Action Learning Challenge Toolkit

Increasing Collaboration Among AmeriCorps VISTAs

Created By:

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Executive Summary

❖ Background

Strategic networking among VISTA members and Leaders can yield numerous benefits to VISTAs, their organizations, and projects. While some VISTA members and leaders might find creative ways to reach out and engage in such partnerships, many others may not necessarily find it easy or have effective ways to network and build collaborations. Those who are able to do it benefit from sharing effective practices, expertise, and resources while enjoying peer support and socialization opportunities. Establishing and promoting strong local and regional networking and collaboration will also contribute to a greater collective VISTA identity and presence both locally and regionally.

❖ The Action Learning Challenge (ALC) Team

In February 2015, five VISTA Leaders from across the United States came together to address the question: "How can VISTAs and Leaders increase local and regional collaboration/networking among the VISTA population?" Over the past four months, the team "collaborated" to produce this toolkit to help VISTA members and VISTA Leaders increase collaboration among members. The team, spanning three time zones, utilized online meeting spaces, emails and phones to work together to come up with an easy-to-use and effective product that will benefit VISTAs and VISTA Leaders to increase regional, local and national collaboration among members.

They capitalized on each others' experiences with collaboration, conducted research and brainstormed best practices and ways to put this toolkit together in a way that would be most beneficial to the audience. The idea was to not only come up with new ideas, but also highlight the use of existing tools such as the VISTA Campus.

The team is proud of their work, and believes this guide will help VISTAs and VISTA Leaders think about fostering collaborations not only during but beyond their service years.

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Acknowledgements

The team believes that each member of this Action Learning Challenge project worked effectively and flawlessly together despite the distance and differences in time zones. They have the utmost respect and admiration for each other and has grown together both as individuals and leaders as well as a highly functioning team. They asked questions, effectively used the online platforms and respected each others' views and they believe it is all reflected in their final product.

However, none of this would have been possible without the team's ever so patient and fearless coach and facilitator, Kapila Wewegama. His constant guidance, encouragement and strong commitment to a collaborative environment allowed each member to thrive and become a stronger leader as well as a stronger team.

The team is also grateful to the Corporation of National and Community Service at headquarters and the states of North Carolina, Kentucky, Washington, and Virginia. They want to extend a special note of thanks to Andy King whose advisements and encouragement throughout the planning process was vital in the creation of this much needed tool to help increase collaboration among VISTA members and leaders across the country.

Finally, the team is extremely grateful to each of their sponsoring organizations for their support for not only over the past few months as the team worked on this project, but also for their constant commitment to building capacity to alleviate poverty in their communities. The team is proud to acknowledge Kentucky Campus Compact, North Carolina Campus Compact, Virginia Mentoring Partnership, North Helpline Emergency Services and Food Bank, and Spokane County United Way.

Corporation for NATIONAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE

Kentucky | Campus Compact

VIRGINIA MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

Every child who needs a mentor should have a mentor.

North Helpline Emergency Services & Food Bank

LIVE UNITED United Way Spokane County United Way

North Carolina Campus Compact

Meet the Team

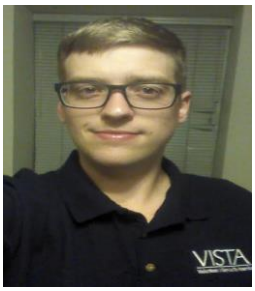
Gretchen Chomas

Gretchen is currently the VISTA Leader for Spokane County United Way in Spokane, WA. Prior to serving in Spokane, she served 1 year and 8 months as the Program Development VISTA for Inter Tribal Sports in Temecula, CA, where she was primarily responsible for the programmatic development of the health and wellness branch of the organization.

Perdita Das

Perdita is currently serving as a VISTA Leader for North Carolina Campus Compact for a cohort of 19 VISTAs. Prior to serving in NC, she served as a VISTA for a year with Connecticut Campus Compact in Bridgeport, CT doing a city-wide needs and assets assessment for future VISTA projects. Perdita has a total experience of 1.5 years in AmeriCorps VISTA.

Ryan Haskell



Ryan is currently almost 6 months into his service as a VISTA leader in Seattle, WA. Originally from Michigan, he moved out to Seattle a year and a half ago for a VISTA position doing development work at a food bank in Seattle.

Christopher Mackey

Chris Mackey has a little over 1 ½ years serving in AmeriCorps VISTA. He served as a VISTA member with the American Red Cross of Montana and he currently serves as a VISTA leader with Toward a Sustainable Kentucky. Chris also served 1 year with AmeriCorps State & National at Red Cloud Indian School in South Dakota.

