

or milestones need to be developed for each objective which can be achieved in a year or even in a quarter.

Each objective statement serves as the starting point for defining the activities or “means” necessary for achieving them. The means for accomplishing objectives are specified by asking the question “how” for each stated objective. The question “how” is asked of each subsequent answer to each question until all of the activities necessary to achieve each objective is given. In addition, other resources, and training and technical assistance need to be stated.

The identified objectives and activities can then be put in a work plan format along with the dates for accomplishing each activity. Finally, a budget can be drawn up that supports each activity.

Periodic evaluations must be conducted to determine 1) if the activities are being implemented and 2) if they are accomplishing each objective. The Project Progress Report form is completed quarterly by AmeriCorps*VISTA project sponsors to measure actual accomplishments. Required changes need to be made to work plan objectives and activities that reflect evaluation findings. In the case of an AmeriCorps*VISTA project sponsor, these modifications are submitted to the CNS State Program Office for approval.

Writing the Assignment Description

After the workplan is complete you can create assignment descriptions for each VISTAs you’ll have on site. The assignment description should be a summary of the goals and objectives from the workplan. You may be using the assignment description to recruit VISTAs, so it will likely be fairly general. Here are a couple of tips of what to include when writing your descriptions.

- The basics: mission of the host organization, location of the host organization, contact information of the host organization.
- Description of the VISTA program
- Description of the project that the VISTA will be working on. Be sure to include short-term and long-term projects.
- Outline of skills needed to accomplish the project as well as what skills will be built through participating in the VISTA project.
- Include a statement the project is open to the interests, talents and experiences that the VISTA will bring to the project.
- Outline of the training, relocation and mentoring support the project will provide to the VISTA. Be sure to include the pre-service orientation and early service training offered by your cluster.

The National Service Resource Library has a series of online documents including assignment descriptions, mission statements, policies and press releases. This material can be accessed through their website at <http://www.etr.org/nsrc/forms/index.html>





The Peddler: The VISTA and their Service Year

The VISTA Service Year

The VISTA service year can be thought of in much the same way as the workplan – a sort of bell curve of activity. During the first few months a VISTA needs time to acclimate to the community. A helpful way of approaching the service year is to break it down into four stages: orientation; months one-three, acclimation; months three-nine, production and implementation; and the sustaining stage; months nine-twelve.

A solid orientation program is the cornerstone of a successful VISTA project. Orientations gives VISTAs the resources and contacts needed to address the workplan as well as provide an opportunity for the host organization to learn what talents and experience the VISTA brings to the host site. During months three through nine VISTAs are in their production and implementation stage, where the bulk of the work is accomplished. The focus of months nine through twelve should be on documenting and sustaining the work completed during the prior nine months. The following series of suggestions will help supervisors address the needs of VISTAs during each stage of the service year.

On his VISTA supervisor Carla Hanson:

Carla gave us assignment titles and told us generally what we could work on but the specifics of each of our assignments was yet to be discovered. She gave suggestions and ideas, as well as resources, and expected us to fill in the blanks. She was great at motivation but really gave us a lot of room (EIGHT SQUARE MILES) to figure it out for ourselves. I began to meet people through my project that could help me with certain aspects of my assignment. The whole concept of VISTA to me at this point was empowerment of the people and I was experiencing this first hand. I had to discover the resources and I had to seek out help to accomplish goals and set new ones. I had to look busy when I wasn't and try to figure out what else I could be doing to do my job.

~Chris Krupa.

*Special education teacher,
New York. VISTA Alum.*

The Orientation Stage

Most supervisors will agree that investing time in developing a thorough orientation program pays off many times over during the service year. Taking the time to get acquainted with the VISTAs, helping the VISTAs acclimate to a new community and work environment make the VISTAs more effective and helps the host site use the VISTA's talents more effectively. The following orientation schedule was adapted from material developed by the Maine/New Hampshire/ Vermont Corporation state office and can be used by your organization to create an orientation program for your project.

Sample Orientation Schedule on the next page.

Training Suggestion

"The Right Ingredients: Wisdom from the Field," in **Stone Soup Training Module: Sustaining the AmeriCorps* VISTA Experience**, pages 28-36 in the Facilitator's Guide. In this activity participants see the connection between the host site, workplan and VISTA through lessons from VISTA alumni.

