



Overview of VISTA Member Orientation for VISTA Supervisors

The AmeriCorps VISTA Member Orientation (VMO) is a self-directed online orientation that introduces members to the terms, conditions, and benefits of service and key program principles at the start of their service. VMO includes tutorials, online readings, and two live webinars.

The Curriculum

VISTA Member Orientation develops knowledge essential for success in VISTA service. The curriculum guides the VISTA through issues of legal and regulatory compliance, achieving the goals and objectives of the VISTA assignment, and managing their benefits and professional development opportunities.

VISTA Member Orientation includes the following elements:

- 1. Pre-Service Online Coursework:** These short tutorials explain the VISTA program, the benefits of service, and important policies for members to follow. VISTAs are responsible for understanding the information presented in all the tutorials and must certify their acceptance of the contents of "Civil Rights and Responsibilities" and "VISTA Terms and Conditions" prior to starting service.
- 2. Onboarding Forms:** These electronic forms allow the VISTA to manage their living allowance and other benefits.
- 3. Countdown to VISTA Service webinar:** This interactive session prepares VISTAs for their first day of service and answers questions about benefits, policies, and other topics.
- 4. Launching Your VISTA Service webinar:** This session reviews important program principles, provides a preview of the first month of service, explains how to get support, and concludes with the Oath of Service that officially inducts VISTAs into service.
- 5. Early-Service Coursework:** These tutorials guide the VISTA in understanding poverty, getting to know the community, the VISTA Assignment Description, and preparing for On-Site Orientation and Training.

Candidates must complete the onboarding forms and pre-service coursework prior to their arrival on site. Once at site, on the member's first day of service, the VISTA must participate in the webinar and submit the oath of service.

Requirements for Success

To successfully participate, an individual needs reliable access to the internet and phone, a high-school equivalence of English language proficiency¹, adequate equipment (laptop or desktop computer), and comfort with computer-based learning. If a VISTA candidate has a need for accommodation, due to a vision or hearing impairment, limited mobility, or use of hands, for example, the candidate should alert the VISTA Training Unit as soon as possible.

For the best experience, VISTAs should use a laptop or desktop computer to complete the onboarding forms, online tutorials, and attending the webinars. Using a smartphone or tablet is not recommended.

¹ Able to read "Readers Digest", or "USA Today", for example.

Member's First Day of Service

A VISTA member's first day of service is the day he or she attends the "Launching Your VISTA Service" webinar and takes the oath of service. It's essential that the VISTA supervisor is available on-site that day to orient the VISTA, get them settled, and ensure they attend the webinar. The AmeriCorps Regional Office will let you know the dates that you can start your VISTAs, which is usually the Monday at the beginning of a pay period.

Requirements for Activation

The VISTA program expects all candidates and members to fully participate and complete all aspects of the VISTA Member Orientation syllabus—onboarding forms, online coursework, webinars, and proper submission of the oath form. Failure to participate and complete an assignment may lead to deselection or termination of service.

Candidates and members must log in and participate individually from their personal or project-furnished computer—this pertains not only to completing online coursework but to joining webinars as well. Participating as a group on a single computer prevents an individual from fully participating and prevents recording that individual's attendance.

Mandatory Onboarding Forms

The VISTA Training Unit notifies candidates about two weeks before they begin service that they must complete their onboarding forms in my.americorps.gov. Candidates must complete all forms by the Wednesday before the candidate is scheduled to start service.

The forms include:

- Direct Deposit Information
- Federal Tax Withholding (W4)
- Unpaid Compensation Information (Designation of Beneficiary)
- End-of-Service Benefit Selection

If forms are not completed by the deadline, activating the candidate's benefits may be delayed.

Acceptance of Service Terms and Conditions

The VISTA Training Unit notifies candidates about two weeks before they begin service to take the Civil Rights and Responsibilities tutorial and the Terms and Conditions tutorial on the VISTA Campus and certify their acceptance of the content. The candidate must successfully record their acceptance no later than the Wednesday before their start date. If the candidate misses the deadline, the VISTA Member Support Unit will notify the candidate that s/he has 24 hours to record their acceptance. If the candidate does not meet the 24-hour deadline, the VMSU will inform the candidate, with a copy to the VISTA Supervisor and the Regional Office, that s/he may not report to site and may not begin service as scheduled. The candidate may attend a future VMO and start service at a later date.

Mandatory Attendance on Webinars

Candidates who are unable to participate in the "Countdown to VISTA Service" webinar must contact the VISTA Training Unit in advance to make arrangements to watch a webinar recording and access the associated materials.

If a candidate is at his/her site but fails to attend the “Launching Your VISTA Service” webinar and either (a) does not submit the electronic Oath form or (b) submits an Oath but was not sworn in by a federal official, the candidate has 24 hours as of notification to complete the requirements of their first day of service and avoid deselection. Failure to comply will lead to deselection.

If a candidate does not report to their site on the day of the “Launching” webinar, the Regional Office will determine the candidate’s status and inform the sponsor of available options.

Emergency absence will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Inappropriate Behavior

If a member engages in behavior that is disruptive, unprofessional, or otherwise inappropriate—verbally, in writing, through non-responsiveness, or lack of capacity—then the Regional Office, in coordination with the VISTA Training Unit, will determine if the member should continue VISTA service.

Supervisor and Sponsor Roles in VISTA Member Orientation

The VISTA Training Unit relies on the sponsor to inquire as to the candidate’s ability to succeed in online learning like VISTA Member Orientation (VMO). If a candidate has concerns about their ability to complete the VMO, then the sponsor should notify their Regional Office.

Once a candidate is placed in a VMO, the sponsor and supervisor must be able and prepared to support the syllabus in terms of:

- Ensuring that the candidate meets the requirements to successfully participate in VMO.
- Furnishing a work station (individual access to a computer and phone beginning on the first day of service)
- Aligning the member’s service schedule so that s/he can fully participate in the VMO webinar on the first day of service (usually 3:00 pm Eastern)
- Supporting the member participation in the VMO in every regard
- Ensuring the member submits the oath form in My AmeriCorps on the first day of service
- Implementing an On-Site Orientation & Training
- Reviewing the VISTA Assignment Description with the member to clarify activities, answer questions, and ensure the candidate understands the goals