CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA PROJECT Assessment Report
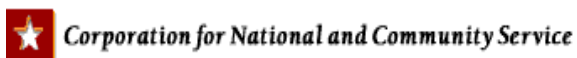
Prepared by

The William Monroe Trotter Institute
University of Massachusetts, Boston

Malo Hutson
Richard O'Bryant
Dr. Regina Rodriguez Mitchell

100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125-3393
(617) 287-5880 • trotterinstitute@umb.edu
www.trotter.umb.edu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project officially began on August 15, 2000 and is a collaboration between AmeriCorps*VISTA, the Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet) and the College of Public and Community Service (CPCS) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Funded by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service, the CTC VISTA Project is entering its third year of operation. The goals of the CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project (hereafter referred to as the CTC VISTA Project or VISTA Project) are to provide coordination, recruitment, training and support for more than 90 AmeriCorps*VISTAs (hereafter referred to as VISTA Members or VISTAs) who work in community technology centers (CTCs) across the United States. Participating VISTAs attend a training and orientation institute at the University of Massachusetts, Boston's College of Public and Community Service. In addition, VISTA Members attend an annual conference held in conjunction with CTCNet.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the CTC VISTA Project's successes and programmatic and operational challenges the William Monroe Trotter Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Boston was contracted to conduct an assessment of the program. The principle goal of the assessment is to help the CTC VISTA Project Staff provide better support, training and/or mentoring to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors. To frame the assessment, the Trotter Institute set out to answer the following questions:

- *How helpful and useful is the CTC VISTA Project PreService Orientation program to VISTA Members? In what ways can the PreService Orientation be improved?*

- *What kind of additional training, support and/or mentoring can be provided to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors?*

- *What can the CTC VISTA Project do to improve its website so that it is more user-friendly and can act as a clearing house for information/resources for VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and the larger CTC community?*

- *What training, support and/or mentoring programs involved with national service and community technology, both those currently used by the Corporation for National and Community Service and those not currently integrated, should the CTC VISTA Project consider incorporating into its programs? What about other programs/organizations—locally or nationally?*

- *What is currently being done online and/or in the distance-learning arena that merits consideration in helping the CTC VISTA Project provide better service delivery and training to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors?*

METHODOLOGY

CTC VISTA Project Surveys

Online surveys were posted on the Internet via the William Monroe Trotter Institute website (www.trotter.umb.edu) in July 2002. The Trotter website included three categories of surveys—(1) VISTA Members, (2) Site Supervisors and (3) Non-VISTA Members (those dropping out before the completion of their service year). An e-mail was sent out to the national CTC VISTA Project listserves which explained the purpose of the assessment, introduced the Trotter Institute Assessment Team and encouraged individuals to fill out the online surveys.   A "reminder" e-mail was sent out encouraging individuals to complete the online survey in September 2002.

Overall, 8 Site Supervisors and 15 VISTA Members responded to the online surveys. Unfortunately, no Non-VISTA Members responded to surveys or interview requests.

VISTA Member and Site Supervisor Interviews

The Trotter Institute conducted in-depth interviews with VISTA Members and Site Supervisors. A majority of those interviewed were VISTA Members and Site Supervisors from Boston metropolitan area CTCs. In total, the Trotter Institute interviewed 6 Site Supervisors (3 of which also completed surveys) and 13 VISTA Members (5 of which also completed surveys).

CTC VISTA Project Interviews with CTC VISTA Staff

Individual interviews with CTC VISTA Project Staff were also conducted. These interviews were semi-structured and included questions – some open-ended – related to their job responsibilities, the PreService Orientation program, goals/mission of the project, etc.

Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps and CTCNet Interviews

In an effort to gain a comprehensive and holistic perspective of the CTC VISTA Project, the Trotter Institute interviewed key staff members from the Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps and CTCNet. Their interview questions centered primarily around administrative, managerial, and policy related issues tied to the original project purpose and goal.

Qualitative Observation Site Visits (Boston Metropolitan Sites only)

Site visits were arranged with Boston metropolitan area CTCs so that the Trotter Institute Assessment Team could conduct interviews with Site Supervisors and VISTA Members. Site visits also provided the Trotter Institute with valuable information about the geographic location and physical characteristics of each CTC. In addition, site visits enabled the Trotter Institute to take a "snap shot" of how each site operated and to gain a

clearer understanding of the CTC's mission, goals and programs.   Overall, more than

half the CTC sites in the Boston metropolitan area were visited.[1]

---

[1] The Trotter Institute was unable to visit every CTC VISTA Project site in the Boston metropolitan area
due to a number of issues including time constraints, VISTAs completing their service year before a visit
could be arranged, scheduling conflicts, etc.

KEY FINDINGS FOR CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA PROJECT

PreService Orientation Program

Successes:

➢ Overall, the PreService Orientation (PSO) is providing VISTA Members with a solid understanding about the CTC VISTA Project, CTCNet, AmeriCorps and what CTCs are and how they operate. The PSO also allows VISTA Members to network and learn more about community technology and community building.

➢ VISTA Members who had their PSO at the national CTCNet Conference in Austin, Texas thought it was a "good idea" and helpful because it allowed them to gain a better understanding of the CTC VISTA Project and other national CTC sites. Moreover, VISTAs got the chance to network with other VISTA Members from around the country as well as participate in conference workshops.

Challenges:

➢ VISTA Members would like to see the PSO provide more workshops on ethnic/racial diversity training, financial planning and obtaining benefits (health, food stamps, etc).

➢ VISTA Members would like to receive more advance information about the communities and organizations of their placement.

➢ New VISTA Members would like more substantive interaction with veteran VISTA Members during the PSO. Many VISTA Members felt this would give them an opportunity to ask veteran VISTAs "what it is really like" to be a VISTA Member.

➢ VISTA Members would like to have the PSO provide more site-specific details regarding their specific service responsibilities.

- ➢ Site Supervisors and VISTA Members felt that the CTC VISTA Project Staff should seriously consider providing an orientation for Site Supervisors.

Training, Support and/or Mentoring

Successes:

➢ VISTA Members and Site Supervisors are satisfied with the electronic mail listserves administered by the CTC VISTA Project Staff.

➢ VISTA Members feel that having a Site Supervisor to report to is a good idea because they have someone to turn to for information and help.

➢ Generally VISTA Members feel that their sites have adequate resources to help them do their jobs.

➢ VISTA Members and Site Supervisors feel that the annual national conference held in conjunction with CTCNet is informative, helpful and provides an opportunity to network.

Challenges:

➢ Overall, VISTA Members and Site Supervisors would like to see better integration between Boston metropolitan VISTAs, Site Supervisors and CTCs with those outside the Boston metropolitan area.

➢ VISTA Members and Site Supervisors would like more interaction between CTC VISTA sites in the form of cross-site meetings, regional conferences, etc. They expressed a strong desire to have regularized and more formal visits to other CTC sites within the same geographic region in order to exchange information, ideas and to learn about what is happening at other sites.

➢ VISTA Members would like to see more formal classes/workshops on community building and technical skills (hardware, software, etc).

- In general, Site Supervisors and VISTA Members would like to see some improvement by the CTC VISTA Project in processing administrative paperwork in a more efficient and timely manner.

- VISTA Members would like assistance in finding housing before beginning their service year, especially in metropolitan areas where the cost of living is high.

- Boston metropolitan VISTA Members would like to see some improvement with the focus and format of monthly meetings. VISTA Members want meetings to take on a workshop format (i.e. technical workshops, financial workshops, fundraising workshops, etc.) rather than spending a large part of the meetings "getting to know each other" exercises.

CTC VISTA Project Website

Successes:

➢ Currently, the CTC VISTA Project website contains links for accessibility to those agencies, organizations, entities and resources that are critical to the overall project.

