Creating an Effective VISTA Assignment Description

What is a VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)?

The VAD details the activities a VISTA member will perform during a service year. It is both a position description and a work plan.

Why is the VAD important?

The VAD takes the milestones you've identified in your VISTA application and translates them into a realistic set of activities. Supervisors can use the VAD to frame a few important conversations with a VISTA. The VAD indicates project priorities, organizational and community challenges, and the purpose of the project.

VADs are used to:

- Recruit potential applicants
- Enable members to understand responsibilities
- Help guide VISTAs in achieving project milestones
- Allow supervisors & VISTAs to monitor performance and assess whether the project is on track.

VADs should include the poverty mission of the project & activities that clearly show how the VISTA will build capacity and empower the community.

Elements of the VAD

Title: Each VAD you create requires a distinct position title.

Details: The VAD requires you to input project details such as the site name. Please list the official site name. We will include this official site name in all paperwork to CNCS.

Goal: The GOAL statement should describe the 3 year overall goal, in terms of organizational capacity AND community impact. It should focus on how the VISTA will work to break the cycle of poverty. Specific with clear goals but focused on alleviating poverty. Keep it concise, no more than 3-4 sentences. 750 characters.

Example Goal Statement: The VISTA project will develop a sustainable volunteer program at Latino Network by engaging community members as mentors to 100 low-income, academically at-risk Latino students. The program will alleviate poverty by developing a culturally responsive volunteer program to improve educational outcomes including increased high school graduation rates and skills for post-secondary success in college or career for K12 youth at in-school and community-based after school programming.

Objectives: The objectives you identify for the VAD must articulate what the VISTA will achieve during his or her assignment. Each VAD should include more than one objective and include completion dates for each objective. The objectives should form a bridge between your goal statements and the VISTA's activities. Answer the following while creating your objectives.
   o Describe the outcome of a set of activities in a sentence or two.
   o Check that what you've written aligns with your goal statement.
   o Include goal numbers or data, if possible.
   o Check that you've included a completion date.

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Elements of the VAD, cont.

Sample Objective Statement: (January 2017-March 2017) Recruit 25 volunteers to serve as mentors. Volunteers will begin to serve students as a three month pilot program. The VISTA will evaluate programming and provide suggestions for the next phase in the project.

Does the statement summarize a set of outcomes?
Does the statement align with your goal?
Is there a completion date?

Activities: The activities section of the VAD identifies more specifically what VISTAs will be doing to achieve their objectives. To begin, start with the Performance Measures in Section 2: FY16 Program Guidance section of your project application and edit them into appropriate activities.

- Helpful hints:
    - Begin your activity sentences with active verbs.
    - The activities you write should be clear and specific. Avoid too much detail.

Sample Activity Performance Measure:
VISTA members will use a train-the-trainer model to provide sustainability training to staff of member agencies.
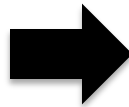
Sample VAD 'Member Activity' Language: Design and deliver a training-of-trainers to staff and community members to ensure project sustainability.

In this example, the Performance Measure was rewritten to be active and clear, using the active verbs- *design* and *deliver*. This reflects the VADs function as a position description.

Tips for Preparing a VISTA Assignment Description

1. **Provide each VISTA with an individual assignment description that describes the capacity-building activities the VISTA is responsible for completing.**

2. **Include enough detail in the VAD to guide the VISTA while still allowing for flexibility in carrying out day-to-day tasks and activities.**

3. **The VAD should identify key capacity-building tasks and activities that the VISTA can realistically accomplish in a year.**

4. **Review the VAD and your VISTA Application side by side to ensure strong links between both documents. Provide the VISTA with a copy of the VISTA application to help the VISTA put his/her activities into the context of the entire project once they begin their service.**