Resource Reading

Starting Strong: A Guide to Pre-Service Training
<http://www.etr.org/nsrc/online_docs.html>



Sample Orientation Schedule

Day 1: Orientation to the Community

- Review of what the VISTAs learned at their pre-service orientation and follow up on any questions they might have or clarification needed
- Review orientation schedule
- Tour of host community and service area
- Leave time to address housing, food, utility and banking needs

Day 2: Orientation to the Sponsoring Organization

- Purpose and goals of host organization
- Organizational chart
- Board structure and composition
- Volunteer involvement with host organization
- Supervision
- Role of VISTA within host organization
- Personnel policies
- Schedule meetings with department heads
- Staff members available to VISTAs
- Host organization resources available to VISTAs

Day 3: VISTA Workplan

- Assignment description
- Past accomplishments/challenges
- Specific problem(s) VISTAs will address
- Goals/objectives of VISTA's workplan
- Strategies/plans for VISTA's assignment
- Description of project balance between short-term and long-term goals
- Training needed to complete workplan and types of training available

Suggested Goals for a VISTA Orientation

1. Provide background, organization and overall purpose of the sponsoring organization.
2. Provide background of the community and identification of community needs.
3. Outline nature of the low-income population served by the VISTA project.
4. Identify potential resources (funds, materials, people).
5. Review supervisory and support structure for the volunteers.
6. Clarify individual volunteer workplans.

Other helpful meetings to schedule during the first two weeks:

- Host site's board
- Advisory board/mentors
- Clients served by the host organization
- National service members who are serving in the community
- VISTA project collaborators



The Acclimation Stage: Months One-Three

During the first three months time should be set aside for VISTAs to develop their workplan. Whether the VISTA is a long-time community members taking on a new role or whether the VISTA has relocated to serve, time to let them build an organizational and community understanding of the project.

The dropout rate for VISTAs is highest during the first three months of service. This attrition can often be prevented if the following four issues are addressed early on in the service year. These issues apply to both the VISTA and the VISTA supervisor.

1. What type of communication style do I have?
2. What type of supervisory style do you have/ need to be successful?
3. What is your motivation for hosting a VISTA/ becoming a VISTA?
4. What kinds of experience, talents and expectations do you bring to the VISTA project?

There are many different ways to address and train on each of these issues. Here are a few training suggestions that supervisors can use during the acclimation stage to address these concerns. The important thing to keep in mind is both the VISTA(s) and VISTA supervisor use the same assessment tool/training/ and participate in the same discussion on the topic. Many supervisors use findings from these assessments to be very useful when re-visioning the workplan and VISTA assignment descriptions.

Training Suggestions

1. **Communication Styles.** Keirseley Temperament Sorter
<www.keirseley.com>
2. **Supervisory Styles and Needs.** Leadership Compass, located in Nicole Trimble's **Preparing Our Nation's Leaders Through Service** at
<www.nationalservice.org/jobs/fellowships/1999-00.html>
3. **Service Motivation,** located in Nicole Trimble's **Preparing Our Nation's Leaders Through Service** at
<www.nationalservice.org/jobs/fellowships/1999-00.html>
4. **Experience, Talents and Expectation,** located in Nicole Trimble's **Preparing Our Nation's Leaders Through Service** at
<www.nationalservice.org/jobs/fellowships/1999-00.html>



The Production and Implementation Stage: Service Months Three-Nine

By the middle six months of service a VISTA understands the project and has the training and resources available to implement the workplan objectives. During this period it's helpful if the supervisor can conduct a midyear evaluation of the program as well as schedule a midservice evaluation of the VISTA. Following an evaluation of the project a re-visioning of the workplan and assignment descriptions can be done. Re-visioning a project entails making sure the original goals and objectives are still appropriate for the project as well as making sure the talents and experience a VISTA brings to a host organization are being used to the best advantage. If changes are made to the workplan, make sure to talk with state office staff to amend the official workplan. A midyear evaluation of the VISTA can take place when the second quarterly report is due. Here are some helpful topics to cover during a mid-year evaluation:

1. Are the goals and objectives of the project being met in a timely manner? If so, is the VISTA bored and are additional projects needed to work on? If not, what challenges is the VISTA encountering and what can be done to overcome these challenges?
2. How is the VISTA acclimating to the host organization and community? Does the VISTA need assistance making contacts with certain parts of the community? If so, who might be able to help with this?
3. Are there communication or supervisory issues that need to be addressed?

