?*

### **Reporting Back**

Participants will have one minute to report back on their workplan. In that minute make sure they observe the three report-back Cs: **Clear, Concise and Committed**. In the one minute report. The report should cover the following four topics:

1. Their sustainability statement;
2. A few of their Big Ideas;
3. Who their stakeholders are; and
4. What the project will look like when there is no longer a VISTA grant supporting the program.





## Sample Sustainability Workplan

**Sustainability Statement:** *The Springsteen Day Center will be a daytime shelter for the residents of Springsteen township with medical, food, and legal facility for participants. The Day Center will be managed by a full time staff member and a corps of volunteers and clients.*

### The Big Ideas

Community enlightenment on the issue of homelessness  
*Hope*  
 Individualized care  
**Trust**  
*One-stop-shop for client services*  
**Social Justice**  
 Dignity

**Mobilize community resources**  
*Quality Care*  
**Client Empowerment**  
 Safe Place  
*Compassion*  
**Action**  
 Collaboration

	January	March	May	July	September	November
<b>Stakeholders</b> VISTAs	Outline day center program. identify stakeholders	Organize community meeting to discuss Day Center	Fundraiser/ Service project for Day Center	Recruit program staff (paid and volunteer to run programs in Day Center	Recruit and train volunteers to run Day Center	Organize grand opening of Day Center
Supervisor	Inform and involve board	Identify and apply for long term funding to support the Day Center.	Develop program delivery strategy for the Day Center	Work with local nonprofit network to develop a referral service for the Day Center	Hire full time staff person to run the Day Center	Take your VISTAs out for a celebratory dinner
Clients	Review program outline	Participate in community meeting	Serve as project captains for service project	Help develop recruitment material.	Run client panel as part of training opening	Help organize and attend grand opening
Community members	Letter to the editor regarding increase in homelessness	Attend community meeting and volunteer for Day Center committee	Attend fundraiser/ service project with 2 friends	Identify and contact 3 local businesses for donations to the Center	Run a volunteer session on community resources	Attend grand opening and are awarded "Volunteer of the Year"



## Soup for the Soul: VISTA Vision

**Purpose:**

This session provides participants with time to reflect upon what it is they want to sustain, personally and project-wise, from their service experience.

**Major Theme:**

Write a personal vision statement by articulating what you want to accomplish during your service experience.

*Time: 35 minutes*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>
Review vision statements	10 min.
Participants write vision statements	15 min.
Report back and wrap up	10 min.

**Materials Needed:**

- Signs with sample vision statements on them (see following pages)
- 1 stone per participant

Please write down your vision statement for your service year. Some things to consider when writing your vision statement

- ❖ What kind of a person do you want to be during and after your service?
- ❖ What legacy do you want to leave in your community?
- ❖ Do you want to sustain your commitment to service and if so how?
- ❖ What words/actions/people serve as a reminder for the kind of person you want to be?

Some examples of famous vision statements are:

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.*

~Margaret Mead

*What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.*

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

*If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain.*

~Maya Angelou

*We must be the change we wish to see in the world.*

~Ghandi

### **Suggested Process**

1. Ask participants to write a vision statement for their service year. The questions below are in the participant book and can help frame the vision statement.
2. Have those participants who are willing to share their vision statements read them out loud.
3. Wrap up the activity and the sustainability training by giving each participant a stone to symbolize their personal **Stone Soup** stone.
4. Be sure to reference the material in the back of the participant book. Also, for the training to be sustainable, encourage participants to use the sustainability workshop material to train other volunteers and/or staff members.



*The only thing you take with you when you're gone is  
what you leave behind.*

~John Allston

*He who has done his best for his own time has lived for  
all times.*

~Johann von Schiller

*Go to the People,  
Live with them,  
Learn from them,  
Love them.  
Start with what they know,  
Build with what they have.*

*And with the best leaders  
When the work is done  
the task accomplished  
The people will say,  
"We have done this ourselves."*

~Lao Tse

*I hope, believe, and dream that national service will  
remain throughout the life of America, not a series of  
promises, but a series of challenges, across all  
generations and all walks of life, to help us rebuild this  
beautiful but troubled land.*

~ President Bill Clinton



Some examples of VISTA vision statements are:

*Every night when I go to sleep I dream of a new world  
but in the morning I wake up to start to build it.*

~Juan Carlos Gastón, Mayagüez Children's  
Library, Puerto Rico

*United in service AmeriCorps we stand. Volunteering  
our lives where there is demand. We strive to leave the  
world better than it was before. Dedicated to "Getting  
things Done," We are AmeriCorps!*

~Thor Midby, American Red Cross, Los Angeles,  
California

*I will see it, become it, plan it, fix it, sustain it.*

~Shirley Johnson, YorkCAN, York, Pennsylvania

*It is human nature to want to help, but not everyone  
knows how. I want to dedicate my time and energy  
into being the example to those that are looking for some  
answers.*

~Heather Luker, Utah Campus Compact, Salt  
Lake City, Utah





## Washing the Dishes: Wrap Up and Evaluation

### Sample Workshop Evaluation

Date of Training

Name of Trainer

1. Please circle what type of project you are working on:  
health education environment public safety  
unmet human needs.

2. How many months have you been a (VISTA, VISTA Leader, VISTA Supervisor, CNS Staff member)?

3. On a scale of 1-5 (1 strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) please rate the following:

a. The training content was appropriate to my project/ individual needs.

1      2      3      4      5

b. The training gave me time to develop a sustainability strategy for my project.

1      2      3      4      5

c. The training gave me a better understanding about project sustainability.

1      2      3      4      5

d. The training gave me a better understanding about sustaining my service commitment past my service term.

1      2      3      4      5

e. I would be interested in additional sustainability trainings.

1      2      3      4      5

4. What portion of the training was most helpful to you and why?

5. What portion of the training was least helpful to you and why?

6. Were your expectations for the training met?

7. Other comments about this training or suggestions for future trainings:

*Thanks for your participation.*

A few things you'll want to cover during the wrap-up portion of the training:

1. Review the expectation list and see if participants believe expectations for the training were met.
2. Review the resource material in the back of the Participant Guide.
3. Remind participants that they can receive helpful CNS resources at [www.etr.org](http://www.etr.org) (resource materials, training guides, tools to help with fundraising, etc.)
4. If you are willing, make up a participant list with contact information so that participants can keep in touch and share resources.
5. Ask participants to complete a workshop evaluation.