

## Aloha United Way

### AmeriCorps VISTA Frequently Asked Questions

**1. *Can you tell me more about the AUW AmeriCorps VISTA program, or can I call you to ask questions?***

Please feel free to call Sarah Murray, Program Coordinator with any questions you may have or to know if the AmeriCorps VISTA program is right for you. Sarah can be reached at 808-543-2249 or [sarahmurray@auw.org](mailto:sarahmurray@auw.org).

**2. *When do I need to apply and what is the hiring process like?***

We typically begin screening and interviewing candidates 2 to 4 months prior to the start date of any given position. We begin with a pre-screening call and Q&A session, followed by a Skype or in person interview with the Program Coordinator and VISTA Leader. The third stage is an interview with the potential organization that you may be placed at. Final selection and notification typically occurs 1 to 2 months in advance of the VISTA position start date in order to give you time to plan for your orientation and relocation. Please keep in mind that timelines can be tighter based the need of the organization.

**3. *What skills do I need?***

The specific skill set varies per position, but all of our placements look for a college degree, experience with data collection, program evaluation, and commitment to bettering our community.

**4. *Do I get paid for being a VISTA?***

Each VISTA receives a modest bi-monthly stipend of \$21,624 annually (approximately \$830—every two weeks). At the completion of their services, VISTAs receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of \$5,920 to pay for college or to pay off student loans, or a \$1,800 cash stipend. VISTAs are also eligible for health benefits and child care.

**5. *Will I need a car for VISTA Service?***

Not really. Most of the positions are on Oahu, where there is a reliable public bus system that most VISTAs take advantage of. Other VISTAs base their housing search to their organization's location and is within walking distance. Bicycles and mopeds are also common modes of transportation on the islands.

**6. *Is housing provided?***

Not at the moment. VISTAs are responsible for their housing, but the AUW Program Coordinator and VISTA Leader are happy to help assist.

**7. *Are my relocation costs covered?***

CNCS will reimburse VISTA members \$1000 towards their flight to Hawaii, up to \$550 for relocation expenses, and another \$1000 towards relocation after service.

**8. *Are all assignments full-time?***

Yes, all assignments are full-time positions for 40 hours a week for the full service year.

**9. Will I get any training before I start?**

Yes, will you receive Pre-Service Orientation from CNCS about the VISTA program overall. The AUW VISTA Program Coordinator and VISTA Leader will provide local orientation and the host site will provide training at the specific site.

**10. Do I get vacation, sick days, or personal time off?**

Yes, you are allocated 10 sick days and 10 vacation days for the year.

**11. Why does Hawai'i have VISTA programs?**

Hawaii is a truly unique place with its own set of unique challenges. Situated in the middle of the Pacific, Hawaii is the most isolated land mass on the face of the Earth. This distance, along with a number of other factors like it's history of colonization and westernization, makes the Islands an expensive place to live, and creates a number of additional challenges that are not normally faced on the US 'Mainland'. Hawaii faces the highest rate of homelessness per capita in the US. Many of our partner agencies put emphasis on providing services geared towards homelessness, also paired with that organizations address challenges with dental, healthcare, child/adult literacy, and food accessibility as well.

**12. What do VISTA members do?**

AmeriCorps VISTA members work on projects that build the capacity of their organization. Projects can vary, but our program projects are predominately geared towards database building, organizing and inputting data, as well as program analysis and evaluation. Some other projects our VISTAs work on include: developing outreach and marketing campaigns, building a social media presence, writing grants, managing a program in its first year, and recruiting volunteers. VISTAs do not perform day-to-day administrative support or direct service. For example, a VISTA could establish a gardening education program, recruit and train volunteers, and raise money for the program—but would not teach the children directly.

**13. What does the typical day/week look like for a VISTA?**

The day to day and week to week differs between VISTAs and their location organizations. Some of the activities you can expect to do as a part of your work may include making phone calls to volunteers, colleagues, businesses, other non-profits, etc.; coordinating volunteers; collaborating on grant writing projects; meeting with various project and community members; and planning special events, trainings, field trips, or workshops. Most VISTAs lead projects that require them to work independently, while some collaborate with sub site colleagues. Each month we hold group professional development workshops and service projects as a chance to come to together and share experiences.

**14. This sounds like a lot of work, what do I get out of this?**

AmeriCorps VISTA is more than a service opportunity, you will also build valuable leadership and project management skills. You will start service with an orientation and have access to professional development opportunities throughout the year. As a capacity-builder, you will be focused on sustainably supporting local organizations and agencies. You will be gaining professional experience and building skills as you learn, experiment, and adapt to a new environment while delivering outcomes. Many AmeriCorps VISTA alumni have said that their year of VISTA service afforded them managerial responsibilities they wouldn't have found in an entry-level job. Many use their AmeriCorps VISTA service as a gap year to pay off loans or save for school as they plan their next move whether that's graduate

school or entering the workforce. Also, AmeriCorps VISTA members receive one year of Federal Non-Competitive (NCE) hiring eligibility, which provides advantages in the federal hiring process. Finally, you are joining a movement and becoming part of history: VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) was envisioned by President Kennedy to be a domestic Peace Corps. President Johnson enacted VISTA as part of the War on Poverty. VISTA is over 50 years old and by joining, you are entering a community with over 220,000 passionate individuals who have gone on to careers in every sector of this economy. President Johnson's words are as relevant today as they were when the first class of VISTAs were sworn into service: "Your pay will be low; the conditions of your labor often will be difficult. But you will have the satisfaction of leading a great national effort and you will have the ultimate reward which comes to those who serve their fellow man."

Additional Resources:

<http://www.malamakauai.org/mk/amerikorps-program-faq/>

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amerikorps/americorpsvista/frequently-asked-questions>