



VISTA Recruitment and Interview Guide

Summer 2008

1. VISTA Recruitment, Selection and Placement Timeline
2. Recruiting Tips and Advice
3. Sample Interview Questions
4. VISTA Benefits and Restrictions (at a glance)

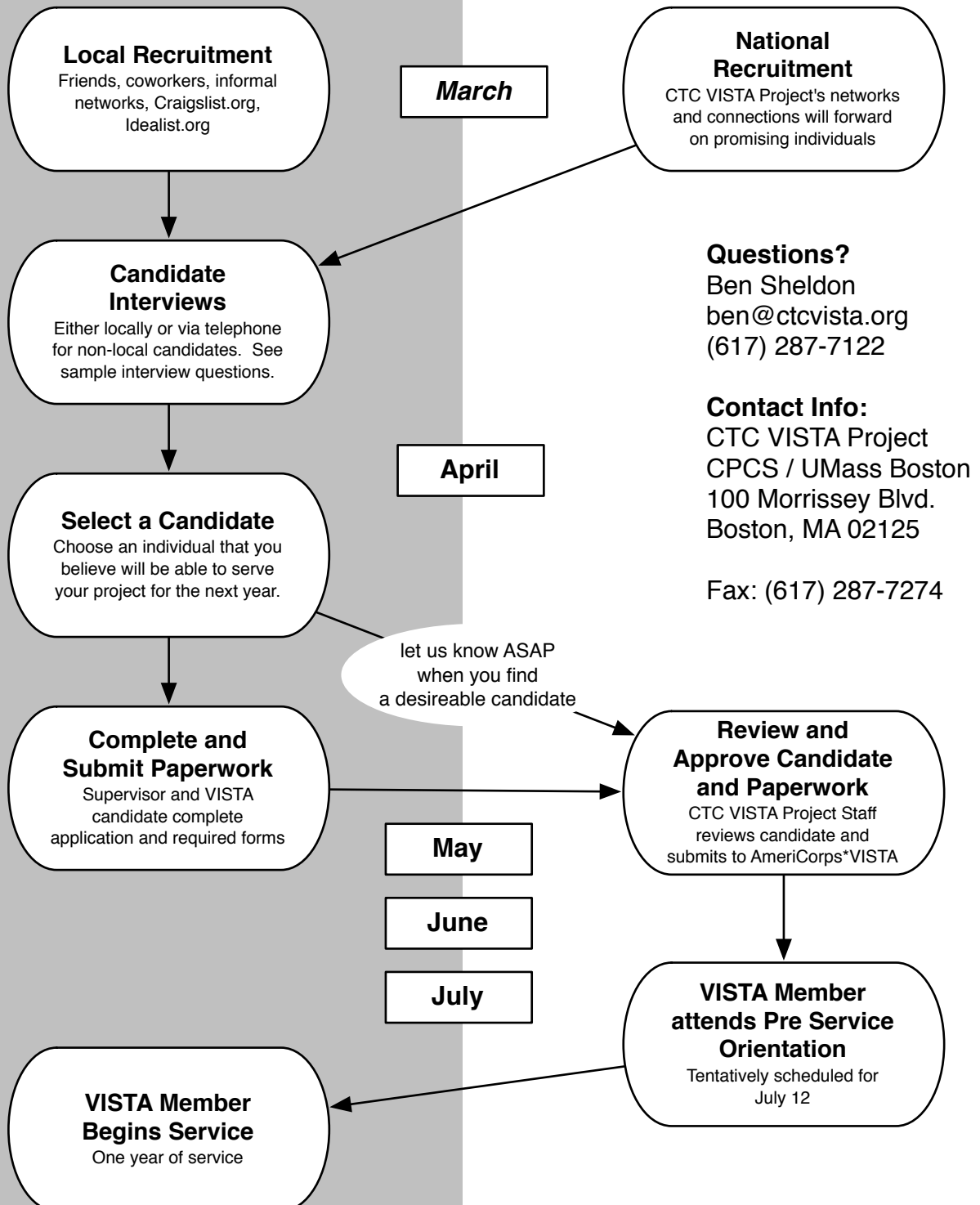
*Ben Sheldon, Assistant Director
Phone: (617) 287 – 7122
Fax: (617) 287 – 7274
ben@ctcvista.org*

