



2025 Request for Proposals

National Legal Aid & Defender Association AmeriCorps VISTA Program





National Legal Aid & Defender Association VISTA Program Request for Proposals – 2025



Program Background

The National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA), in partnership with AmeriCorps, invites proposals from organizations across the United States interested in hosting AmeriCorps VISTA members for a three-year capacity-building project beginning in 2025. Guided by the belief that the quality of justice should not depend on financial means, NLADA strives to ensure access to justice by supporting organizations dedicated to expanding legal resources and advancing justice for communities facing systemic barriers.

Public defender offices and other organizations dedicated to legal aid and justice services often encounter systemic barriers that limit their access to essential partnerships, funding, resources, and the operational systems needed for effective service delivery. NLADA's VISTA Program is designed to help these organizations overcome such obstacles, building sustainable capacity and enhancing their impact to support long-term growth and resilience for all partners involved.

Through this model, NLADA's AmeriCorps VISTA program enables host sites to:

- Build sustainable community relationships and partnerships.
- Conduct strategic grant research and enhance resource development.
- Advance racial equity and justice within their operations and services.
- Strengthen data systems and practices to better understand and meet community needs.

Eligible host sites include public defender offices, legal aid organizations, and community-based nonprofits that provide services directly addressing barriers to justice, such as legal support, restorative justice initiatives, reentry programs, and resources for individuals facing systemic barriers. VISTA members will serve full-time, dedicating their efforts to projects tailored to the specific needs of their host organizations, enabling these entities to expand their reach and sustainability.

About the AmeriCorps VISTA Program

The AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program is part of the AmeriCorps family of national service initiatives, administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). VISTA members serve full-time as dedicated volunteers, working to enhance access to justice and reduce poverty by building the capacity of their host organizations through indirect service. This capacity-building work may include fundraising, developing outreach and communication strategies, creating community engagement initiatives, and supporting program development to extend legal resources to underserved communities.

VISTA members focus exclusively on systemic change rather than direct service activities (such as direct client representation or one-on-one legal assistance). By concentrating on strategies that strengthen host organizations, VISTA members help create lasting improvements in legal access and justice for those facing systemic barriers. Members receive a modest living allowance and healthcare support through CNCS, allowing them to commit to a full year of impactful service.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligible organizations for NLADA's AmeriCorps VISTA Program include public defender offices, legal aid providers, and community-based nonprofits across the United States that focus on providing services to individuals and communities facing systemic barriers to justice. Ideal host sites are committed to projects that enhance capacity-building efforts, align with NLADA's mission to expand access to justice, and target resource limitations within their communities.

To qualify, organizations must have:

- A dedicated staff member or team able to supervise and mentor the VISTA member.
- A clear, mission-aligned project plan that identifies specific capacity-building goals and anticipated outcomes.
- Commitment to long-term sustainability of project impact beyond the VISTA service term.
- Hold an NLADA Program Membership.

Project Duration:

Each selected organization will host an AmeriCorps VISTA member for a project duration of one year, with an opportunity to renew annually for up to three years, pending successful project outcomes and alignment with program goals.

Roles and Responsibilities

Host Site Responsibilities:

Organizations chosen to participate as host sites will be responsible for:

- *Supervision and Mentorship:* Designating a full-time supervisor to mentor and guide the VISTA member, including regular meetings and ongoing feedback. Approval may be granted for a part-time supervisor if additional full-time support is available.
- *Work Environment:* Providing a safe and resource-equipped work environment, including office space, a computer, phone, and email access equivalent to that of paid staff.
- *Project Plan Development:* Collaborating with NLADA and AmeriCorps to develop a Project Plan that defines clear activities, goals, and timelines for the VISTA member. The plan will be a joint agreement among the host site, VISTA member, NLADA, and AmeriCorps.
- *Recruitment and Selection:* Leading the recruitment and selection process for their VISTA member, with support from NLADA and AmeriCorps. This includes interviewing and identifying candidates who align well with the project's goals.
- *Training and Reporting:* Participating in training sessions hosted by NLADA and completing bi-annual progress reports, performance evaluations, and any site visits conducted by NLADA staff.

NLADA and AmeriCorps Responsibilities:

NLADA and AmeriCorps will provide:

- *Guidance and Support:* Assistance in developing project plans, setting realistic goals, and ensuring project alignment with VISTA's core principles and NLADA's mission.
- *Training and Resources:* Orientation and ongoing training for host sites and VISTA members to ensure a smooth onboarding and productive service year.
- *Evaluation and Feedback:* Ongoing support to monitor and evaluate the project's progress and provide guidance for improvements or adjustments as needed.
- *Administrative Duties:* Support with administrative responsibilities, including payroll processing, onboarding procedures, and conducting background checks for VISTA members.

Financial Commitment

Host sites are required to make an annual, non-refundable cost-sharing contribution to support the NLADA VISTA program. This sliding-scale fee, based on the organization’s budget, helps ensure equitable access to the program across diverse organizations. The contribution covers essential program costs, including the VISTA member’s living allowance, training, and support services. The cost-share will be invoiced to the host site after the VISTA member is placed.

Program Fee Structure:

Annual Budget	Cost per VISTA Member
\$0 - \$600,000	\$2,500
\$600,001 - \$1,500,000	\$3,500
\$1,500,001 - \$2,000,000	\$5,500
\$2,000,001 - \$5,000,000	\$7,000
Over \$5,000,000	\$8,000

Professional Development Fund:

Each host site will provide an additional \$800 for a professional development fund per VISTA member. This fund supports the VISTA member’s growth and learning throughout their service term, covering expenses such as training, conferences, and skill-building resources.

Service-Related Expenses:

Host sites are also responsible for reimbursing the VISTA member for any approved service-related travel or other authorized expenses.