➢ The website is not "click intensive" and allows users to locate information with relative ease.

Challenges:

➢ VISTA Members would like to have a hyperlink on the website that contains resources for personal skill building and also methods for capacity building at their respective sites.

➢ There appears to be a disconnect between the information made available by the CTC VISTA Project Staff and the use of this information by the Site Supervisors.

➢ The website is not visually user-friendly. The current color selection of the website is hard on the eyes compared to blues and/or pastel colors.

Integrating Programs into the CTC VISTA Project

➢ The events of September 11, 2001 have shifted the federal government's funding priorities towards homeland security. As such, the CTC VISTA Project needs to build on existing relationships with community technology and community building organizations in order to ensure that the program is sustainable.

➢ There are a number of private sector firms, foundations, universities and other nonprofits with which the CTC VISTA Project could foster ties and build relationships.

Online and Distance Learning Programs

➢ There are a number of different online/distance learning programs that the CTC VISTA Project can get involved with including Element K, Free-Ed, Contentbank.org and Learnthat.com.

➢ There are a number of organizations as well as online journals and newspapers that provide the latest information on developments in the online and distance learning fields.

CONCLUSION

The key findings discussed in this executive summary are included in the full assessment report. The full assessment report also contains a set of recommendations and conclusion based on the Trotter Institute's findings.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade community technology centers (CTCs) have emerged to play an integral part in providing local residents with free or low-cost access to computer-related technologies and information. CTCs are often times essential in the community building and empowerment process because they can provide local residents with valuable resources such as information sharing, community networking, computer skills and vocational training. More importantly, CTCs can be found in economically disadvantaged urban communities and in rural areas with sparse resources. Unfortunately, CTCs multiple missions and diverse geographic locations can provide an added challenge to CTC staff and volunteers. Many CTCs are understaffed and lack qualified individuals that possess the necessary technical, leadership and/or management skills to help carry out its goals and vision. In addition, many cultural, social, racial, and economic factors make it difficult for some CTC staff and volunteers to realize their full potential. Thus, it is important that CTC staff and volunteers are not only well trained in leadership, management and interpersonal skills, but that they have access to the latest developments in diversity training, computer-related skills, information sharing, community capacity building and are aware of pertinent public policies affecting the greater community technology movement.

These are precisely many of the goals of the CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project.

The CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project officially began on August 15, 2000 and is a collaboration between AmeriCorps*VISTA, the Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet) and the College of Public and Community Service at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Funded by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service, the CTC VISTA Project is entering its third year of operation. The goals of the CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project (hereafter referred to as the CTC VISTA Project or VISTA Project) are to provide coordination, recruitment, training and support for more than 90 AmeriCorps*VISTAs (hereafter referred to as VISTA Members or VISTAs) who work in community technology centers (CTCs) across the United States. Participating VISTAs attend training and an orientation institute at the University of Massachusetts, Boston's College of Public and Community Service.   In addition, VISTA members attend an annual conference held in conjunction with CTCNet.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the CTC VISTA Project's successes and programmatic and operational challenges the William Monroe Trotter Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Boston was contracted to conduct an assessment of the program. The principle goal of this assessment is to help the CTC VISTA Project Staff provide better support, training and/or mentoring to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors. To frame the assessment, the Trotter Institute set out to answer the following questions:

> ***How helpful and useful is the CTC VISTA Project PreService Orientation program to VISTA Members? In what ways can the PreService Oreineation be improved?***

> *What kind of additional training, support and/or mentoring can be provided to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors?*

> *What can the CTC VISTA Project do to improve its website so that it is more user-friendly and can act as a clearing house for information/resources for VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and the larger CTC community?*

> *What training, support and/or mentoring programs involved with national service and community technology, both those currently used by the Corporation for National and Community Service and those not currently integrated, should the CTC VISTA Project consider incorporating into its programs? What about other programs/organizations—locally or nationally?*

> *What is currently being done online and/or in the distance-learning arena that merits consideration in helping the CTC VISTA Project provide better service delivery and training to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors?*

METHODOLOGY

CTC VISTA Project Surveys

Online surveys were posted on the Internet via the William Monroe Trotter Institute website (www.trotter.umb.edu) in July 2002. The Trotter website included three categories of surveys— (1) VISTA Members, (2) Site Supervisors and (3) Non-VISTA Members (those dropping out before the completion of their service year).   An e-mail was sent out to the national CTC VISTA Project listserves which explained the purpose of the assessment, introduced the Trotter Institute Assessment Team and encouraged individuals to fill out the online surveys.   A "reminder" e-mail was sent out encouraging individuals who had not already done so to complete the online survey in September 2002.

Overall, 8 Site Supervisors and 15 VISTA Members responded to the online surveys.   In some cases, follow-up phone conversations were conducted with Site Supervisors and VISTA Members in order to obtain additional information.   Unfortunately, no Non-VISTA Members responded to the online survey or interview requests.

VISTA Member and Site Supervisor Interviews

The Trotter Institute conducted in-depth interviews with VISTA Members and Site Supervisors. The majority of those interviewed were VISTA Members and Site Supervisors from Boston metropolitan area CTCs. In total, the Trotter Institute interviewed 6 Site Supervisors (3 of which also completed surveys) and 13 VISTA Members (5 of which also completed surveys).

CTC VISTA Project Interviews with CTC VISTA Staff

Interviews with CTC VISTA Project Staff were also conducted. Most of these interviews were semi-structured and included questions – some open-ended – related to their job responsibilities, the PreService Orientation program, goals/mission of the project, etc.

Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps and CTCNet Interviews

In an effort to gain a comprehensive and holistic perspective of the CTC VISTA Project, the Trotter Institute interviewed key staff members from the Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps and CTCNet. Their interview questions centered primarily around administrative, managerial, and policy related issues tied to the original project purpose and goal.

Qualitative Observation Site Visits (Boston Metropolitan Sites only)

Site visits were arranged with Boston metropolitan area CTCs so that the Trotter Institute Assessment Team could conduct interviews with Site Supervisors and VISTA Members. Site visits also provided the Trotter Institute with valuable information about the geographic location and physical characteristics of each CTC. In addition, site visits enabled the Trotter Institute to take a "snap shot" of how each site operated and to gain a clearer understanding of each CTC's mission, goals and programs. Boston Neighborhood Network TV, Bruce Wall Ministries, the Lowell Community Technology

Consortium (consisting of multiple sites) and Newland Media Education Center were all

visited.

PREFACE TO KEY FINDINGS

Before beginning an in-depth discussion of the key findings of the CTC VISTA Project assessment, it must first be stated that there is a clear difference between the experience of VISTA Members and Site Supervisors in the Boston metropolitan area and of those at other sites throughout the United States. There appears to be two main causes for this difference, one obvious and the other not so obvious. The most obvious reason for the difference in experiences between the two is the Boston metropolitan area CTC's proximity to the CTC VISTA Project headquarters at the University of Massachusetts Boston. This enables VISTA Members to have more frequent face-to-face contact with one other, with CTC VISTA Staff and to participate in monthly meetings. These factors are crucial for the development of relationships and dissemination of ideas/information that allows Boston area VISTA Members and Site Supervisors to build social networks with each other, thereby increasing their social capital and potential for capacity building. As one staff person for the CTC VISTA Project noted, *"the Northeast has an abundance of resources"* in the community technology and nonprofit field. These resources provide an added boost to the VISTA Members and Site Supervisors' capacity to support community building efforts—one that may be lacking of CTCs in other parts of the country.

