This email is being sent to organizations that may be interested in AmeriCorps VISTA funding opportunities.   If you would like to be removed from our distribution list; please email md@cns.gov.

DATE: November 27, 2017

FROM: Maryland State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service

SUBJECT: Request for Concept Papers (RFCP) for <u>New</u> AmeriCorps VISTA Projects in Maryland – Concept Papers Due: **January 5, 2018**

INTRODUCTION
The Maryland State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service announces an opportunity, subject to availability of resources, to develop new AmeriCorps VISTA projects in the State of Maryland. This Request for Concept Papers is open to organizations that are **NOT** current VISTA sponsors. Please share this notice with your networks, and contact the CNCS Maryland State Office at MD@cns.gov with any questions.

AmeriCorps VISTA (**V**olunteers **I**n **S**ervice **T**o **A**merica) is a full-time national service program for individuals interested in developing lasting solutions to the problems of poverty in the United States. AmeriCorps VISTA members create and expand services and programs that help bring low-income individuals out of poverty.

ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION
Public organizations such as state and local government, Indian Tribes, and non-profit private organizations can apply to be VISTA sponsors. Please note that eligible non-profit private organizations are not limited to those with IRS 501(c)(3) status, but rather all organizations with IRS 501(c) status that focus on anti-poverty community development; organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are not eligible.

<u>**The Maryland Corporation State Office is giving priority consideration to proposals**</u>:
- focusing on initiatives that address substance abuse prevention, education and recovery projects under one or more of the Corporation's priority programming areas of Economic Opportunity, Education and Healthy Futures; and,
- that can support a minimum of two (2) VISTA members. If your agency cannot administratively support this number of full time members, we welcome collaborative partnership proposals by two or more community agencies, especially those that include faith-based and/or small community organizations that are addressing a similar community need. Please contact our office for additional guidance on submitting a collaborative proposal.

The Maryland State Office is accepting Concept Papers that also propose to address the following Corporation Focus Areas.

> ***Economic Opportunity***: Connecting families and individuals to emergency housing and transitional services; providing affordable permanent housing; financial literacy including empowering individuals and low-income communities to take advantage of financial opportunities and build wealth that will ultimately lead to an exit from poverty.

> ***Education***: Developing programs that promote school readiness and promote educational achievement and engagement among economically disadvantaged children, youth, and adults, particularly in communities that have underperforming schools participating in the U.S. Department of Education's Title I School Improvement Grant program.

> ***Healthy Futures***: Reducing obesity rates, and increasing health and wellness for low income individuals, with a focus on food security and access to health care.

> ***Veterans and Military Families***: Engaging veterans in service, and service to veterans and military families. Increasing economic opportunity for low-income veterans and military families under one or more of the Economic Opportunity, Education, and Healthy Future focus areas.

> ***Environmental Stewardship***: Decreasing energy and water consumption; green jobs; youth development through conservation activities which have a strong connection to lifting people out of poverty.

> ***Disaster Services***: While disaster response is generally an inappropriate activity for a VISTA project, the exception would be the provision of post-disaster community development to support long term recovery efforts, such as job placement projects that help place local workers in disaster response positions. The proposed VISTA project may only support preparedness and mitigation activities that are designed to lift people out of poverty.

In addition, applicants that are able to cost share VISTA member's living allowance are encouraged to include that in their application. In cost-sharing, the sponsor covers the living allowance of one or more of the VISTA members. The annual member living allowance in Maryland currently ranges from $12,312 to $20,640 per year (based on census poverty statistics). In exchange for that investment, the Corporation covers all the remaining federal program costs for each VISTA member. The Corporation pays the VISTA members directly and invoices the sponsor monthly for the cost of the living allowance of any cost-share VISTA members.

SCOPE OF PROJECT
Subject to availability of resources, AmeriCorps VISTA positions will be awarded statewide on a full-time basis for one year of service to new VISTA sponsoring organizations. The Corporation will make an award covering a period not to exceed one year, with the potential for continuation. VISTA members will likely begin service during the summer of 2018.

Programming should be primarily based on addressing local needs, and the Corporation State Office will be guided by locally-driven programming. Each VISTA project must be developed in accordance with the parameters defined by law, federal regulations,

http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/dvsa_dec99.pdf; and the **Key VISTA Principles**: Anti-Poverty Focus, Community Empowerment, Capacity Building and Sustainable Solutions.

- **Anti-Poverty Focus**

As previously noted, by law the purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. The goal of every project must be to help individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply to make poverty more tolerable. The project should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

- **Community Empowerment**

All VISTA project sponsors must ensure that their project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, implementing and evaluating the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community assets, strengths and resources.

- **Capacity Building**

One way to achieve sustainable solutions is to strengthen the ability of local organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and partnership development, VISTAs help sponsors to bolster their capacity to achieve lasting solutions to poverty. If you are invited to submit a full application, keep in mind that VISTA projects should focus their performance milestones on achieving outcomes that measure the impact on the community and/or beneficiary population, and not on outcomes of capacity building for the sponsoring organization or its partners, affiliates, or intermediary organizations.

