

What You Need to Know about VISTA Relocation

If you signed up for a 12-month VISTA term and are moving more than 50 miles to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA, you are eligible for Relocation Assistance. This is an awesome benefit provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) but also can be a slow and confusing process to get approved. In this document you will find some definitions, FAQs, and helpful clarifications to make the relocation process go as smoothly as possible!

Terms and Definitions

PSO: Pre-Service Orientation that you must attend before you can begin service at your VISTA site.

Home Of Record (HOR): The permanent address you provide on your application on your My AmeriCorps portal. This is the place you will be moving from.

VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU): The phone hotline to call if you are having trouble with relocation related matters or have questions. To reach the VMSU, call the National Service Hotline at 800-942-2677 and select the option for the VISTA Member Support Unit. You can also submit a question to them using a web form at <https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask>.

Relocation Travel Request Profile: The online form you fill out on the My AmeriCorps Portal that informs CNCS that you are eligible for relocation. This form will ask you to select options such as Relocation Prior to PSO or round trip travel to PSO followed by relocation. The option you select on this form is not binding and CNCS and the VISTA Member Support Unit will work with you to determine what the best option is for you. The VMSU will contact you by e-mail to let you know if your travel plans are approved. Do not arrange and pay for travel until you receive written approval from the VMSU. If you are confused about your travel request profile, or having trouble with it, call the VMSU. In some cases they will fill it out for you with information you give them over the phone.

Relocation Travel Allowance: The money that CNCS **reimburses** you for your travel from your HOR to your service site. It is based on these rates bellow and is determined by how many miles you traveled. It cannot exceed \$1000. You will learn the exact amount when you sign a travel relocation voucher at PSO, and the allowance will be provided via direct deposit **8 weeks after your PSO**.

	Relocation Rate	Shipping Rate	Total Relocation Travel Allowance
Example	\$0.24/mile	\$0.10/mile	\$0.34/mile

It is important to know that the Travel Allowance is a reimbursement, and is never paid in advance. This means that you will have to be able to afford the cost of the gas/plane ticket/train ticket up front and get the money back 8 weeks after PSO.

Settling-In Allowance: Provided with your first VISTA living allowance payment, this is a one-time allowance of \$550 to offset moving costs. It will always arrive before the reimbursement of your travel allowance. (Please note that taxes are deducted from your settling-in allowance).

Financial Hardship: If you are unable to pay for your travel to your site upfront before the relocation travel allowance reimburses you, you may contact the VMSU in writing and explain why you cannot pay your own initial way to your site. If you choose this option, you will NOT receive the relocation travel allowance in the mileage amount. Instead, the VMSU will purchase and arrange your travel and you will receive only the \$550 settling-in allowance.

Return to HOR: If you wish to return to your HOR when you complete your VISTA year, you can go through a similar process and submit a travel request. When approved, you will arrange your own travel and 8 weeks after the close of your service you will receive the same amount as you did when you initially relocated. You can also apply for financial hardship to return to your HOR and the same rules apply.

Frequently Asked Questions

What must I consider when planning relocation travel?

Before committing yourself to relocating to serve in VISTA:

- Weigh the professional and personal costs against the benefits of relocation when accepting a position.
- Calculate the amount of the Relocation Travel Allowance you are entitled to in order to make informed decisions about arranging your travel.
- Recognize that relocation assistance provided by the VISTA program may not cover all expenses that you incur or alleviate all inconveniences. The VISTA program will provide a reasonable allowance to defray the costs of travel necessary to enter and close service.
- Understand that relocation is intended to match the best candidate to a specific position to benefit the project and the community. The financial assistance for relocation travel may not fully meet your hopes or preference.

How do I ask for relocation assistance?

Fill out the travel request profile on your My AmeriCorps portal. If you have questions, contact the VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) to request support in relocating to your service site. The VMSU can answer any questions, and approve your travel, if

appropriate (800-942-2677). You will receive written confirmation from the VMSU when they have reviewed your request and then you will be free to begin to arrange your travel.

How do I travel from my home of record (HOR) to my service site?

Once the VMSU has approved your request to relocate, and told you the amount of financial assistance you will receive, you will arrange your own travel from your HOR to your service site. The means of travel is up to you— air, rail, bus or personal vehicle.

You may also decide on your dates of travel in coordination with and permission of the VMSU. You may relocate prior to attending PSO, after attending PSO, or attend PSO on your way to your service site. Dates and itinerary must be approved by the VMSU.

I understand that I arrange my own travel to my service site. How do I travel to Pre-Service Orientation (PSO)?

- Travel by Car: If approved by the VMSU to travel to PSO by car, you will be reimbursed for mileage from your approved departure point to the PSO at a rate set by the VISTA program. You may request reimbursement for the cost of tolls and parking at the PSO, as long as you provide receipts.
- Travel by Air, Rail, and Bus (Ticketed Travel): For ticketed travel, the VMSU will arrange and purchase tickets for you to travel from your approved departure point to the PSO. You will receive an itinerary by email at least a week prior to your scheduled departure date. You may request reimbursement for the cost of getting to the airport (or station), as long as you provide receipts.

What if I relocate to my service site without approval from the VMSU?

If you relocate to your service site without written approval from the VMSU, you must arrange your own travel to PSO and you will receive reimbursement, if at all, to the amount VISTA policy permits.

If I receive relocation assistance, do I also receive help to return home after the VISTA year is complete?

Yes. If you wish to return to your HOR, you are responsible for arranging your return travel to your HOR. You will receive the same relocation travel allowance at the end of service as you do at the beginning. You must plan your finances accordingly.

Tips and Important Things to Consider

- Though it is frustrating that you don't receive your travel relocation allowance until 8 weeks after PSO, the amount based on the mileage you travel generally totals more than the cost of, for example, a one-way plane ticket. If it is possible

for you to pay for your move out of pocket for eight weeks, you will eventually end up with more money in your pocket. Financial hardship is a great option for those of you who do not have the funds available to do so, however!

- If your PSO is in a different city than your service site, the VMSU will only arrange and pay for round-trip travel to PSO. You either need to travel to your service site first or travel round trip to PSO from your HOR in order to get the VMSU to pay for your travel to PSO. Otherwise, if you travel from your HOR to PSO to your service site, you will arrange your own travel and be reimbursed for your PSO travel at the same time as you receive your travel relocation allowance (eight weeks later).
- In order to use your own car to relocate or travel to PSO and receive reimbursement, you must fill out the V-81 form, which is also available on the My AmeriCorps portal, before you travel in the car.