The second reason, which could explain the difference in experiences between VISTA Members and Site Supervisors in the Boston metropolitan area with those outside the area, is that the original funding for the CTC VISTA Project planned to support 30 VISTA Members in the Boston metropolitan area only. However, because the project ended up being supplemented with a grant that was originally awarded to the Community

Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet) for an additional 51 VISTA Service Years (VSYs)[2], the CTC VISTA Project was able to expand their service delivery beyond the Boston metropolitan area to the continental United States.   It became apparent to the Trotter Institute Assessment Team that the CTC VISTA Project was faced with two serious challenges from its inception:

1) **Spatial Challenge** —The CTC VISTA Project Staff is faced with the constant challenge of trying to maintain a cohesive network of VISTA Members and Site Supervisors in roughly 30 different CTCs from across the United States.

2) **Capacity Challenge** —The CTC VISTA Project core staff[3] is responsible for providing administrative and social support to over 90 VISTA Members, numerous Site Supervisors in approximately 30 CTCs. This is no small task, especially for an organization with a limited number of staff, a limited travel budget and little opportunity to make face-to- face contact on a regular basis with non-Boston metropolitan area VISTA Members and Site Supervisors. The annual national conference held in conjunction with CTCNet is one of the few opportunities.

Despite being faced with these two very big challenges, the CTC VISTA Project Staff have, for the most part, been able to provide the basic resources needed for VISTA Members and Site Supervisors to meet their day-to-day job responsibilities.

---

[2] CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project. *CTC VISTA Project 1st year Project Progress Report.* November 30, 2001.

[3] The CTC VISTA Project's core staff consists of a director, an assistant project director, a faculty member from the College of Public and Community Service, an administrator of information technology, a VISTA support specialist and a VISTA Member.

KEY FINDINGS

PreService Orientation Program

Successes

According to the CTC VISTA Project Staff, the PreService Orientation (PSO) consists of two components that the Trotter Institute has categorized as (1) administrative and (2) programmatic. The administrative component is designed to familiarize VISTA Members with basic information about the CTC VISTA Project, CTCNet and CTCs. In addition, the PSO is a time for VISTA Members to complete the necessary administrative paperwork, to

> *"The PSO was great for going through all the administration paperwork and for becoming familiar with the relationship between my site, AmeriCorps, VISTA, CTCNet and UMASS Boston. It was also helpful to meet other VISTAs and find out why they were committing to this."*

learn more about the communication infrastructure used by the VISTA Project and an opportunity to network and build relationships with fellow VISTA Members and CTC VISTA Project Staff. The programmatic component of the PSO focuses on community building concepts and the presentation of multimedia tools. These two areas are particularly important for the CTC VISTA Project because its overall mission is to provide capacity building strategies to community building institutions and the

> *"Prior to the CTC VISTA Project, I had very little understanding of what the CTCVISTA Project was and so it was helpful to get a better understanding of that and a broad perspective on why we are doing what we're doing.…It was really helpful."*

multimedia tools are used to help VISTA Members demonstrate what their capacity building work is about and how it aids CTCs with their programs.

In general, most VISTA Members

were satisfied with the way the PSOs were structured and organized. Moreover, they felt that the content appropriately addressed their concerns and questions about the program and left them feeling like they were prepared to start their service year. As two VISTA Members stated: *"The PSO was great for going through all the administration paperwork and for becoming familiar with the relationship between my site, AmeriCorps, VISTA, CTCNet and UMASS Boston. It was also helpful to meet other VISTAs and find out why they were committing to this."* and *"Prior to the CTC VISTA Project, I had very little understanding of what the CTC VISTA Project was and so it was helpful to get a better understanding of that and a broad perspective on why we are doing what we're doing….It was really helpful."*

There were several responses from VISTA Members that confirmed the point that the CTC VISTA Project Staff was doing a fairly good job in running the PSO:

➢ "PSO provides a good understanding about the CTC VISTA Project, CTCNet, AmeriCorps and what CTCs are and how they operate."

➢ "The CTC VISTA Project staff was open and honest about the positives and negatives of the CTC VISTA Project and how the entire program operates."

VISTA Members who had their PSO at the national conference in Austin, Texas were especially positive about their experience. They thought having a PSO at the national conference was a good idea because it provided them with a better understanding of the CTC VISTA Project and allowed them to network with other VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and professionals in the community technology and community building

fields. Also, several VISTA Members commented that they were given the opportunity

to take advantage of the CTCNet conference workshops, which many felt provided them

with good preparation for their jobs as well as increased their knowledge of the

community technology field.

Challenges

Despite the positive responses about the PSO and how it is organized, there

appears to be some tension regarding what the CTC VISTA Project's PSO goals and

mission and what some feel the PSO's goals and

mission ought to be. A large number of VISTA

Members expressed dissatisfaction with the

content of the orientation and would have

> *"This should be (the PSO) a time to connect you with other volunteers, your city and how to survive in the city or location where you are going to work."*

preferred that it adopted a broader focus by providing more information on the following:

- ➢ VISTA Members would like more background information on the historical, social, economic, cultural and ethnic/racial characteristics of the communities where they will be placed.

- ➢ More information on financial planning, obtaining benefits and housing information.

- ➢ VISTA Members would like to see the PSO provide more information on job tasks at their sites, especially information on capacity building techniques.

The following are some comments from VISTA Members on the aforementioned issues that illustrate these points. With regards to wanting the PSO to provide more background information and training on the communities they will be providing service to, one VISTA Member made the following statement: *"I think most VISTAs are coming out of college but often go into urban environments where college is not much of an expectation. There is some socioeconomic differences and ethnic differences with VISTAs and the community they work in. ...But some kind of training would help ease me into communities that I am unfamiliar with."* Another VISTA Member commented that the PSO should be the time to learn more about the city and community they will be in: *"This should be (the PSO) a time to connect you with other volunteers, your city and how to survive in the city or location where you are going to work."*

There was a consistent and singular theme of concern by VISTA Members with the issue of housing. Assistance with housing seemed to be the biggest and most pressing

"We need support with the cost of housing, cost of housing, cost of housing!"

concern for VISTA Members when planning out their year. VISTAs saw the PSO as an opportunity to point new VISTA Members toward safe and affordable housing. As one VISTA Member stated [4],: *"It would be great for the Project to offer more resources for housing—it's taken me nearly five months (starting my search three months prior to my relocating to start my year of service) and three moves to find an adequate and affordable place to live."* Moreover, VISTA Members saw the PSO as an opportunity to share strategies on conflict resolution

---

[4] The vast majority of VISTA Members who were interviewed and/or surveyed mentioned the need for financial planning workshops and assistance with finding affordable housing.

in real life situations that may occur at their respective CTC VISTA sites. As one VISTA responded, *"The PSO could be improved with more time spent on how the CTC VISTA staff can be of use to the VISTAs in real life settings…supervisor conflicts, money issues, etc. Also, how the CTC VISTA Project relates to our everyday jobs."*

Finally, VISTA Members would like to see the CTC VISTA Project Staff encourage more interaction between veteran VISTA Members and new VISTAs. Many VISTA Members felt this would give them the opportunity to find out "what it's really like to be a VISTA Member." Interestingly, surveys and interviews revealed that both VISTA Members and Site Supervisors expressed a strong interest in having a PSO for Site Supervisors as well. Site Supervisors were especially interested in a PSO that would cover the following areas:

> *Supporting a VISTA Member*
> *Responsibilities of being a Site Supervisor*
> *Understanding the CTC VISTA Project procedures and guidelines for filling out Project-related paperwork.*

Based on the results compiled by the Trotter Institute, it appears that the CTC VISTA Project PSO is accomplishing many of its stated goals. It is meeting these goals and mission through its administrative and programmatic components. Clearly not all VISTA Members responded favorably to the content and structure of the PSO, indicating that there continues to be some room for improvement. Suggestions of how the CTC VISTA Project could approach improving the PSO can be found in the "Recommendations" section of this report.