<http://ctcvista.org>

VISTA Recruitment, Selection and Placement Timeline

(Summer 2008)

Local Organization Responsibilities



Recruiting Tips and Advice

Eligibility and Qualifications: Any US citizen or legal resident 18 years of age or older is eligible to become a VISTA but the typical CTC VISTA candidate will have some college and/or applicable work experience. Basically, they need to be qualified for the position you have described in your application.

Look everywhere: Look for potential VISTAs in all the same places that you might look for a regular employee or volunteer. Then look everywhere else. Craigslist.org, Idealist.org, and local message boards or volunteering organizations can be very good places to post your opportunity/job description.

Be clear it's not a "job": Be clear in your flyers, postings, etc. that it's an Americorps*VISTA position that you're looking to fill. Say it upfront so they know it's not a regular job. But remember that a VISTA member is not a volunteer, an intern or a work-study student. It's a commitment to fulfill the valuable needs of your organization.

Explain the big picture: Help people understand what it is to be a VISTA. It is national service. It is community service. It is the "Domestic Peace Corps". It is a chance to take on a project that will have a lasting impact; to develop needed community resources. One of the most attractive things about being a VISTA is that you have the opportunity to make a very measurable impact in a very specific period of time.

Be upfront about the job and qualifications: Let people know exactly what you want them to be working on. Fortunately you already have that in your application. Let them know what skills you require, and what skills you merely desire. You don't want to put yourself in a position of having to weed tons of poor candidates, but you also want to make sure that you aren't asking too much of people either: if someone really has 5 years experience doing exactly what you're asking them to do, they probably won't be doing VISTA.

Stress the Benefits: Incorporate the benefits into your pitch and literature:

- Either a \$1200 cash stipend or \$4725 education award at the completion of service. The education award can be used to pay for tuition at many universities or to pay off student loans. Some colleges and universities offer additional credits or scholarships, even matching the ed. award, for AmeriCorps alumni.
- Most student loans can be deferred during service (they should check with their lending agency).
- Basic health insurance coverage.
- Childcare assistance available.
- Professional development opportunities. All CTC VISTAs attend a national media or technology conference (such as those held by CTCNet, NTEN, ACM, NAMAC, etc.) and we strongly encourage you to make additional development opportunities available to your VISTAs.
- Transportation support (train/bus pass or the like).
- The ongoing support of the CTC VISTA Project staff and a network of 50 VISTAs working on media and technology projects across the country.

Be honest about the difficulties: You don't want to be too forward about the difficulties of being a VISTA member but you want to make sure they know the restrictions and difficulties involved in being a VISTA:

- Vistas can only be enrolled in one university course per semester. That course should relate in some way to their work and must be approved by the Project.
- The VISTA living allowance is very challenging to live on. The exact amount of the bi-weekly allowance varies from place-to-place but it is between \$10,500 - \$11,000 per year
- VISTA members absolutely cannot have outside employment during their year of service.

Be more than a boss: If you are familiar with services for low-income people in your area, these will be useful to your VISTA! Vistas can qualify for food stamps, low-income housing etc. Let them know if you can help them make the connections. If you can help a VISTA find an affordable place to live, this is immeasurably helpful. Housing concerns are a major source of stress for VISTAs that are relocating.

Sample Interview Questions

Below are some sample questions that you might adapt to interviewing prospective VISTA candidates. Though they are general, they try to provide a balanced look at the VISTA member's experience, work-style, ability to learn and adapt, interest and commitment. *As an interviewer, you should be sure to have a complete understanding of the job description and qualifications of the position trying to be filled.*

Experience and Aptitude

- <<Summarize the project and expectations>> Do you have any questions about the position?
- Tell us something about your background that makes you a good candidate for this project.
- What experience have you had with <<project activities and objectives>>?
- How would your current (or most recent) employer describe your work habits?
- Describe a situation where you had to deal with a difficult problem. How did you solve that problem?
- Have you worked with a culturally diverse group of people? Tell us about that experience.