Vanessa Reyes

Vanessa has been serving for 1 year and 11 months in the AmeriCorps VISTA program. She first served as a Mentoring Coordinator VISTA with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Richmond, Tri-Cities, & Hampton where she served military youth in Fort Lee and the surrounding Tri-Cities area of Virginia. Vanessa is currently serving as a VISTA Leader with the Virginia Mentoring Partnership providing VISTA support and professional development as they create sustainable mentoring programs across the state of Virginia.

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Mission, Vision and Goals

Mission

The mission of the AmeriCorps VISTA Action Learning Challenge team is to provide AmeriCorps VISTA members with an improved sense of community by providing them with an easy-to-use, sustainable, online tool that increases collaboration at the local, regional, and national level. This will lead to increased member and program satisfaction and enhance the VISTA support network, which will in turn strengthen the AmeriCorps VISTA program, improve the VISTA brand identity and benefit the people we serve.

Vision

The vision of the AmeriCorps VISTA ALC team is increased deliberate collaboration among VISTAs locally, regionally and nationally; leading to better VISTA retention, greater satisfaction among members and programs, a greater sense of community, increased peer support structure and greater branding of the VISTA identity.

Goals

Goal 1: To provide a mechanism/tool for VISTA members that will allow them to easily use the VISTA Campus (or other platforms like social media) to search and connect with VISTAs for the purpose of promoting collaboration and meaningful relationships.

Goal 2: To develop a strategy to promote and utilize this collaborative mechanism before, during, and after PSO.

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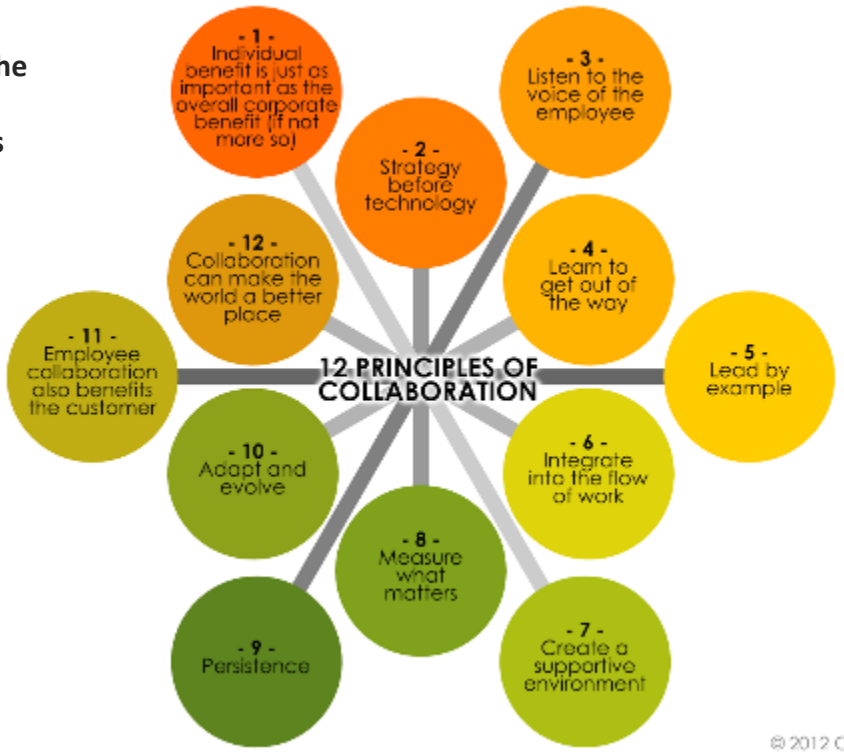
Why is Collaboration Important Among VISTAs?

Throughout our service years as VISTA members and leaders, it is extremely important to build lasting connections and relationships that would enhance the efficiency of the VISTA program and give additional support to individual VISTAs. These connections hold value both professionally and personally. Increased collaboration amongst VISTAs and VISTA leaders will not only strengthen the project or meet personal needs of the VISTA members but will also increase a sense of connection with national service (CNCS) itself.

Photo Courtesy: VISTA Campus

A failure to build connections and relationships among VISTAs isn't just a problem of missed networking opportunities. When there is a weak or nonexistent community among VISTAs, they miss out on chances to collaborate and improve their program and personal professional development. This lack of meaningful relationships leads to isolation among VISTA members, this isolation means missing out on shared experiences and a weak support system. Lack of a support system can be stressful on VISTAs who may have moved across the country and cause them to fall short of their full potential or drop out of the program altogether. VISTAs work better as a team that can lean on each other during and beyond the program.