Supervising a VISTA is different from supervising a staff member. Not in the "Oh it's just a volunteer; you shouldn't give them as much responsibility" way. In our organization our VISTAs have been treated like staff in that they have taken on just as much responsibility as staff members have and have been given the freedom to do that and they've done incredible things because of that. I think when you have a VISTA you have to be more conscious of recognition and support because there are some situations where a VISTA will go out into the community and make a connection with someone, and sometimes when they say they are the VISTA volunteer, they need some staff backing to make things happen in the community because the community might be a little wary of this person who is a volunteer.

~Charise Milton, VISTA Supervisor, Rural California Housing Coalition. VISTA Alum



4. What areas of the project is the VISTA doing well and what areas (project and professional) could the VISTA focus efforts on in the coming six months?
5. What training and resource needs does the VISTA have for the coming six months?
6. What project or supervisory suggestions does the VISTA have for the supervisor or for the project?

Finally, during the implementation stage of the service year it's important for the supervisor to make sure the VISTAs are collecting and organizing project material in a way that will be useful and accessible to future VISTAs and staff members.

The Sustaining Stage: Service Months Nine-Twelve

During the final three months of the service year it's beneficial for a VISTA supervisor to help the VISTA bring closure to both the project and the service experience. As to the project, closure can be achieved by addressing activities discussed in the workplan chapter. For the VISTA, it's helpful to allot time for them to pursue post-service opportunities. As you start to write your third quarterly report, check with the VISTAs to see what their post-service plans are and find out what resources are needed.

VISTAs often think they can walk on water and they don't believe you until their feet are wet. Sometimes the risks work and sometimes they don't. This last group of VISTAs was able to get into a school district we were never able to get into. It's letting them try even though in common sense and historically it's not going to get you anywhere. It's overcoming the, "Well we've tried that before and it's never worked. Who knows, they might put a different spin on it and it might work!"

~Jeanne Bock, VISTA Supervisor,
Panhandle Health, Idaho

Resource Reading

Next Steps: Life after AmeriCorps by the Corporation for National Service

Available through the National Service Resource Library: ETR Associates
Phone: 800-860-2684
<www.etr.org/NSRC>



This list of VISTAbuses collected from discussions with VISTAs, VISTA supervisors and state office staff is intended as a “learn from my mistakes” reminder for future supervisors.

Top Ten Most Common VISTAbuses

1. Using the VISTA as an administrative assistant, answering phones, copying, preparing mailings etc.
2. Not having appropriate office space and computer and phone access.
3. Not providing the VISTAs with a clear idea of what the workplan is.
4. Not providing community or organizational orientation.
5. Switching or unclear VISTA supervision.
6. Continually pulling VISTAs into organizational crises.
7. Not having a conversation about the balance between the direct and indirect service portions of the workplan during the first few weeks of service.
8. Not including VISTAs in staff meetings or organizational planning sessions.
9. Assigning projects without providing appropriate orientation and training.
10. Not providing professional or skill development opportunities for the VISTA.

VISTAbuse

VISTAbuse is the inappropriate use of a VISTA’s time and talents and makes for frustrated VISTAs and challenged supervisors. Because the service term of a year is so short, acclimation to the project and the need for a sense of accomplishment can be more intense for a VISTA than for a traditional staff member. It’s easy to slip into many of these VISTAbuses when time is short and there are many important assignments to be done. What may seem to be small project or a minor change in the workplan can often become a major obstacle to a VISTA fulfilling their workplan.



Suggestions for Supervisors

On a more positive note, most former VISTA supervisors will tell you that working with VISTAs is stimulating, challenging, enlightening, frustrating, and, ultimately, a rewarding experience. When asked to define a sustainable project, many supervisors said, "It's when we can find the money to hire the VISTA at the end of the service term."

Provided with the right environment and resources, a VISTA can bring the energy, talent and commitment needed to address formidable community development projects. Below are some final pearls of wisdom from VISTA supervisors on how to take good care of your VISTAs.