Adaptability and Skills

- Tell us about your skills or abilities that will help you as a VISTA member on our project.
- What motivates you?
- How do you handle working with people who are less motivated than you?
- Tell us about an experience you've had working independently.
- Tell us about an experience you've had working with a group of people.

Character and Personality

- What is one of your greatest accomplishments, either personally or professionally?
- What is your definition of professionalism?
- What are your passions or interests? What do you want to learn? Where do you see yourself in five years? How will a year of service further you in these pursuits?

Important Tips:

Don't be rushed into the wrong person: Don't select someone that is not right for the job just because you are afraid you will not find anyone in time. If you do, you will get a year of headaches. If you don't find anyone in time, you will still have achieved something: You'll have a completed AmeriCorps*VISTA application which you can take to other sources that have different timelines for placement.

Do they care? AmeriCorps*VISTA service is more than a job and it's definitely more than just a paycheck (because it's not much of that). Candidates should be interested in the potential work they'll be doing, interested in your organization, interested in the community and, if they're relocating, wanting to learn more about what it's like to live, work and play there.

Can they commit—personally, professionally and financially? VISTA service is a yearlong commitment to difficult (though satisfying) work that brings with it hardships and no benefits for the VISTA member, your organization, or the CTC VISTA Project if they quit early. Do they have a stick-with-it personality? Does serving with your organization further their professional interests or career—will there be buy-in? Make sure that they aren't planning to go back to school before their service officially ends (they must serve the full year). Lastly, can they survive on the living allowance?

VISTA Benefits and Restrictions

(at a glance)

AmeriCorps*VISTA Benefits

Living Allowance

During their year of service, AmeriCorps*VISTA members receive between \$10,600 and \$11,000, paid bi-weekly by the CTC VISTA Project. This amount varies due to where the VISTA member is serving and is calculated as no less than 95 percent of the local poverty line—members serving within metropolitan areas receive more, rural areas less. The average monthly rate, after taxes, is about \$400 every two weeks; ask the CTC VISTA Project for the exact amount for your location.

Healthcare Benefits

VISTA members receive coverage through a PPO-like (Preferred Provider Organization) healthcare provider that covers emergency or catastrophic incidents. The plan does not cover preventative services such as physicals (with the exception of one GYN-exam for women) and does not cover treatment of pre-existing conditions. VISTA healthcare does not cover Dental (unless for pain) or Vision services.

Most prescription drugs are covered and the coverage is relatively generous. If you are currently covered by other healthcare, you can elect to keep that.

Transportation Support

VISTA members will receive transportation support in the form of a bus or train pass (usually in urban areas) or a gas card or other subsidy. *This is provided by the local organization; please note that VISTA members cannot be paid directly.*

Student loan deferment or forbearance

VISTA members are eligible for forbearance on most federally backed student loans. For other types of student loans, ask your loan holder if your AmeriCorps service qualifies you for a deferment or forbearance. The terms and conditions of available deferments differ depending on the type of loan, the date the loan was disbursed, and the policies of the individual loan holder. Candidates should contact their lending agency to find out for what they are eligible.

Upon successful completion of one year of service...

\$4,725 Eli Segal Education Award in the form of a voucher that can be used to pay for higher education (degree or non-degree) or to repay eligible student loans.

or (not both)

\$1200 End of Service Stipend paid out in the VISTA member's final paycheck

AmeriCorps*VISTA Restrictions

No Outside Employment or Income

VISTA members are explicitly forbidden from outside employment. They are intended to serve full-time at their project site and at the same income level as the members of the community their service benefits.

No Full-Time School/College

VISTA members cannot be enrolled full-time in any degree program. VISTA members can take one-class per semester (one class at a time) but it must be approved by both the CTC VISTA Project and the AmeriCorps*VISTA State office and pertain to the VISTA member's service.