Calling all Potential VISTA Sponsors:

You are invited to join us for an AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsor Info Call to find out how your organization can apply to become an AmeriCorps VISTA sponsor! We’ll fill you in on what it means to benefit from the capacity-building, anti-poverty AmeriCorps VISTA members in your organization. We’ll share all the information you need to know about the application process and timeline and share with you what national service can do for your organization.

Save The Date!

Monday, March 2
1-2 P.M.
Call-In Line: 877-599-3491
Passcode: 24171531
Webinar Details To Come
RSVP by February 25 to Molly Turner, State Director: mturner@cns.gov

Curious? Check out the resources below to learn more prior to the call!

Guide to Becoming a VISTA Sponsor:

Concept Paper Instructions:

Corporation for National and Community Service
Missouri & Kansas: Spring Request for Concept Papers (Due April 20, 2015)

SUMMARY: The Corporation for National and Community Service Missouri State Program Office seeks applications for the AmeriCorps VISTA program from innovative, high-performing and outcome driven organizations that share the VISTA mission to provide long term solutions to poverty. This Request for Concept Paper (RFCP) is for placement of VISTA members contingent on FY16 federal budget decisions. Organizations interested in sponsoring an AmeriCorps VISTA project in Missouri and Kansas are invited to submit a concept paper to the Corporation for National and Community Service Missouri State Office no later than April 20, 2015.
Who is the Corporation for National and Community Service?

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) (www.nationalservice.gov) is the federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through its core programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and the Social Innovation Fund. As the nation’s largest grant-maker for service and volunteering, CNCS plays a critical role in strengthening America’s nonprofit sector and addressing our nation’s challenges through service. The mission of CNCS is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program

Founded in 1965, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) is a federal national service program designed to strategically partner with nonprofit organizations and public agencies and increase their capacity to lift Americans out of poverty. In 1993, VISTA was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs, housed at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). AmeriCorps VISTA supports efforts to alleviate poverty by recruiting Americans 18 years and older from a diverse range of backgrounds in a year of full-time service with a sponsoring organization (“sponsor”) to create or expand programs designed to empower individuals and communities in overcoming poverty.

While strong progress has been made in lifting Americans out of poverty following the Great Recession, recent data from the United States Census Bureau identifies more than 45 million Americans still living below the poverty line.

2015 marks 50 years since VISTA deployed its first corps of members as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “unconditional war on poverty in America.” This year is an opportunity to celebrate the work of VISTAs while continuing to explore new strategies to help lift Americans out of poverty.

VISTA Programming Priorities for FY 2015

This year’s priorities are guided by the CNCS Strategic Plan and AmeriCorps VISTA’s statutory mandate to focus on eliminating poverty. CNCS expects that at least 80 percent of AmeriCorps VISTA resources will be invested in building the capacity of anti-poverty programs and organizations operating in these areas:

- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Healthy Futures
- Veterans and Military Families.

Within these four focus areas AmeriCorps VISTA encourages new project development where appropriate in the following specific programming areas and initiatives. Projects focused in these areas will be given the highest consideration for investments of AmeriCorps VISTA resources:

- Data Collection and Management for Results
- Intergenerational Hunger
- My Brother’s Keeper
- Refugee Resettlement/Anti-Trafficking.
Economic Opportunity
AmeriCorps VISTA’s commitment to ending poverty requires an intense focus on projects that equip those we serve with skills, education, and training that track the needs of employers looking to hire. The July 2014 “Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity” report specifies that projects using “coordinated strategies across systems, and flexible, innovative training strategies that integrate the education, training, and support services” are needed when dealing with workers with lower skills or those facing multiple barriers to employment.
In FY 2015, VISTA will give priority to projects that support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to the improved economic well-being and financial security of economically disadvantaged people.
VISTA project activities should focus on the following objectives of Economic Opportunity:

- **Financial Literacy**: Improving access to services and benefits aimed at contributing to enhanced financial literacy
- **Housing**: Transitioning individuals into or helping them remain in safe, healthy, affordable housing
- **Employment**: Improving employability that leads to increased success in becoming employed.

CNCS is a member of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and also maintains an interagency agreement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to launch a VISTA corps this year focused on preserving affordable housing and helping low-income residents access other necessary supports. AmeriCorps VISTA applications that focus on housing should align with the USICH strategic plan Opening Doors and utilize USICH strategies and technical assistance resources.
**Education**
AmeriCorps VISTA will place priority on projects that provide support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children.

The program will target new project development in communities with schools that received School Improvement Grants from the U.S. Department of Education or were identified by a state educational agency that has requested and received approval from the Department for Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility, including those schools participating in the Together for Tomorrow initiative.

Projects should focus on the following objectives:
- School readiness for economically disadvantaged young children
- K-12 success in student educational and behavioral outcomes in low-achieving schools
- Post-secondary success.

Where feasible, project activities should align with the goals of Together for Tomorrow:
- Celebrate and inspire community and family engagement in education and strengthen a community culture of education success
- Foster the capacity of low-performing schools to manage school-community partnerships
- Focus community partnerships on boosting key measurable student outcomes—attendance, behavior, course performance, college access.

