



# Creating an Effective VISTA Assignment Description



AmeriCorps

## 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 their responsibilities.
- Help guide VISTAs in achieving project milestones.
- Allow supervisors and 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 the 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 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. Keep it concise, no more than 3-4 sentences. 750 characters.

Example Goal Statement: The overall goal of the Big Sky Tutoring and Outreach Program project is to increase graduation rates and course passage rates of economically disadvantaged youth to 86%. This will be accomplished through academic tutoring, peer mentoring, community outreach, and program development. Fifty percent of Big Sky High School students qualify for free and reduced lunch, the highest rate for high schools in the Missoula County Public School District. Low income students are not always able to prioritize school and academics. In the fall of 2015, 24% of students failed at least on class and 34% of students identified through free and reduced lunch rates had at least one failing grade. This project will provide additional support for all students to succeed.

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 objectives. The objectives should form a bridge between your goal statements and the VISTAs activities.

- Describe the outcome of a set of activities in a sentence or two.
- Check that what you've written aligns with your goal statement.
- Include goal numbers of data, if possible.
- Ensure objectives increase capacity and are not direct service.

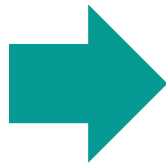
Sample Objective Statement: (January 2017-March 2017) Recruit 25 volunteers to serve as mentors. Volunteers will begin to serve students as a three month pilot program.

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

Activities: the activities section of the VAD identifies more specifically what the VISTA will do to achieve their objectives. To begin, start with the Performance Measures selected in the VISTA application and transfer 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 details.
  - Ensure activities build the capacity of your organization and are not direct service.

Sample Performance Measures: Hours of service contributed by community volunteers recruited by CNCS-supported organizations or national service participants.



Sample VAD "Member Activity"  
Language: Create a database to track hours and contributions of each volunteer.

In this example, the Performance Measure was rewritten to be active and clear, using the active verb "create". 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 details 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.