- Be prepared to spend at least a quarter of your time during the first two months of the VISTA's arrival working on VISTA-related work. The time invested in the first few months pays off tenfold later on in the service term when the VISTAs can work autonomously and are able to tackle big projects.
- Find a supervisor for the VISTAs who can appreciate the need for flexibility and keeping the VISTAs "on a loose string."
- Identify programs that can help your VISTA with basic needs (food, housing, childcare, utility expenses). By helping address the VISTA's personal needs you will increase their project productivity and show sensitivity to the financial situation of the VISTAs that will be greatly appreciated.
- Take time to recognize work accomplished by a VISTA. For example, one VISTA project started a "Take a VISTA to Lunch" day where once a month a

Resource Reading

A Manager's Guide to Communication by the Corporation for National Service available at <www.etr.org/nsrc/online_docs.html>

Becoming a Better Supervisor: A Resource Guide for Community Service Supervisors by the Corporation for National Service available at <www.etr.org/nsrc/online_docs.html>

Practical Applications: Strategies for Supporting a Diverse Corps by the National Association for Conflict Mediation. Available through the National Service Resource Library:

ETR Associates
Phone: 800-860-2684
<www.etr.org/NSRC>



different staff member would buy the VISTA lunch and find out more about their work.

- Let others know the fine work that your VISTAs are doing. Whether it's a letter to the editor, a commendation from your board or a letter to the VISTA's family letting them know the impact their work is having on the community – share the successes with others.
- Keep in touch with your VISTAs after the end of the service year, put them on your mailing list, invite them to serve on a committee, etc. VISTA alumni are a great spokespeople and fundraisers for their programs.

Most of these are very simple gestures that go a long way to make the VISTA feel safe, productive and appreciated by their host site and community.

Here's my advice on supervising VISTAs: Feed 'em, love 'em and leave 'em alone – kind of the Dr. Spock approach to VISTA management. If you are doing it right the VISTAs need facilitation and guidance. You are responsible for painting them the big picture, firing them up and sending them out to do great work...but remember you do need to feed them, they are hungry ALL of the time.

~Virginia Lang, VISTA Supervisor, Communities in Schools. Oklahoma





Putting It All Together

With strong community and organizational commitment to the VISTA project, a clear workplan and VISTAs who have the training and resources to accomplish the project goals, a sustainable project is achievable and long-term social change a reality.

The path to a sustainable project is long and has many turns. The destination you originally chose for the project may be very different than where you wind up. A successful, sustainable project is going to shift to the changing needs of the service population it addresses, the funding environment and collaboration opportunities. Goals and objectives can be modified to accommodate these changes and a project will flourish when there is clear communication and a shared vision on the part of the VISTA, host site, the community and the state office. Hopefully the guide has provided you with helpful information about program development to create this vision and you now have a clearer sense of how to develop and implement a sustainable project. For more information about sustainability, managing a national service project or community development issues, please review the Resource Material section that follows.

Good luck with your project!

The VISTAs gave us new ideals and a new perspective; a bigger perspective and that was what we needed.

~Brenda Takeshore, VISTA
Supervisor, Bureau of Land
Management, Alaska

Resource Reading

Tool Kit: A User's Guide to Evaluation for National Service Program

Available through the National Service Resource Library:

ETR Associates

Phone: 800-860-2684

<<http://www.etr.org/NSRC>>



On Line Sustainability Resources

Sustainable Seattle: <www.scn.org/sustainable/susthome.html> Listing of policies, how Seattle has organized volunteers, 1998 Sustainable Community Indicators Report, and project descriptions (Neighborhood Network Team, Policy Group, and the Seattle Guide to Sustainable Living).

Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development: <www.sustainable.doe.gov/> Site has case studies, rural and urban specific sustainability information, funding opportunities and houses toolkits for the following topics: Land Use Planning, Green Buildings, Transportation Economics, Industry, Disaster Planning, Community Development

United States Environmental Protection Agency Funding Page: <<http://134.67.55.16:7777/DC/OSECWeb.nsf/Grants?OpenView>> Comprehensive listing of foundation and governmental funding opportunities for sustainable community development. Very helpful writing tutorial included in site.

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation: <www.wilder.org/pubs/pubcatlg.html> A series of community collaboration and community building, leadership development and marketing and fundraising publications available: A sampling of their titles: Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, Organizing for Social Change, Leadership, Management, and Planning: All the Way to the Bank: Smart Money Management for Tomorrow's Nonprofit, Consulting with Nonprofits: A Practitioner's Guide, Coping with Cutbacks: The Nonprofit Guide to Success When Times Are Tight, Marketing Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations Volume I: Develop the Plan, Wilder Nonprofit Field Guide to Conducting Successful Focus Groups, Wilder Nonprofit Field Guide to Getting Started on the Internet.