**STEM Education**
AmeriCorps VISTA is committed to expanding projects focused on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education programs that will build partnerships between STEM students, faculty/staff, and community partners to develop long-term solutions for bolstering the number of underrepresented students who obtain STEM degrees. The progress made in the prior fiscal year through such projects should continue and expand to include at least 15 new communities nationwide in FY 2015.

**Community Colleges**
Projects that partner or work in concert with community colleges are encouraged, given the hub of services and supports that these schools currently provide to low-income populations. Beyond the significant educational benefits imparted through curriculum and class instruction, community colleges provide a strong foundation for workforce development and strengthening local economies.

**Healthy Futures**
The VISTA program will give priority to projects that meet health needs, including access to food resources and health care, for economically disadvantaged individuals.

Projects should support the following Healthy Futures Objectives:
- **Obesity and Food** (Food Resources): Improving access to nutritious food.
- **Access to Health Care**: Connecting economically disadvantaged individuals to preventative and primary health care services.

**Hunger**
AmeriCorps VISTA is committed to ending child hunger. Building on our existing support of critical U.S. Department of Agriculture programs, such as the Summer Food Service Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program, school breakfasts, etc., VISTA is committed to projects that further leverage coordination between national service programs and public/private partnerships. Potential focus areas might include projects that expand breakfast in the classroom or address transportation barriers to food access, specifically in rural areas or other venues with hard to reach populations.
**Inter-Generational Food Security**
AmeriCorps VISTA will give priority to projects that increase access to healthy foods across generational lines (e.g., a VISTA project that develops a one-stop, congregate meal program model where food for parents and their infants and children, or seniors could be provided simultaneously). Ideal projects will advance co-located services and move individuals and families toward economic self-sufficiency.

**Health Care**
Given the nexus between poverty and negative health outcomes, AmeriCorps VISTA will aim to ensure that underserved low-income individuals and families are connected to an initial visit with a primary care provider and ongoing preventative health care services. Seamless access will involve developing health care resources that:
- Bring culturally relevant services to underserved groups according to age, geography, and disability
- Create wrap-around support including physical, mental, and social welfare elements
- Assist individuals in accessing health insurance coverage and finding a primary care provider.

**Veterans and Military Families**
AmeriCorps VISTA will support projects that focus on low-income veterans and military families as beneficiaries or enhance existing projects to better serve those populations. In FY 2015, we aim to expand programming in support of Veterans and Military Families around:
- Economic opportunity – employment, financial literacy, housing
- Education – school readiness, success in K-12 education and beyond
- Healthy futures – food security, access to health care.

**Additional Programming Considerations**
**My Brother’s Keeper**
In response to the President’s call around the My Brother’s Keeper initiative to support boys and men of color and all youth, AmeriCorps VISTA will aim to support its goals through projects focusing on:
- Entering School Ready to Learn – closing the word gap, ensuring access to high-quality early care and education, and expanding health and developmental screenings
- Reading at Grade Level by 3rd Grade – joint book reading or in-home literacy programs and increasing the capacity of successful reading proficiency programs
- College Access – improving access to college advising and support tools, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in low-income communities
- Workforce Development – programs aimed at increasing entry-level jobs, mentorship, and apprenticeship options.

**Refugee Resettlement/Anti-Trafficking**
Poverty acutely impacts refugee populations, and AmeriCorps VISTA will give priority to projects that provide support services to low-income, documented immigrant and refugee populations, particularly unaccompanied minors and victims of human trafficking. Our emphasis in FY 2015 will be programs that raise awareness of trafficking and connect those vulnerable groups with comprehensive support services. Project activities should focus on economic opportunity, education, and healthy futures. Ideally, AmeriCorps VISTA projects will focus on refugee populations that have been placed in a community by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement and are likely to maintain a continuous presence in the United States.
**Rural Community Development**
VISTA seeks a balanced portfolio of urban and rural programming. More than 35 percent of the people living in completely rural counties live in high-poverty counties and more than 26 percent live in persistent-poverty counties. VISTA will continue to invest resources to move people in rural communities out of poverty.

**Data Collection and Management for Results**
Increasingly, nonprofit organizations are asked to take on important, complex challenges. They are also increasingly attempting – and being asked by funders, beneficiaries and other stakeholders – to ensure that they efficiently and effectively use their limited resources.
Performance measurement, performance management, and evaluation are elements that can be used by nonprofit organizations to know whether they are effective in getting results. However, many nonprofit organizations lack the capacity to use these tools.
VISTA has a 50 year history of building the capacity of nonprofit organizations and public agencies to create or strengthen anti-poverty programs. In FY 2015, AmeriCorps VISTA seeks proposals from organizations with an interest in helping organizations build their capacity – or that of their programs – to more effectively use information to implement programs that address poverty. Depending on the organization’s need and capacity in this area, this initiative would involve placing VISTA members with organizations to address capacity around Performance Measurement, Evaluation, or Performance Management.