



**Nominee:** Urban Roots

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

**Award Category:** Most significant enhancement to an existing program using AmeriCorps resources (since August 2016)

**Nominator:** OneStar Foundation (Texas State Service Commission); Glenn Goodrich (glenn@onestarfoundation.org)

Urban Roots began in 2007 as a program of YouthLaunch before becoming its own independent agency in 2011. Housed on a 3.5-acre sustainable urban farm in East Austin, Urban Roots provides paid internships, life and job skills, and service opportunities in the areas of hunger and food access to youth age 14 to 17 in Austin. In 2015, Urban Roots began the Advanced Leadership Academy (ALA), a fall internship for alumni youth, which culminated in a youth-led event bringing together young people all over Austin to explore issues related to food justice, youth leadership, and healthy lifestyles.

Urban Roots uses food and farming to transform the lives of young people and inspire, engage, and nourish the community. To accomplish these goals, Urban Roots partnered with CNCS and OneStar Foundation in May 2016 to host an AmeriCorps VISTA member to build the capacity of the organization and expand their impact. The VISTA project focused on the launch and growth of the Food & Leadership Fellowship Program, a paid internship on the farm for 18-23 year olds that focused on leadership development and youth mentorship while growing food for the community. In year one, VISTA Lucía Cole created key systems and processes to launch this new program with a pilot class of 11 young adult fellows. These systems included developing recruitment materials, writing curricula and strengthening the social justice program focus. The fellows were engaged in leadership development through the farm, pairing them with high school students to deepen their leadership skills through direct mentorship. The first year of the program helped lead to the growth of 25,000 pounds of food for the community! Through VISTA support, Urban Roots plans to double the size and scope of the Food & Leadership Fellowship Program in its second year.





Lucia's service has helped Urban Roots take a huge step forward to expand their impact in the community. She helped Urban Roots rebuild their program evaluation systems. This will prepare the launch of more programs this year with the framework in place to measure their success and ensure they remain connected to the mission. Additionally, she provided an invaluable eye for improvement in all of Urban Roots existing programs by reviewing and documenting countless ways to do things more effectively and efficiently. She even re-wrote the organization's theory of change.



Urban Roots leadership is thankful for the VISTA program. Programs and Operations Director Ian Hunter-Crawford states "The VISTA impact can't be overstated. For a small organization like Urban Roots, a VISTA member's ability to stay focused on capacity building projects has enabled us to expand our programming in a short amount of time. The work will continue to bear fruit for years to come, as well, as we continue to take advantage of the systems, processes, and research that Lucia has done. The impact will snowball

year after year, as we continue to grow and engage more young people in Austin with transformational experiences through food and farming."