Training, Support and/or Mentoring

Successes

Overall, the feeling among VISTA Members and Site Supervisors is that electronic communication via e-mail listserves provides a good way for people to disseminate community technology center-related information, ask questions, post announcements and stay up-to-date on the latest activities and developments going on throughout the country regarding community building and technology policy and programming. Several VISTA Members and Site Supervisors also expressed an appreciation for the work done by the CTC VISTA Staff, especially by the former VISTA Leader (Matt Chricton), in sending out important information about the CTC VISTA Project and answering their questions. In addition, a large number of Site

Supervisors and VISTA Members commented on how pleased they were with the quick replies by CTC VISTA Project Staff to their e-mail questions and phone messages (in just about every case, it was stated that the CTC VISTA Project Staff responds to questions within 12 hours).

Moreover, VISTA Members and Site Supervisors are as a whole pleased with the following aspects of the CTC VISTA Project:

➢ VISTA Members feel that having a Site Supervisor to report to is a good idea because it provides them with a "rapid response" vehicle and someone to turn to for information and help.

> Most VISTA Members feel that their sites have enough resources to help them do their jobs adequately and effectively.

> VISTA Members and Site Supervisors feel that the annual national conference held in conjunction with CTCNet is informative, helpful and provides an opportunity to network.

VISTA Members also reported that they feel connected to their site and have regularly scheduled meetings with their Site Supervisor (usually once a week or every two weeks). However, it is important to note that, although VISTA Members and Site Supervisors are meeting on a regular basis, the working relationships between VISTA Members and Site Supervisors are sometimes a source of conflict. Based on the responses to the surveys and interviews, the most common causes of conflict between Site Supervisors and VISTA Members are due to the following:

1) **Breakdown in Communication**

   VISTA Members expressed the need for structured guidance with a clear understanding regarding the goals, expectations and service responsibilities. The general feeling is that these factors are not always clearly defined. Another issue is that VISTA Supervisors or CTC site staff are not using VISTA Members as capacity builders. Instead, they treat them like employees and often have them engaging in direct service activities. In addition, VISTA Members feel that they are often given unreasonable amounts of work/tasks or service duties.

2) Personality Issues

VISTA Members report that differing work and personality styles have regularly impacted work and productivity.

3) Lack of Leadership

VISTA Members feel that some Site Supervisors are not organized and lack focus or direction, thus compromising their working relationship as well as the quality of their work. Likewise, Site Supervisors reported that some VISTA Members are not meeting their expectations and/or service responsibilities. Many Site Supervisors and VISTA Members also feel that the leadership within the CTC VISTA Project could be improved.

4) Little Direct Contact with Supervisors

In some cases VISTA Members have very little interaction with their Site Supervisors which lead to feelings of isolation or to the "employer and employee" hierarchical complex rather than a more collegial form of decision making and program implementation.

5) Mismatch between VISTA Member Interests and Mission/Goals of CTCs

Both Site Supervisors and VISTA Members reported that in some cases problems and conflicts arise because there is an inadequate "fit" between the VISTA Members' skills and interests and the needs and goals of the CTC site where they are placed.

Fortunately for the CTC VISTA Project, these five main sources of conflict affecting the working relationship between VISTA Members and Site Supervisors appear to be repairable. (see "Recommendations" section of report for Trotter Institute possible mitigating strategies).

Challenges

As mentioned earlier in the "Preface to the Key Findings", the Trotter Institute has discovered that there is a difference in the responses to survey and interview questions among VISTA Members and Site Supervisors in the Boston metropolitan area when compared to those in other parts of the country. Nowhere is the difference more profound than when it comes to asking

> *"Planning more interactions between local VISTA besides the Boston area."*

questions about support, training and/or mentoring. Although electronic communication is used as the primary tool to keep information flowing between CTC VISTA Project Staff, VISTA Members and Site Supervisors, most VISTA Members and Site Supervisors feel like it is not enough to maintain the feeling of "being a part of a larger organization". This feeling of disconnectedness is prevalent among VISTA Members and Site Supervisors outside the Boston Metropolitan area. For example, some

> *"I don't see any link between my co-VISTAs and I, except for a listserve. Conference calls or video conferences would be great as I am interested in what others are doing. Also, I see no coordination between the State office and national headquarters, so I feel isolated."*

comments from VISTA Members and Site Supervisors' surveys and interviews included suggestions on ways in which the CTC VISTA Project Staff could improve support:

"Planning more interactions between local VISTA besides the Boston area." and *"I don't see any link between my co-VISTAs and I, except for a listserve. Conference calls or video conferences would be great as I am interested in what others are doing. Also, I see no coordination between the State office and national headquarters, so I feel isolated."*

Similarly the Boston metropolitan area VISTA Members and Site Supervisors expressed many of the same feelings shared by the non-Boston metro area VISTA Members and Site

> *"It might help some of us if we read that one of our fellow Members has done something that we are trying to do and then we know to go to them for specific advice. It would also be interesting to be a bit more connected to the overall VISTA community—local VISTA get-togethers?"*

Supervisors, albeit to a lesser extent. The most common response from Boston metropolitan area VISTAs and Site Supervisors is that the CTC VISTA Project needs to have more cross-site meetings and interaction. Nearly everyone surveyed or interviewed expressed *a strong interest in having formal visits to other CTCs within the same geographic region* in order to exchange information, ideas and learn what is going on elsewhere. As some VISTA Members responded: *"I would like to see more interconnected stuff with Boston area CTCs"* and *"It might help some of us if we read that one of our fellow Members has done something that we are trying to do and then we know to go to them for specific advice. It would also be interesting to be a bit more connected to the overall VISTA community—local VISTA get-togethers?"*

Site Supervisors also feel the need for more interaction: *"I think the Supervisors need some support, some leadership and cohesion and need to meet as well like the VISTAS"* and *"More opportunities to have direct face-to-face meetings with other supervisors to talk about challenges (maybe quarterly meetings). Opportunities for Supervisors to talk about the larger CTC field and how the work we do develops the field."*

Improving the physical and virtual connection between CTC VISTA Project Staff,

"More opportunities to have direct face-to-face meetings with other supervisors to talk about challenges (maybe quarterly meetings). Opportunities for Supervisors to talk about the larger CTC field and how the work we do develops the field."

VISTA Members and Site Supervisors is a serious challenge facing the CTC VISTA Project.

With regards to technical training, VISTA Members would like to see the CTC VISTA Project offer more formal classes and workshops that could increase their human capital and inter-site connectedness. Since VISTA Members are responsible for adding capacity to CTCs located in predominately economically disadvantaged areas, technical and community building skills classes and workshops are critical for them to meet their day-to-day responsibilities. Several VISTA Members commented that they would like to see some workshops/classes that deal with project management and community organizing. The section of the report entitled, "Online and Distance Learning Programs" should provide some ideas and examples of how the CTC VISTA Project can provide additional training to VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and CTC VISTA Project Staff.