This graphic outlines the basic principles of collaboration, why it is important and who it benefits



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Contents of the Toolkit

This toolkit is broken down into the following three parts. Please click on a box to access each portion:

A Guide for VISTA Leaders

A Guide for VISTA Members

A Recorded Webinar on how to utilize the VISTA Campus to Collaborate

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A GUIDE FOR VISTA LEADERS

Action Learning Challenge Toolkit for Increasing Collaboration Among AmeriCorps VISTAs

AMERICORPS VISTA
Volunteers In Service To America

Fight Poverty with PASSION

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Introduction

❖ A Message for VISTA Leaders

As VISTA Leaders, we have the added advantage of being able to look at our entire cohort, identify opportunities for collaboration and guide our members through that process. There are many tools and guides out there to foster both in-person and online partnerships, but we wanted to take this opportunity to highlight the VISTA Campus and other tools that are effective for our year of service.

Overall, it is quite evident that VISTAs are missing out on the opportunity to maximize on each others' experiences. The challenge is nationwide and affects every AmeriCorps VISTA member, leader, and project. Even VISTA cohorts with members who are geographically close to one another have little or no knowledge of other AmeriCorps members or AmeriCorps VISTA member in their cities, their states, and their regions. The focus of this guide will be connecting members and alums on the local, regional, and national level with each other and YOUR role as a VISTA Leader in that process.

This guide is visual and contains links to the recorded webinar that we created for better utilization of VISTA Campus as well as links to other online platforms. The Action Learning Challenge Team believes that this will be an effective guide for VISTA Leaders as we fulfill those roles ourselves and have created it in a way that will be most helpful to you.

Happy Reading!

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SECTION I: WHAT WE KNOW NOW

The members of this Action Learning Challenge team have a combined nine years of experience serving with AmeriCorps VISTA. The longer we serve in AmeriCorps, the more we realize the substantial benefits collaboration and networking can bring to VISTA members. In this section we wish to share stories that highlight the importance of collaboration and provide a few key points summarizing what we have learned about collaboration during our VISTA terms. It would have been incredibly beneficial if we knew at the beginning of our first AmeriCorps VISTA terms what we know now. Our hope is that VISTA members and VISTA leaders, especially those just beginning their service terms, will use this information in order to build on our successes and learn from our mistakes.

*Photos provided by ALC Team Members Vanessa Reyes and Gretchen Chomas

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Gretchen Chomas

As a VISTA Leader with the Spokane County United Way (SCUW) I wish I would have known the range of difficulties I would face. I highly recommend asking questions to other VISTA leaders on the VISTA Campus and VISTA Leader Facebook groups and staying in touch with the other leaders from your PSO group. Given that I never had a VISTA Leader and I was the first VISTA Leader for SCUW, I spent a lot of time synthesizing what VISTA Leaders from other cohorts had already done while talking with my cohort about what they needed. If I could start my leader term again I would definitely ask for more resources from other VISTA Leaders and the Corporation for National & Community Service about topics such as reporting, project recruitment, timekeeping, professional development & training and working with site supervisors.

Perdita Das

After transitioning to North Carolina from Connecticut, I suddenly faced the challenges of bringing together a cohort that are geographically distanced from each other. As savvy as I am with social media, it still was a learning process for me understanding online meeting platforms, their limitations and getting members to talk with each other. It took me a while to realize that I, as the VISTA Leader, have to take the lead into sparking possible partnerships. During our online trainings, I incorporated check-in questions that started to get the members talking to each other. For my next cohort starting in August 2015, I am introducing bi-monthly Google hangout calls specific to project focus areas to allow more conversations based on their projects. Had I known better, I would have done more research into how to make our online meetings more dynamic and collaborative and would have educated myself a bit more on online communications among teams. This would have probably allowed me to create a collaborative workspace earlier on.

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Ryan Haskell

If I could start over, I would have done more before becoming a VISTA leader to build community in my group. I would have found the time and taken the initiative without the worry of seeming too pushy or bossy. The goal of networking isn't just some "jargony" buzzword for business types to sell you things. It's essential for another easily overlooked aspect of any type of work or AmeriCorps service: enjoying what you do and enjoying the people with whom you work. People who enjoy what they do are more likely to be generally happy, are usually more productive, and are more likely to have colleagues with whom they can collaborate, share knowledge, and depend upon during and after their job or service term ends.

