

Overview of MEO VISTA Core Principles

The primary role of Montana Economic Opportunity (MEO) VISTA members is to help build a sustainable program by increasing the capacity of the organization.

Capacity Building: VISTAs expand the ability of sponsor organizations to fight poverty. Rather than providing services to low-income individuals and communities, VISTAs strengthen and support organizations by building infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, securing long-term resources

Except for brief training and educational purposes for project development, VISTAs should not be involved in performing direct services such as tutoring, teaching, counseling, driving clients, painting, manual labor, or clerical work.

- **Obtaining Sustainable Solutions:** VISTAs serve as a short-term resource to help sponsor organizations achieve lasting solutions to poverty.
- VISTAs are assigned to help build an organization to implement its antipoverty program on its own after a period of time (typically three years).
- Organizations should develop a long term sustainability plan beginning in year one of the project's existence, showing the eventual phase out of the VISTA resource.



Capacity Building vs. Direct Service

- **Capacity building** is working with staff and the communities to create, expand, or strengthen the systems and processes that help an organization carry out its anti-poverty work. These tasks and activities include the transfer of knowledge/skills, products, and relationships.
- **Direct service** refers to activities that immediately address a client's needs. For example, tutoring or providing a meal.

Examples of Capacity Building and Direct Service

| Capacity Building | Direct Service |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Recruit volunteers to build houses | Build Houses |
| Develop database of mentors | Mentor Teenagers |
| Write financial literacy course curriculum | Teach Financial Literacy Course |
| Setting up partnerships in the community | Deliver Meals on Wheels |
| Organize a Fundraiser | Provide Health Screening Services |

Acceptable Services vs. Capacity Building Activities and Sustainable Activities

| Acceptable Service | Capacity Building | Sustainable Activities |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Recruit Volunteers | Develop forms, Volunteer assignments | Develop Volunteer Handbook |
| Train Direct Service Providers | Write Training curriculum or the trainer curriculum | Develop Training Manual |
| Coordinate Projects | Develop procedures and systems for coordinating projects | Develop volunteer management system and procedural guide |
| Public Speaking | Develop speakers' bureau | Develop community partners |
| Write press releases | Develop press kits, media database | Secure media partners |
| Organize fundraising events | Grant writing; develop database | Secure project staff through additional funding |
| Organize task forces/coalitions | Develop structure of task force/coalition | Create infrastructure |
| Conduct outreach | Design brochures, posters | Create mechanism for project evaluation |

Strategies for Capacity Building Activities

- ❖ There are four key types of strategies to consider when building the capacity and, ultimately, the sustainability of your organization and VISTA project.
 1. Recruitment and management of volunteers
 2. Partnerships with community members and organizations
 3. Marketing and promotion
 4. Increase and diversification of resources

1. Recruitment and Management of Volunteers

- ❖ Developing a volunteer program where your volunteers recognize how their current and future roles and activities are key to sustaining your project.
 - ♦ VISTAs develop data bases, volunteer assignment descriptions, recruitment strategies, retention strategies, and recognition strategies that will be sustained.

2. Partnerships with Community Members and Organizations

- ❖ Create effective multidisciplinary solutions to community problems
Groups that excel in building collaborative relationships open doors to new projects, new funding, new clients, and volunteers.
 - ♦ VISTAs work across organizational boundaries to attract and keep the partners you need to solve problems

3. Marketing and Promotion

- ❖ **VISTAs can**
 - ♦ Generate opportunities for the print or electronic media to spread the word about your organization.
 - ♦ Focus the marketing pieces you create about your project.
 - ♦ Identify public forums that allow your project to tell its story well.
 - ♦ Create a public image and reputation that attracts supporters, customers, and partners

4. Increase and Diversification of Resources

- ♦ Develop a realistic plan to solicit contributions of cash or in-kind donations from local organizations
- ♦ Research funding and resources opportunities, write grants
- ♦ Work with local stakeholders to identify resources
- ♦ Identify in-kind resources
 - ♦ free marketing assistance from a local business,
 - ♦ donation of space for a meeting, or
 - ♦ food for a special event
 - ♦ training and technical assistance from community professionals

Possible Outcomes from Capacity Building Efforts by VISTA Members

- ❖ **Increase services**
 - ◆ Serving more beneficiaries
 - ◆ Increasing the utilization of services by existing beneficiaries

- ❖ **Expand service delivery**
 - ◆ Developing new programs/services or expanding existing programs/services
 - ◆ Improving the quality of programs or services

- ❖ **Strengthen organizational capacity**
 - ◆ Establishing new partnerships
 - ◆ Improving collaboration with existing partners

- ❖ **Improve infrastructure**
 - ◆ Improving internal systems (e.g., service delivery, volunteer recruitment and training, organizational management, performance measurement)

- ❖ **Increase operational resources**
 - ◆ Establishing/expanding pool of volunteers to assist with service delivering
 - ◆ Developing/expanding a more diversified funding stream

Resources

<http://www.meoprogrammt.org>

<http://vistacampus.org>

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org>

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/>

<http://www.americorps.gov/about/programs/vista.asp>