Finally, one source of frustration for both VISTA Members and Site Supervisors is the need for important administrative paperwork to be processed in a timely manner. It was mentioned several times in interviews and surveys that paperwork often gets lost or misplaced, takes a long time to be processed or is confusing to fill out.
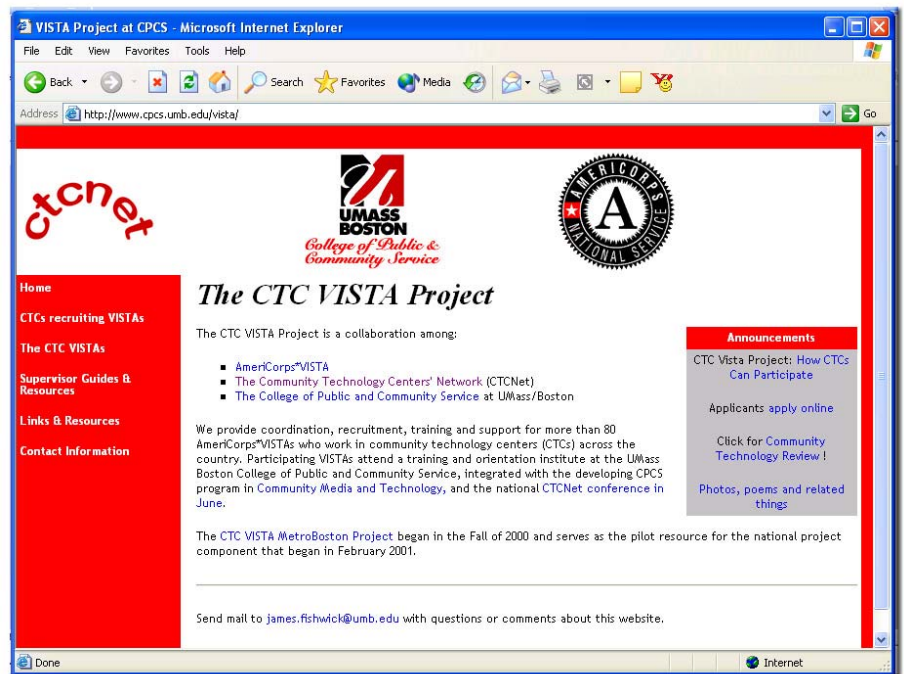
CTC VISTA Project Website

The Internet has become an electronic forum for businesses, organizations (public and private), community groups and individuals to publish information about themselves and their interests. The incredible advances in Internet technology has made it possible to not only publish text but to publish digitized sound along with high resolution images and videos.

Successes

The current CTC VISTA website has some very strong characteristics. First, it contains links for accessibility to those agencies, organizations, entities and resources that are critical to the CTC VISTA Project, VISTA Members and Site Supervisors. The VISTA Project website is clean, brief and informative. A user does not have to search very long for information that he or she is looking for. A user can access almost any information they are looking for in one or two clicks of their mouse. In web development terms it is not click intensive. Overall, the CTC VISTA Project community is served well by the website.

Challenges

Although the Trotter Institute did not specifically inquire with interviewees about the usefulness of the CTC VISTA Project website, certain information deficits were raised. The VISTA Members would like to have a place of reference for building personal skills and also methods for capacity building at their respective sites. Links could consist of information on financial management, fundraising, or relevant hyperlinks and workforce or skill development. Although the website clearly contains a link to critical information for Site Supervisors, there seems to be a disconnection between the availability and use of this information and the Site Supervisors taking advantage of this resource.

Finally, the website's choice of color palate (i.e. red) tends to be harder on the eyes compared to other shades. If a user stays at the site for any extended period of time it may become uncomfortable to the eyes. Moreover, the website contains an over abundance of text and few pictures which make the site unattractive and uninviting to the user. Despite these challenges there are many ways in which the website can be improved which are offered in the recommendations section.

Integrating Programs into the CTC VISTA Project

The CTC VISTA Project Staff and the faculty in the College of Community and Public Service at UMASS Boston have a strong interest in making sure that the CTC VISTA Project is sustainable and successful at helping CTCs increase their community building capacity within economically disadvantaged communities. As a result, they are interested in other programs (both locally and nationally) that the CTC VISTA Project might consider integrating into its current programs. Moreover, the CTC VISTA Project is interested in collaborative opportunities with organizations, institutions and individuals who are concerned with community technology, community building and "digital divide" issues. The CTC VISTA Project is especially interested in finding out what opportunities may exist in the above areas within the Corporation for National and Community Service and CTCNet.

Unfortunately, no one could have predicted the horrific events that affected our nation on September 11, 2001. As a consequence, the present administration has dramatically shifted funding priorities for domestic programs. Money that was earmarked for community technology and community building efforts is now going towards programs that support "homeland security". This new directive from the Bush Administration is affecting the budgets of almost every federal agency and organization, including the Corporation for National and Community Service.[5] This situation has left many federal agencies and programs unsure about their future funding priorities and how their budgets will be affected. Consequently this poses an enormous financial challenge

---

[5] The current shift in funding priorities by the federal government was corroborated in interviews with key people from the Corporation for National and Community Service and AmeriCorps.

for nonprofit organizations and programs that receive a majority of their operating budget from federal dollars.

The current political and economic situation has not provided many "new" collaborative opportunities for the CTC VISTA Project. The Trotter Institute's findings suggest that the CTC VISTA Project should focus on building stronger relationships with their existing partners such as the Corporation for National and Community Service, the College of Public and Community Service and CTCNet. For example, CTCNet's Leadership Development Institutes (LDI) would be a good resource for the CTC VISTA Project. LDI's mission is to "*build the capacity of community technology centers by supporting the professional growth of CTC directors and program managers*" and focuses on important issues—human assets, technology planning, funding, community relations and working with key stakeholders.[6] The CTC VISTA Project may want to consider having CTCNet's LDI offer special leadership training sessions for Site Supervisors, CTC VISTA Project Staff and other key individuals affiliated with the program. In addition, since many Site Supervisors expressed an interest in having their own PSO, LDI could offer a special orientation for Site Supervisors.

The CTC VISTA Project may also want to tap further into their relationship with CTCNet. Since CTCNet is one of eight partners that make up the America Connects Consortium (ACC), they could take advantage of some of the resources ACC provides to community technology organizations. For example, ACC supports several regional meetings and conferences around the country such as the September 2002 conference "Media, Technology, and Social Change: Broadening the Base, Building the Movement"

---

[6] Community Technology Centers' Network Leadership Development Institutes (LDI) website: www.ctcnet.org/ldi/leadinst.htm . 2002.

at UMASS Boston. These conferences and meetings are ideal environments in which

VISTA Members and Site Supervisors could be encouraged to present their work,

participate in workshops and to network. Moreover, the ACC has a collection of

resources on their website (www.americaconnects.net) which provides community

technology center staff, users and others with information on:

> Starting a CTC

> Sustaining a CTC

> Capacity Building

> Partnerships

> Technology

> Disability/Inclusion

> Education

> Workforce Development

> Economic Development

> Program Design

> Digital Divide

CTCNet's strong partnerships, rich resources and commitment to social change through

community technology make it an ideal partner for the CTC VISTA Project.

Another ideal partner that the CTC VISTA Project would benefit from

strengthening ties with is the National Service Resource Center (NSRC), a project of

ETR Associates. NSRC provides training and technical assistance to programs funded by

the Corporation for National and Community Service. Thus, the CTC VISTA Project can

take full advantage of their services. Besides training and technical assistance, NSRC has

launched an online resource website that has a whole page dedicated to the "digital divide" (www.etr.org/nsrc/digitaldivide.html). The "Bridging the Digital Divide" page contains links to "best practices", "funding and grant management", "online training and curricula" and the latest community technology news, to provide several examples. NSRC's online site contains numerous publications, best practices databases and a list of national and technical assistance providers making it a great resource for the CTC VISTA Project

In addition to strengthening ties to current CTC VISTA Project partners, interviews with key stakeholders in the community technology field suggest that the VISTA Project may want to look into building collaborative partnerships or relationships with private industry, foundations, universities and/or other nonprofits. For instance in the private sector the Intel Corporation, which supports community technology projects such as the Computer Clubhouse, may be a good source for financial support. In the nonprofit sector, the CTC VISTA Project could potentially approach foundations for financial support such as the AOL Foundation, Markle Foundation, Ford Foundation, etc. The CTC VISTA Project could also link up to other nonprofits such as the National Community Building Network (NCBN) in order to improve their ability to offer better training and support to VISTAs and Site Supervisors. NCBN's mission is "to promote and advance community building principles, in practice and policy, to achieve social and economic equity for all children and families" as they try to introduce all their members to innovative efforts to reduce poverty and create social and economic opportunities in distressed communities.[7]   NCBN's community building focus combined with the CTC

---

[7] National Community Building Network (NCBN) website: www.ncbn.org . 2002.