Chris Mackey

For VISTA leaders: Set expectations. Include expectations and information about VISTA collaboration during new VISTA orientation and training sessions. If you set clear expectations from day one your VISTA team will hopefully be more inclined to collaborate throughout their service terms. Additionally, let VISTA members know that expectations are not a one-way street. Set clear expectations for yourself as VISTA leader and let new VISTAs know how you will support them and provide them with collaborative and team-building opportunities.

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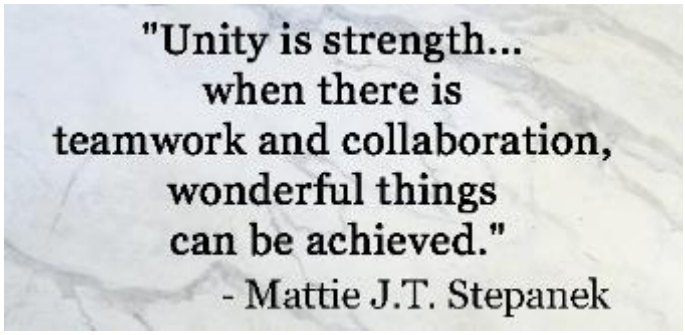
Vanessa Reyes

My aha moment was as a VISTA Leader seeing my VISTA cohort collaborating on mentoring events and opportunities. They reached out to each other several different ways. They planned mentor/mentee appreciation and reflection events. They created collaboration opportunities not only for themselves but also for the volunteers to find camaraderie within a community of individuals who wanted to make an impact. Because they worked together, they were able to pull resources and accomplish great things. Had I thought in a similar mindset when I was a VISTA, I too would have been able to reach out to my fellow VISTAs and come up with equally grand events.



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What We Know Now: Key Points

Host events and informal get-togethers! VISTAs who know each other are much more likely to communicate and collaborate.

Set expectations for VISTA members about participating in collaborative projects, activities, or events; periodically remind VISTAs about connecting and collaborating throughout their VISTA terms.

Get to know VISTA members so you can connect those with similar projects or focus areas.

Communicate regularly with VISTA members. If your VISTA team members serve far from one another, attempt in-person meetings, but try to connect virtually on a regular basis.

Use social media to connect VISTA members, but try to limit the number of online platforms you use in order to avoid sending redundant information. That said, if one online platform (say, a Facebook group) is not working, try another social media tool to increase collaboration.

Seek out especially motivated VISTA members in your cohort and ask them to help you provide opportunities for VISTA collaboration.

Attempt to connect your VISTA team with other AmeriCorps members and other VISTA members in your area.

Participate as a group in Corporation for National and Community Service Days of Service and in other volunteer projects.

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SECTION II: USING THE VISTA CAMPUS FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

VISTA Campus is an online platform created for the purpose of helping those committed to fighting poverty -- VISTA members, leaders, supervisors and alumni -- learn, connect, collaborate and network. In this section we will provide a brief overview of how to create a profile on VISTA Campus and then highlight several features that promote collaboration and networking between VISTAs at the local and the national level!

The step-by-step guide on how to use the VISTA Campus has been created in two parts

A written guide with pictures included in this document beginning on the next page.

A recorded webinar presented by ALC team members Chris and Perdita with a tour of the VISTA Campus.

Click here to view.

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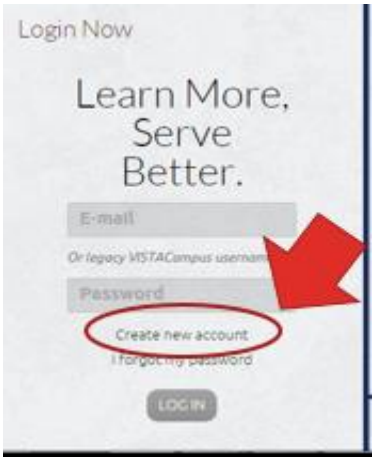
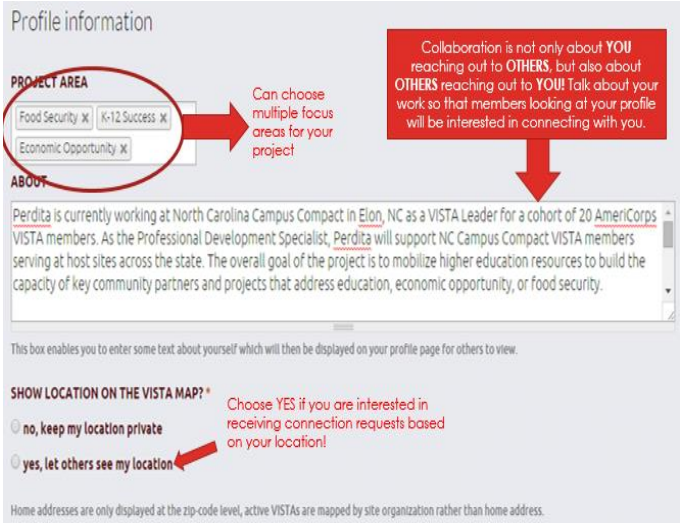
Using the VISTA Campus to Collaborate
First Step: Creating a VISTA Campus Profile

