

VISTA Professional Development Resources and Expectations

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Professional development is an important value of the AmeriCorps*VISTA program. At its best, professional development experiences meet the needs of the VISTA member, correspond to the realities of the position, and transfer immediately to the context of the service. Given the range of sites and experiences of VISTA members, a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development is often inappropriate. That being the case, we ask VISTA members, with the assistance of supervisors, to develop an individualized professional development plan, appropriate to both the needs of the VISTA member and service site.

Expectations and resources to support VISTA professional development

- This project expects all VISTA members to create an individualized professional development plan addressing three to five professional development goals (*due by the end of the second month of service*);
- A minimum of 10 days, spread out throughout the year, should be committed to professional development;
- Once completed plans are received, the project will make \$200.00 available to support each VISTA member's professional development (see professional development funds request form);
- VISTA members are required to participate in three specific project-sponsored professional development trainings annually;*
- The project will sponsor (at no cost to VISTA members) optional professional development trainings throughout the year;*
- Computer software workshops are available through The Muskie School of Public Service, at no cost to VISTA members;*
- Host sites are permitted (even encouraged) to supplement the professional development resources available to VISTA members to the degree possible.

*See training calendar

VISTA Professional Development Plan Directions

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Step 1 • Prep Work: Skills inventory and self-reflection

In the context of your service, take a realistic look at your current abilities and identify strengths as well as areas for development. The idea here is to get a sense of your professional development needs by comparing what tools you've got with those you'd like to acquire.

Self-assessment options:

Equipped for the Future Content Standards: Role Map

- *AmeriCorps Skills and Interest Inventory (adapted)*
- *Letter to self:* Draft a letter to yourself discussing your current professional skills, style and ambitions. Consider the following questions as jumping off points and reflect from there:
 - How confident am I in my technical, interpersonal and analytical abilities?
 - Which areas am I not as confident in; which would I like to develop?
 - How do I see my work over the next year shaping me for future endeavors?
 - What aspect of this position am I most excited about and why?
 - What strengths do I bring to this work? Why is this work important to me, to families, communities and children?

Steps 2-6 refer to the Professional Development Plan Worksheet attached to these directions.

Step 2 (I) • Identify Professional Development Goals

To achieve the intended outcome, it's best to be **S.M.A.R.T.** Set **specific** goals that will focus your development on competencies **relevant** to your current job and future aspirations. Establish a method of monitoring your progress so you can **measure** your success in attaining the goal at hand, making sure that you are realistic from the start and are pursuing **achievable** ends. Consider your timeline (**timely**) and settle on just a few priority areas, noting the resources you may need, the resources you have and how you learn most effectively. *(Use one professional development worksheet per goal)*

→ *Example (I):* Enhance organizational capacity through fundraising

**Note: The goal is what will be achieved by you and your site through the development of the identified competency*

Step 3 (A) • Strengths/skills

You've identified a S.M.A.R.T. goal. Now consider the abilities you *already* possess that will/can be applied toward the identified goal:

- *Example (A)*: 1. Strong writing skills
2. Good time management
3. Research experience

Step 3 (B) • Competency to be developed

This section refers to the skill/knowledge you'd like to develop to more effectively/efficiently achieve the identified goal:

- *Example (B)*: Grant Writing

Step 4 (C) • Developmental Strategies

This table asks for the identification of specific developmental opportunities; if you recognize them early, you're more apt to take advantage and access financial assistance. Activities may include:

- VISTA trainings
- Other trainings
- On site assignments (co-facilitating a focus group, database creation and maintenance, etc)
- Peer site visits
- On the job training (OJT)
- Educational Materials
- Other

Activities can and *should* be added as new prospects arise. By entering options in the table you're not necessarily committing to them—it's simply a method of raising awareness of *what's* available *when*, so you can potentially plug in.

Step 5 (D/E) • Tie it together

Consider why/how the information on this sheet relates to your year of service. These final questions are intended to examine the connection between the professional development you're pursuing and the work you're doing with your project.

- *Example (Q1)*: By developing grant-writing skills I can seek funding opportunities at both the state and federal level; securing funds will lend to the overall sustainability of the project.

- *Example (Q2)*: My work plan has me actively pursuing funding for organizational capacity building and attending informational meetings pertaining to specific RFPs of interest.

Step 6 • Review and establish shared priorities with your supervisor

Review the identified goals and developmental strategies with your supervisor. He or she may be able to add insight on the skills you *do* have or areas for improvement that would best serve the project. In addition your supervisor will probably be aware of site specific training opportunities as well.

This process will also communicate where you're at and where you're headed in regards to your professional readiness to tackle certain aspects of a project, which will help your supervisor know how to support you.

As this plan represents a shared investment of time, energy, and resources between the VISTA member and the host organization; both the VISTA member and supervisor are asked to sign the plan.

Step 7 • Revisit and Revise!

As noted earlier, this is a living document meant to change as you navigate your project and adjust to the demands thereof. This plan gives you a map so you have a sense of where you're starting, where you're headed and how you'll get there—it's an instrument by which to measure your progress. Altering the route by re-prioritizing doesn't make this work moot, either; it suggests that your awareness of what your needs as a professional are is growing and you're adapting accordingly.

Professional Development Plan

I. Goal: _____

A. Strengths/skills:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Competency to be developed: _____

C. Developmental Strategies

Activity	Date/Location	Cost

D. Identify ways in which developing this competency will assist you in your service:

E. Identify ways in which your work plan supports the development of this competency.

Vista Signature: _____ Supervisor Signature: _____

Professional Development Plan

II. Goal: _____

A. Strengths/skills:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Competency to be developed: _____

C. Developmental Strategies

Activity	Date/Location	Cost

D. Identify ways in which developing this competency will assist you in your service:

E. Identify ways in which your work plan supports the development of this competency.

Vista Signature: _____ **Supervisor Signature:** _____

Professional Development Plan

III. Goal: _____

A. Strengths/skills:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Competency to be developed: _____

C. Developmental Strategies

Activity	Date/Location	Cost

D. Identify ways in which developing this competency will assist you in your service:

E. Identify ways in which your work plan supports the development of this competency.

Vista Signature: _____ **Supervisor Signature:** _____

Professional Development Plan

IV. Goal: _____

A. Strengths/skills:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Competency to be developed: _____

C. Developmental Strategies

Activity	Date/Location	Cost

D. Identify ways in which developing this competency will assist you in your service:

E. Identify ways in which your work plan supports the development of this competency.

Vista Signature: _____ **Supervisor Signature:** _____

Professional Development Plan

V. Goal: _____

A. Strengths/skills:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Competency to be developed: _____

C. Developmental Strategies

Activity	Date/Location	Cost

D. Identify ways in which developing this competency will assist you in your service:

E. Identify ways in which your work plan supports the development of this competency.

Vista Signature: _____ **Supervisor Signature:** _____