VISTA Project's use of community technology as a tool to support community capacity building could be an effective partnership.

In difficult economic times and/or when funding for specific federal programs becomes limited, nonprofits must build on their strengths in order to remain sustainable. In the current political and economic climate, it is important for the CTC VISTA Project to take full advantage of their national and local partnerships in order to leverage resources to ensure the sustainability of the project. Therefore, the CTC VISTA Project should also call on the state governments where VISTA Members are located for financial, administrative and/or technical support.

Online and Distance Learning Programs

The field of online and distance learning has grown exponentially in recent years. There are a number of agencies, online sites and universities/colleges that offer online and distance learning courses. Perhaps one of the leading online distance learning companies that could provide a great service to the CTC VISTA Project and UMASS Boston's College of Public and Community Service is Element K[8] (www.elementk.com). Element K is one of the leading online providers of computer courses for information technology and business. There are a

number of universities and colleges that are customers of Element K—Virginia Tech, Johns Hopkins University, Bucknell University, the Boston Consortium (which consists of 13 educational institutions including Harvard, MIT, Boston University, Boston College, Northeastern University, Tufts and Wellesley) and several community colleges. A company like Element K is flexible enough in that it allows each individual to tailor online courses to their needs and interests. Since many VISTA Members and some Site Supervisors expressed interest in being able to participate in technical workshops to
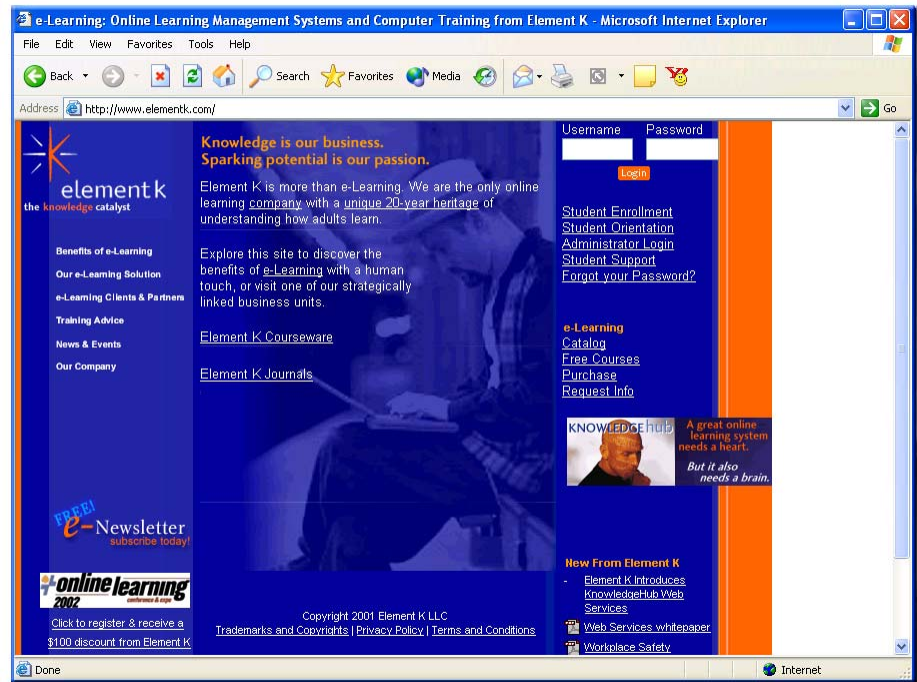
enhance their knowledge and skills, Element K could provide that service not only to the CTC VISTA Project, but to the greater University of Massachusetts, Boston campus. For example, Element K offers courses in these following areas, all of which could help increase VISTAs technical capacity:

➢ **Database Courses** —including Access, FileMaker Pro, Office XP, Seagate Crystal Reports, Quattro Pro, and Approach Millennium Edition.

➢ **Design Courses** —including Adobe Acrobat, Photoshop, Illustrator, and PageMaker; Corel Painter and PhotoPaint; FrontPage; and Macormedia Director and Dreamweaver.

➢ **Desktop Courses** —including Microsoft Office, WordPerfect Office, operating systems, installation, configuration, and administration techniques.

➢ **Programming Courses** —including Java Scripting and applets, dynamic HTML, and database programming.

➢ **Project Management Courses**

➢ **Webmaster Courses** —including HTML and Common Gateway Interface

An alternative to companies like Element K who charge a fee to access their online courses, are organizations that provide online courses, tutorials and activities at no cost. One organization that fits this description is Free-Ed (www.free-ed.net). Free-Ed is "committed to providing an online, virtual university where users from around the

---

[8] Element K does not disclose the cost of their service to educational or nonprofit institutions, but has a number available on their web site for an account representative to contact your organization directly (1-800-434-3466) or your organization can opt to fill out a request form online.

world can study, take courses, and participate in community activities at no cost".[9] Free-Ed provides courses and tutorials for more than 120 different vocational and academic disciplines.[10] Some of their most relevant and useful courses for VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and CTC VISTA Project Staff are in the area of information technology. Free-Ed offers courses and tutorials in the following fields:

- ➢ **Computer Languages and Scripts** — i.e. Visual Basic, C++, and HTML.
- ➢ **Operating Systems –** Windows, Linux, MAC OS
- ➢ **Databases** — i.e. SQL, Oracle, Cold Fusion, Access, and Visual FoxPro.
- ➢ **Networks and Networking** — i.e. TCP/IP
- ➢ **Desktop Publishing** — i.e. Microsoft Publisher
- ➢ **Spreadsheets**
- ➢ **Graphics** — i.e. Adobe Illustrator and CorelDraw.

Learnthat.com is another organization that offers free online courses and tutorials over the Internet. Learnthat.com was founded in 1999 to offer free web based training to users of all levels. Some of Learnthat.com's most popular courses and tutorials are related to information technology—A+ Core Certification tutorial, A+ DOS Certification tutorial, Macromedia Flash and Dreamweaver. Learnthat.com also offers computer software tutorials such as RedHat Linux, Microsoft Frontpage and Intuit's Quicken. In addition, they provide courses and tutorials on "How to build your own PC/Computer", "Introduction to Linux" and i-Net+ Certification.

---

[9] Free-Ed, 2002. www.free-ed.net.

In the area of community building and information technology, Contentbank.org (The Community Content Bank (www.contentbank.org) is another good resource for the CTC VISTA Project. Conentbank.org is a new online resource for information, tools and people interested in building Internet content for economically disadvantaged communities. Their website offers numerous links to online resources in education, health, housing and jobs. It also has links to what they call "Tech Resources". Tech Resources consist of online resources related to desktop publishing, e-learning (which provides a link to Media Alliance, an organization that offers staff of nonprofits classes on the Internet, web design, or software applications), and classes on other nonprofit related topics. In addition, Tech Resources has links to online portals, shareware/freeware and web design.

In an effort to provide better service delivery to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors, the CTC VISTA Project and UMASS Boston's College of Public and Community Service may also consider joining the American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC) (website address: www.adec.edu). ADEC is an international consortium of state and land grant institutions that provide distance learning and education programs via the Internet. Members of ADEC have access to online resources related to distance and education learning, courseware, virtual universities, conferences and workshops just to name a few.

There are also a few online newspapers and journals that deal specifically with the latest developments in online and distance learning that may be useful. One good resource is the Virtual University Gazette (www.geteducated.com). This site has

---

[10] Important to note that Free-Ed is not intended to replace formal education; instead users can use their courses to review material, prepare for exams, extend vocational skills, etc.

directories to online colleges, both graduate and undergraduate, as well as online training

programs and other resources. The CTC VISTA Project and UMASS Boston's CPCS

may also want to check out *The Journal*, an online journal dealing with distance learning

issues (www.thejournal.com).

