



**Nominee:** Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation

**Eligibility:** AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsor (through OneStar VISTA Intermediary Project)

**Award Category:** Best new program design addressing a critical priority (since September 2014)

**Nominator:** OneStar Foundation (Texas State Service Commission)

The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation (BBHLF) was established in 2013 to improve the quality of life for Houstonians through the power of literacy. BBHLF advocates for literacy as a fundamental right and foundational skill towards success in life. Conversely, illiteracy denies individuals the ability to reach full potential and is shown to lead to increased dropout, unemployment, incarceration and poverty rates.

BBHLF has taken on the strategic role of expanding awareness of the value of literacy and building capacity throughout the Houston literacy provider community by mobilizing resources – funding, volunteers and services – to dramatically increase literacy rates among people of all ages. To accomplish these goals, BBHLF has partnered with CNCS and OneStar Foundation since April 2014, when CNCS CEO Wendy Spencer attended the launch of its strategic plan, *Houston's Literacy Crisis: A Blueprint for Community Action*, and announced BBHLF would be awarded a grant to host 5 AmeriCorps VISTA members as “boots on the ground” to support the first three years of the plan’s implementation. BBHLF launched its VISTA project a few months later with help from the CNCS Texas State Office and OneStar Foundation’s Statewide VISTA Intermediary Project. Today, BBHLF VISTA members mobilize volunteers, oversee communications/outreach and volunteer management technology, and cultivate diverse funders and stakeholders.



These critical VISTA member roles have helped the Foundation produce remarkable results. Since the launch of the [Connect4Literacy.org](http://Connect4Literacy.org) volunteer portal in late 2014, built on the HandsOn Connect platform, BBHLF has engaged 4,818 volunteers who have given 33,153 hours of service for 27 Houston-area literacy partners. VISTAs have also increased awareness of the literacy cause, resulting in 12,500 followers across social media channels, 1.9 million Facebook views, and 12.5 million traditional media views (television/print media) stemming from 15 high profile events.



BARBARA BUSH  
HOUSTON LITERACY FOUNDATION



onestar  
foundation  
building a stronger nonprofit sector for a better texas

On October 19, 2015, BBHLF collaborated with Points of Light to try to break the world record for the largest number of children being read to by an adult over a 24-hour period for “Read Across the Globe.” The support of the BBHLF VISTA team resulted in 65,871 children being read to and 3,534 volunteers contributing 12,369 hours of service to the greater Houston community.

The Foundation’s leadership is thankful for the VISTA program. In the words of President Julie Baker Finck, “As a new foundation formed in 2013, our VISTA members have been instrumental in building capacity of internal operations, raising awareness about the literacy cause, supporting a growing coalition of literacy providers across our city, and mobilizing thousands of volunteers to serve those in need. We owe a great deal of our progress in implementing our plan of action, *Houston’s Literacy Crisis: A Blueprint for Community Action*, to the VISTAs who have served these past two years.”

Board Chairs Neil and Maria Bush add, “The AmeriCorps VISTA program enabled us to very quickly build a strong foundation for a sustainable volunteer infrastructure to address Houston’s literacy crisis in a strategic and comprehensive manner. The VISTA program exemplifies the power of volunteerism in changing lives, empowering families and lifting up communities. We are deeply grateful for the impactful service contributed by our VISTA members.”