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University: <<http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/abcd.html#AA>> Guide to Mapping and Mobilizing the Economic Capacities of Local Residents (1996), A Guide to Mapping Local Business Assets and Mobilizing Local Business Capacities (1996), A Guide to Mapping Consumer Expenditures and Mobilizing Consumer Expenditure Capacities (1996), A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents (1997), A Guide to Evaluating Asset-Based Community Development: Lessons, Challenges, and Opportunities (1997), A Guide to Creating a Neighborhood Information Exchange: Building Communities by Connecting Local Skills, and Knowledge (1998), City-Sponsored Community Building: Savannah's Grants for Blocks Story (1998), Newspapers and Neighborhoods: Strategies for Achieving Responsible Coverage of Local Communities (1999).

Sustainable Communities Network: <www.sustainable.org> Site provides a listing of sustainable development funding sources, case studies, publications on the following topics: Smart Growth, Governing Sustainability, Civic Engagement, and Community Indicators.

Center for Livable Communities:<www.lgc.org/clc/> Hotline and Referral Help
1800-290-8202

Civic Practices Network: <www.cpn.org/index.html> Civic Practices Network (CPN) Center for Human Resources, Heller School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare/Brandeis University/ 60 Turner Street/Waltham, MA 02154/ Phone: (617) 736-4890. *Community Manuals* (i.e.: Community Building in Public Housing: The Ties that Bind People and their Communities, Planning Community-Wide Study Circle Programs: A Step-by-Step Guide, The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide: Violence in Our Communities, Building Communities From The Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets, The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook)



Environmental Manuals, Networking Manuals, Family, Gender and Children's Manuals, Work and Empowerment Manuals, and Youth Education Manuals.

National Town Meeting for a Sustainable America: <www.sustainableusa.org/>
Some interesting best practices profiles on youth, environmental and housing programs.

Community Research network (Loka Institute): <www.loka.org/crn/index.htm>
Great linking page for a variety of social issues ranging from health to the environment to agricultural issues. Also, the site houses a comprehensive issue database and listing of funding sources.

Kellogg collection of community development resources: <www.unl.edu/kellogg/index.html> A comprehensive database of community development guidebooks, manuals, workshop materials, reports, books, and videos. Useful for rural, urban, and suburban topics.



National Service Resources

Because some of the training and technical assistance providers change over the years, it's helpful to consult the following site for an up-to-date listing of providers: at <www.etr.org/nsrc/resguide/rgtoc.html>

National Service Resource Center (NSRC)

ETR Associates

P.O. Box 1830

Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1830

Phone 1 (800.)321-4407 (6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. PST).

Fax 1 (800) 435-8433

Website: <www.etr.org>

Disability Issues

United Cerebral Palsy Associations/ Access AmeriCorps

1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 410

Washington, DC 20036

Telephone: 202-785-3891

Fax: 202-296-0349

E-mail: <info@nonprofitrisk.org>

Website: <www.nonprofitrisk.org>

Evaluation Assistance

Aguirre International/Project STAR (Support and Training for Assessing Results)

480 East 4th Ave., Unit A

San Mateo, CA 94401

Telephone: 800-548-3656

Fax: 650-348-0261

E-mail: <star@aiweb.com>

Website: <www.projectstar.org>



Human Relations and Diversity

CHP International

1040 North Blvd., Suite 220

Oak Park, IL 60301

Telephone: 800-635-6675 or 708-848-9650

Fax: 708-848-3191

Website: <www.chpinternational.com/DIVERSE.html>

Leadership Training

National Service Leadership Institute

Bldg. 386, Moraga Ave.

P.O. Box 29995

Presidio of San Francisco, CA 94129

Telephone: 415-561-5950

Fax: 415-561-5955

Organizational Development and Program Management

United Way of America

701 North Fairfax Street

Alexandria, VA 22314-2045

Telephone: 703-836-7100, ext. 436

Fax: 703-549-9152

Website: <www.unitedway.org>

Supervisory Skill Training

National Crime Prevention Council

1700 K Street, NW, 2nd Floor

Washington, DC 20006-3817

Telephone: 800-355-1200 / 202-466-6272

Fax: 202-785-0698

Website: <www.ncpc.org/amicorps.htm>



Sustainability

Campaign Consultation

2817 St. Paul Street

Baltimore, MD 21218

Telephone: 410-243-7979

Fax: 410-243-1024

Website: <sustainability@campaignconsultation.com>