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the CTC VISTA Project enters its third year of operation, making some internal and external changes that will allow it to become a more effective and sustainable program are critical. The following recommendations attempt to address and remedy many of the challenges facing the CTC VISTA Project. These recommendations are based solely on the Trotter Institute's findings from their assessment of the CTC VISTA Project. Moreover, these recommendations are merely suggestions to ways in which the CTC VISTA Project can improve its ability to provide better support, training and/or mentoring to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors. They are by no means the only solutions or ways in which the CTC VISTA Project can be improved. Finally, it is important to remember that positive institutional or structural change requires an enormous amount of coordination and collaboration and will not happen overnight. It is a long and arduous process that must include the opinions, ideas and suggestions from all those involved. It is the belief of the Trotter Institute that the CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project Assessment is a big step in that direction.

PreService Orientation Program

➢ Provide a PreService Orientation program for Site Supervisors. This could be put on by UMASS Boston's College of Public and Community Service or could be jointly run with the CTCNet's Leadership Development Institutes (LDI). Orientation topics should include, but are not limited to "Managing a VISTA", "Responsibilities of Being a Site Supervisor" and "Procedures and Paperwork for Site Supervisors".

- Add a larger component to the programmatic section of the PSO to include more sensitivity training on ethnic and racial diversity as well as working in economically disadvantaged communities.

- Include more workshop/classes on financial planning and obtaining benefits (health, food stamps, etc).

- Encourage more face-to-face interaction between new VISTA Members and veteran VISTA Members.

Training, Support and/or Mentoring

- The CTC VISTA Project Staff should consider routinizing and visiting CTC sites in the Boston metropolitan area on a regular basis. This will allow them to gain a better handle on what is going on within the CTC sites.

- The CTC VISTA Project should consider having more regional meetings not only within the Boston metropolitan areas, but in other parts of the country as well. One way to facilitate this is to develop VISTA Regional Leaders, individuals that are mature and possess some managerial skills. Regional VISTA Leaders would be responsible for coordinating regional meetings with VISTA Members and Site Supervisors. They would also act as liaisons between regional CTC VISTA sites and the national headquarters site at UMASS Boston. If cost is an issue, then the VISTA Project should rely more on multimedia tools such as video conferencing, streamlining video and/or audio over the Internet in order to enhance project cohesiveness.

- In addition to regional meetings, the CTC VISTA Project should consider encouraging more cross-site meetings between CTCs. Monthly meetings can be held at different CTC VISTA sites within a region. In those meetings, the host site can use part of the time to present their work and goals (in some cases using

multimedia tools). This will add to the exchange and free flow of information and ideas from one site to another.

➢ The CTC VISTA Project should consider providing VISTA Members and Site Supervisors with more technical training and community building workshops, classes, seminars and tutorials. This can be done by partnering with local organizations that specialize in these areas, through online and distance learning programs/organizations or through the College of Public and Community Service at UMASS Boston.

➢ Have all VISTA Members and Site Supervisors sign "work contracts" that clearly outline their service responsibilities, tasks, and expectations (similar to the "Overview of Basic Requirements/Guidelines for CTC VISTAs and Site Supervisors". This will cut down on misunderstandings and foster a more healthy and productive working relationship.

➢ Provide VISTA Members with more assistance in finding affordable and safe housing before they begin their service year, especially for VISTAs placed in sites within metropolitan areas where the cost of living is high such as Boston, Washington, D.C. and the San Francisco Bay Area.

➢ In an effort to provide better training, support and/or mentoring in all of the above areas, the CTC VISTA Project should consider strengthening leadership and communication throughout the organization. One way to do this is to make sure policies, procedures, guidelines, and job responsibilities are clearly communicated, written down and understood by *all* VISTA Members, Site Supervisors, CTC VISTA Staff and others involved with the project.   This will enhance accountability, increase responsibility and promote a respectful and professional working environment.

CTC VISTA Project Website

➢ The CTC VISTA Project should put more administrative documents/paperwork on the CTC VISTA Project website in order to reduce paperwork, improve accuracy, information sharing and increase the speed of processing documents.

➢ The CTC VISTA Project should consider developing a comprehensive online database that contains a list of all VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and CTC VISTA sites and all their contact information. The database should be password protected so that only current CTC VISTA Project-affiliated persons can access the database. Finally, VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and CTC VISTA Project Staff could access the online database to update their contact information, VISTA service year status, etc in real time.

➢ The website should be developed so that it is more user-friendly. It should contain colors that are softer on the eyes such as blues and/or pastel colors. In addition, the site should contain more pictures of events, CTC sites, VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and VISTA Project Staff.

➢ The CTC VISTA Project should consider encouraging more Site Supervisors and VISTA Members to use the website as a tool for accessing information/resources, databases, documents/paperwork and making announcements.   A way to do this is to make some documents/administrative paperwork/information available only on the website. Also, launch a website publicity campaign encouraging VISTA Members, Site Supervisors, VISTA Project Staff and friends of the CTC VISTA Project to access the site.

Integrating Programs into the CTC VISTA Project

➢ The events of September 11, 2001 have shifted the federal government's funding priorities towards homeland security. Thus the CTC VISTA Project should consider building on existing relationships with community technology and community building organizations such as CTCNet and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

➢ The CTC VISTA Project should develop ties and build relationships with external organizations that could enhance the sustainability of the project. For example, there are a number of private sector firms, foundations, universities and other nonprofits to which the CTC VISTA Project could approach for support. In addition, numerous nonprofit organizations exist that can enrich the resources of the CTC VISTA Project, such as the National Community Building Network or Contentbank.org. Given that the CTC VISTA Project is a national program, they should contact individual states for support—financial, hardware and software, technical assistance, etc.

➢ CTCNet's Leadership Development Institutes (LDI) is a resource that the VISTA Project can partner with to help Site Supervisors and VISTA Leaders gain skills to help them lead, manage and supervise their sites and VISTAs better. CTCNet's affiliation with the America Connects Consortium is also an area where they may be able to provide additional resources to the CTC VISTA Project.

➢ The National Service Resource Center (NSRC) is an organization that the CTC VISTA Project should reach out to for more support in the areas of training and technical assistance.

Online and Distance Learning Programs

➢ There are a number of different online/distance learning programs that the CTC VISTA Project could utilize including Element K, Free-Ed, Learnthat.com and Contentbank.org.

➢ There are also a number of organizations as well as online journals and newspapers that provide the latest information on developments in the online and distance learning fields.

CONCLUSION

The Trotter Institute's assessment of the CTC AmeriCorps*VISTA Project examined many aspects of the program: the PreService Orientation program; ways in which CTC VISTA Project Staff can provide better training, support and/or mentoring to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors; the CTC VISTA Project website; national and local programs/organizations that the VISTA Project can integrate with their existing programs; and took a comprehensive look at online and distance learning programs that could assist the CTC VISTA Project in providing technical and community building skills to VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and CTC VISTA Project Staff. Overall it appears that the CTC VISTA Project has been successful in meeting many of its goals. The CTC VISTA Project has for the most part been able to provide coordination, recruitment, training and support to VISTA Members and Site Supervisors.

However, as the Trotter Institute's assessment discovered, there are many areas in which the CTC VISTA Project can be improved. Without the proper leadership, support, communication and consistent follow-up, VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and even CTC VISTA Project Staff can experience isolation, alienation and frustration to the detriment of the project. It is within these areas that the Trotter Institute finds the greatest challenge for the CTC VISTA Project. As such, the recommendations outlined are made in order to assist the CTC VISTA Project in providing VISTA Members, Site Supervisors and CTC VISTA Project Staff with the resources and tools they need to operate a successful program.