- **Sustainable Solutions**

As originally designated in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act and reinforced in the Serve America Act, VISTA members represent a short-term resource and work to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. **All VISTA projects should be developed with the goal of an eventual phase-out of the need for VISTA members and the ability of the project to continue without them.**

Unless it is an Intermediary style program (see A Guide to Becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA Project Sponsor), VISTA projects typically last three-to-five years. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must think about how to use the VISTA project to phase-in other resources and systems to replace the VISTA resource.

CONCEPT PAPER SUBMISION

The Corporation requires that all applicants submit applications electronically via the Corporation's web-based application system, **eGrants**. For VISTA applications this is a two-step process which includes a concept paper application and a full application. If your organization has not used the CNCS eGrants system before, you will need to create an account. http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/.

Download a copy of the Concept Paper application and instructions at: https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/VISTA_Concept%20Paper_2017%20%28002%29_508.pdf

Then to apply, go to: http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/.

In eGrants select the **2018 AmeriCorps VISTA STATE** for the Concept Paper.

CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL

Criteria for approval are based on whether the proposed project does the following:

- Fits with one or more of the Corporation's strategic initiative focus areas, VISTA programming priorities, or priority areas listed in the introduction section of this document. This must be clearly documented in the Concept Paper
- Addresses the needs of low-income communities
- Leads to building organizational capacity so that the project can continue once VISTA resources are withdrawn
- Involves beneficiaries of the service and the low-income community in project development and implementation. This is required and must be noted in the Concept Paper in the Strengthening Communities section. If the organization's board of directors does not consist of at least 51% of the low-income beneficiary community, the sponsor must create an Advisory Council with a composition of at least 51% of its members from the low-income community. The board or advisory council must review and provide written comments concerning the project application prior to submission. A copy of these comments will be a required attachment of any full application submitted.
- Is designed to generate public and/or private-sector resources
- Promotes local volunteer service
- Complies with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended; 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, VISTA regulations; and VISTA policies.

Further criteria for determining approval are based on whether the applicant meets the following:

- Is a local or state government agency, Tribe, or a private organization designated as a non-profit by the Internal Revenue Service
- Has resources available for VISTAs to perform their activities, such as space, supplies, and on-the-job transportation, and is able to provide emergency cash advances when needed
- Has the management capacity and commitment to recruit, train, supervise, and otherwise support VISTAs recruited locally and nationally
- Understands and is committed to promoting national and community service
- Has the capacity to build community partnerships and collaborative efforts to achieve project self-sufficiency.

As previously mentioned, VISTA projects have an average lifecycle of three-to-five years unless the applicant is serving as an intermediary agency. New project development occurs annually and is always subject to availability of resources. The Maryland State Office strives to ensure that the portfolio of VISTA projects is diverse, both in terms of programmatic areas as well as geography. An additional factor we consider is the type of sponsor: from small grassroots organizations to large intermediary organizations.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Any interested organization or individual with additional questions not addressed by this RFCP may contact: MD@cns.gov

Additional resources:

- AmeriCorps VISTA FY 2018 Program Guidance:
  https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FY2018%20AmeriCorps%20VISTA%20Program%20Guidance_508.pdf

- General information on the Corporation and all national service programs
  http://www.nationalservice.gov/

- Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009
  http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/legislation/edward-m-kennedy-serve-america-act

- Specific information on VISTA (regulations and Concept Paper instructions)
  http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp

  https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/VISTA_Concept%20Paper_2017%20%28002%29_508.pdf

- Information regarding the Corporation's online application system – eGrants
  If you have questions about submitting your application through eGrants, please contact Maryland State Office (MD@cns.gov), e-mail the National Service Hotline (https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask) or call the Hotline at 1-800-942-2677

TIMELINE

January 5, 2018: Deadline for submitting concept papers

January 17, 2018: MD CSO staff will notify organizations if their concept paper has been approved and provide guidance on the next step of the application process to approved applicants.

January 22, 2018: Conference call for organizations submitting full application

February 11, 2018 –5:00PM ET: Deadline for organizations with approved concept papers to submit full project application via eGrants. All supporting documentation and attachments must be emailed to MD@cns.gov OR mailed and received by the MD CSO on or before **February 11, 2018** at the following address:

> Corporation for National and Community Service
> 31 Hopkins Plaza, Suite 400-B
> Baltimore, Maryland 21201

March 5, 2018 – MD CSO staff will notify organizations of decisions on applications and proceed with final approval process of accepted applications.

April 2018- VISTA Member Assignment Descriptions submitted through eGrants; Supervisors attend CNCS organized Supervisor Training.

June 2018 – Application approvals completed and Memorandums of Agreement issued. Approved projects will start recruiting VISTA candidates. MD CSO staff will provide technical assistance to new VISTA project directors.

July or August 2018: VISTA candidates will attend training and start service. Specific deadlines for submitting VISTA candidate nominations to MD CSO will be shared as the information becomes available.