AmeriCorps VISTA Terms and Conditions

AmeriCorps VISTA members serve full-time for a one-year term, with the option to extend for up to three years, based on host site needs and project success. Members receive a range of benefits and support during their term:

VISTA Member Benefits:

- **Compensation:** Bi-weekly living allowance, healthcare support, and choice of a Segal Education Award (approx. \$7,395) or a \$1,800 cash stipend upon completing service.
- **Non-Competitive Eligibility:** Members who complete their service receive one year of non-competitive eligibility for federal employment.
- **Loan Forbearance:** Members opting for an education award may qualify for forbearance on federal student loans, with accrued interest eligible for payment upon service completion.

Service Requirements:

- **Service Hours:** Full-time commitment, including occasional evenings or weekends if required by the host site.
- **Employment and Education:** Part-time employment is permitted but must not conflict with service hours and requires supervisor approval. Members may also enroll in part-time courses.

Eligibility Requirements:

- **Age and Residency:** Must be at least 18 years old (no upper age limit). Eligible candidates must be U.S. citizens, U.S. Nationals, Lawful Permanent Residents, or individuals legally residing in a state, including those with refugee, asylee, TPS, or DACA status.

Prohibited Activities: VISTA members focus solely on capacity-building work and may not engage in direct service, religious instruction, electoral activities, lobbying, or duties that replace or displace paid staff.

Additional benefits are available at [AmeriCorps.gov/VISTABenefits](https://www.americorps.gov/VISTABenefits). We will provide more detailed training and information on these terms during supervisor sessions and info sessions.

Application Process

The application process for NLADA's VISTA Program involves two primary steps:

Part 1 – Proposal and Narrative

Due Date: December 31, 2024

Applicants must submit a detailed proposal outlining a one-year project, with the potential for extension to a three-year term. The proposal should clearly communicate the anticipated impact of hosting a VISTA member, specific goals, and how the project aligns with NLADA's mission of expanding access to justice. Applicants are encouraged to describe how the VISTA member's work will strengthen organizational capacity, enhance community impact, and address barriers to justice within underserved populations.

Part 2 – Project Plan Development

Due Date: March 18, 2025

Organizations selected in the initial review phase will be invited to submit a comprehensive Project Plan. This plan should include defined objectives, expected outcomes, and a timeline for the VISTA member's activities and milestones. NLADA and AmeriCorps will provide guidance in developing this plan, which will serve as the VISTA member's primary roadmap throughout the service term. The Project Plan must be finalized and approved before recruitment of the VISTA member can begin.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. **Alignment with NLADA's Mission:** The extent to which the proposed project reflects NLADA's mission to expand access to justice and address barriers faced by underserved communities.
2. **Capacity-Building Focus:** How well the project aligns with AmeriCorps VISTA's goals for strengthening organizational capacity and reducing poverty through sustainable initiatives.
3. **Community Involvement:** The level of engagement and input from the community in shaping project goals and expected outcomes.
4. **Project Need and Methodology:** The project's ability to address a compelling community need and the appropriateness of the proposed approach.
5. **Supportive Environment:** The host site's ability to provide a structured, resourceful, and supportive environment for the VISTA member.
6. **Commitment to Equity and Justice:** Evidence of the organization's dedication to promoting equity and justice within both internal operations and its community impact.

Proposal Submission

All proposals and application materials must be submitted electronically by **December 31, 2024**. For additional information and detailed submission instructions, please contact the **NLADA VISTA Program Team** at VISTA@nlada.org. More information is available at <https://www.nlada.org/AmeriCorps-VISTA>.

Timeline for VISTA Proposal, Award, and Recruitment

Date	Milestone
December 5, 2024	Info Session for New Host Sites (Register here)
December 12, 2024	Info Session for New Host Sites (Register here)
December 31, 2024	Applications Due
January 31, 2025	Applicants Notified of Selection
February 20, 2025	Host Site Supervisor Training - Part I - Project Plan and Service Opportunity Listing (SOL) Development - MOUs signed and returned to NLADA
March 14, 2025	1st Draft Deadline for Project Plan and Service Opportunity Listing (SOL)
March 28, 2025	Final Draft Deadline for Project Plan and SOL - Approval required before VISTA recruitment
April 10, 2025	Host Site Supervisor Training - Part II (Recruitment)
April - August 2025	VISTA Member Recruitment Period
April 24, 2025	Host Site Supervisor Training - Part III (Reporting)
May 30, 2025	Performance Measures Due to NLADA
July 16, 2025	Final Candidates Selected and Sponsor Recommendation Due to NLADA
July 25, 2025	Host-Site Orientation Schedule and Training Plans Due to NLADA and Sent to VISTA Member
August 11, 2025	VISTA Members Begin Service - CNCS Virtual Member Orientation (VMO) - NLADA Orientation TBD week of 8/11
September 2025	Cost Share Invoiced and Site Visit Scheduled

*Please note: CNCS recruitment and Pre-Service Orientation dates are subject to change, which may impact member pre-enrollment, NLADA VISTA Program Orientation dates, and VISTA members' first day on-site.

Additional Support and Contact Information

For questions or assistance, contact the **NLADA VISTA Program Team** at VISTA@nlada.org. More details are available at <https://www.nlada.org/AmeriCorps-VISTA>.

Information Sessions (recommended for new host sites)

- **December 5, 2024:** [Register here](#)
 - **December 12, 2024:** [Register here](#)
- One-on-One Assistance**
Schedule a consultation: [Schedule here](#)

Thank You for Your Interest!

To submit your application or learn more, simply scan the QR Code or go to <https://bit.ly/NLADAVISTA2025>.

We look forward to reviewing your application and partnering with you to expand access to justice.