APPENDIX 1: CTC VISTA Project Surveys

APPENDIX I: CTC VISTA Project Site Supervisor Survey

CTC VISTA Site
Supervisor Name: _____

Supervisor Title: _____

Gender: M F   Age: _____   Ethnicity: _____

CTC VISTA Site: _____

CTC VISTA
Site Address: _____
                                              (Street)

_____, _____ _____
            (City)   *(State)*   *(Zip Code)*

CTC VISTA Site   Website
Phone Number: _____   Address: _____

Email: _____@ _____

Interviewer   Interview
Name: _____   Date: _____

1.0   Service delivery

1.01   What are your job responsibilities in general?

1.02   What are your job responsibilities as they relate to the CTC VISTA Project?

1.03   What types of support/training/mentoring could be useful and/or needed from the
        CTC VISTA Project?

2.0   Working Relationship with CTC Vista Project Staff

2.01   How long has your organization/site had a CTC VISTA Project Member?

2.02   How many CTC VISTA Members do you supervise? How many CTC VISTA
        Members are at your site?

2.03   Does your site have any other AmeriCorps VISTA Members? How many?

2.04   What are the positive aspects of having a CTC VISTA Member(s)?

2.05   What are some of the challenges of having a CTC VISTA Member(s)?

2.06   As Site Supervisor, how often do you discuss future plans with the CTC VISTA Member?

2.07   As Site Supervisor, how often do you meet with your CTC VISTA Member (i.e. weekly, bi-weekly, etc.)?

2.08   Have you had any CTC VISTA Members dropout of your program? If so, what was the problem? What could be improved to reduce dropouts?

2.09   When you have a problem with a CTC VISTA Member, whom do you turn to for support?

3.0 Working Relationship with the CTC VISTA Project Staff

3.01   How often are you in communication with the CTC VISTA Project headquarters staff? What is the usual means of communication (i.e. e-mail, telephone, etc.)?

3.02   What are the reasons for communication with the CTC VISTA Project staff (administrative, program development, etc.)?

3.03   Do you feel the CTC VISTA Project staff clearly communicate goals and expectations to your site?

3.04   Overall, how would you rate the level of communication with Site Supervisors and CTC VISTA Project headquarters staff?

        3.04.1 Excellent   3.04.3 Fair
        3.04.2 Good   3.04.4 Poor

3.05   Overall, based on your experience as a Site Supervisor, what do you like about the CTC VISTA Project?

3.06   Overall, based on your experience as a Site Supervisor, what could be improved about the CTC VISTA Project?

Additional Interviewer Comments and Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX I: CTC VISTA Project Questionnaire for VISTA Members

CTC VISTA
Member Name: _____

Gender: M   F   Age: _____   Ethnicity: _____

CTC VISTA Site: _____

CTC VISTA
Site Address: _____
                                          (Street)

_____, _____ _____
           (City)   *(State)*   *(Zip Code)*

CTC VISTA Site   Website
Phone Number: _____   Address: _____

Email: _____@ _____

Interviewer   Interview
Name: _____   Date: _____

1.0   Service delivery

1.01   What are your job responsibilities?

1.02   Do you feel like you have the necessary resources and equipment to perform you
          job requirements? If not, what are some of the resources and equipment you feel
          you need

1.03   What are some of the positive aspects of your job?

1.04   What are some of the challenges of your job?

2.0   Working Relationship with CTC VISTA Project

2.01   How long have you been a CTC VISTA Member?

2.02   Did the CTC VISTA Project PreService Orientation program give you a good
          overview of the program? Please explain.

2.03   In what ways do you think the CTC VISTA PreService Orientation program can
          be improved?

2.04   How can the CTC VISTA Project be useful in providing you with the proper mentorship/support/training needed to perform your job adequately? Please explain.

2.04.1 Have you participated in training programs/events/workshops that have helped you do your job?

2.04.2 What are some of the training programs/events/workshops that you would like to see made available that might help you in doing your job?

2.05.1 How often are you in communication with the CTC VISTA Project headquarters staff?

2.05.2 What is the usual means of communication (e-mail, telephone, etc.)?

2.05.3 Why do you communicate with the CTC VISTA Project headquarters (i.e. administration-related, program development, etc.)?

2.06   Based on your experience as a CTC VISTA Member, what ways can the CTC VISTA Project be improved?

2.07   Based on your experience as a CTC VISTA Member, what do you like about the way the CTC VISTA Project is run?

3.0   Working Relationship with Site Supervisor

3.01   In your role as a CTC VISTA Member, do you feel like you are treated like part of the core site staff? (Yes/No) How so?

3.02   As a CTC VISTA Member, how often do you meet with your CTC VISTA Site Supervisor (i.e. once a week, bi-weekly, etc.)?

3.03   As CTC VISTA Member, how often does your CTC VISTA Site Supervisor discuss your future plans?

3.04   Have you been able to work well with your site supervisor? If not, what would you consider some of the challenges?

Additional Interviewer Comments and Notes:

APPENDIX I: CTC VISTA Project Questionnaire for
VISTAs Not Completing Program

CTC VISTA
Member Name:

_____

Gender: M   F   Age: _____   Ethnicity:

_____

CTC VISTA Site:

_____

CTC VISTA
Site Address:

_____
(Street)

_____, _____   _____
(City)   *(State)*   *(Zip Code)*

CTC VISTA Site   Website
Phone Number: _____ Address:

_____

Email: _____@ _____

Interviewer   Interview
Name: _____   Date:

_____

1.0   Background Information

1.01   What were you doing before you applied to become a CTC VISTA Member (in
         school, working, etc.)?

1.02   What initially got you interested in applying to the CTC VISTA Project to
         become a VISTA Member?

1.03   How long were you a CTC VISTA Member before you left the program?

1.04   Why did you leave the CTC VISTA Project (personal, professional, program
        staff, terminated, etc.)?

1.05   Overall, based on your experience as a CTC VISTA Member, how would you rate
        the overall effectiveness of the CTC VISTA Project PreService Orientation
        Program in preparing you for your job? Please explain.

        1.05.1   Excellent   1.05.3 Fair
        1.05.2   Good   1.05.4 Poor

2.0   Working Relationship with Site Supervisor

2.01   Overall, based on your experience as a CTC VISTA Member, how satisfied were
        you with your site placement?

        2.01.1 Very satisfied   2.01.3 Somewhat satisfied
        2.01.2 Satisfied   2.01.4 Not satisfied

2.02   Overall, based on your experience as a CTC VISTA Member, how would you rate
        the working relationship between you and your site supervisor(s)?

        2.02.1   Excellent   2.02.3 Fair
        2.02.2   Good   2.02.4 Poor

2.03   As a CTC VISTA Member, how often did you meet with your CTC VISTA Site
        Supervisor (i.e. once a week, bi-weekly, etc.)?

2.04   As a CTC VISTA Member, how often did your CTC VISTA Site Supervisor
        discuss your future plans after the program?

2.05   Overall, based on your experience as a CTC VISTA Member, how would you rate
        the support/training/mentoring that you got from your site supervisor?

        2.05.1 Excellent   2.05.3 Fair
        2.05.2   Good   2.05.4 Poor

3.0   Working Relationship with the CTC VISTA Project

3.01   Overall, based on your experience as a CTC VISTA Member, how would you rate
        the support/training/mentoring that you got from the CTC VISTA Project?

        3.01.1   Excellent   3.01.3 Fair
        3.01.2   Good   3.01.4 Poor

3.02   How often did you communicate with the CTC VISTA Project Staff? What was
        the usual means of communication (i.e. e-mail, telephone, etc.)?

3.03   Since you have left the CTC VISTA Project, what are you doing now (i.e. in
        school, working, etc.)?

Additional Interviewer Comments and Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____