Setting up a VISTA Campus account and profile is extremely quick and easy! Go to the VISTA Campus website, click the LOG IN button at the top of the homepage, and click Create New Account. To create a new account you will need a valid email address. You will then select your user type (VISTA member, VISTA leader, alumni, etc.) and provide information about yourself that will be included in your VISTA Campus profile.

There are two other aspects of creating a VISTA Campus profile that are important to note:

- You are able to select your privacy settings in order to limit who is able to see your profile
- You can select whether you wish to include your information and location on the VISTA Map. See the VISTA Map section below for more details about the VISTA Map feature.





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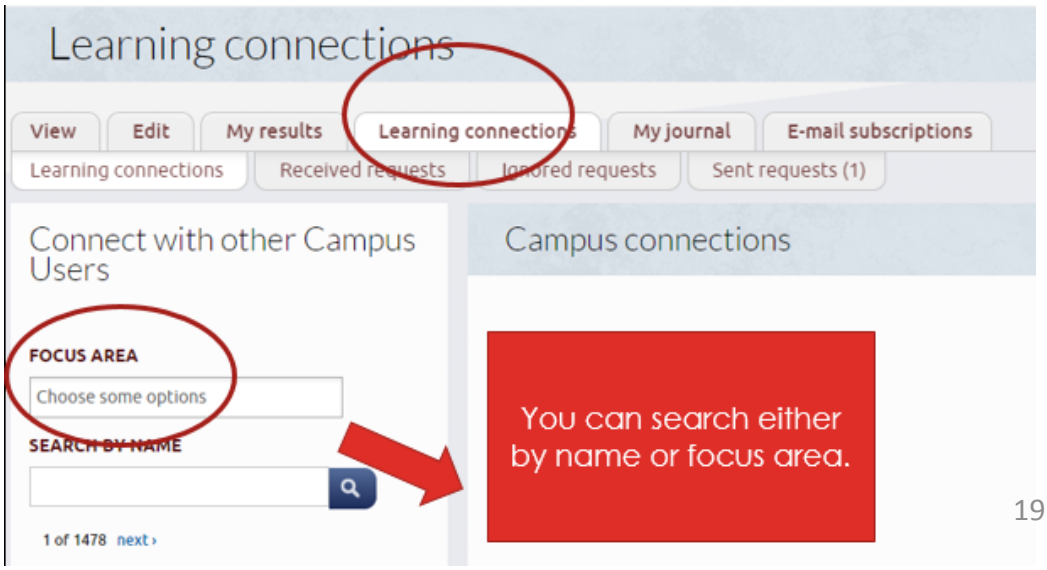
Second Step: Using the Campus to Collaborate

Learning Connections

The Learning Connections feature on VISTA Campus is a social networking tool for those dedicated to alleviating poverty and building capacity! This feature allows VISTA members, leaders, supervisors and alumni to connect with one another in order to share resources, send messages and keep in touch.

After creating a VISTA Campus profile and logging in to VISTA Campus (which you must do in order to utilize the Learning Connections feature) click on Learning Connection in the "Connect and Learn" tab on the VISTA Campus homepage. In the Learning Connections page you can search for VISTAs by name or by focus area. To send someone a Learning Connection request click the plus sign and click send! Once you send a request you will get an email notification of when the request has been accepted.



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VISTA Maps

When combined with the Learning Connection feature, the VISTA Map is a great tool for VISTA collaboration. Whether you are a VISTA member new to your area or a VISTA leader looking to connect VISTA members on your team, the VISTA map provides a great visual way of building a sense of community and fostering collaboration among VISTAs!

As mentioned above, you are able to post your information on the VISTA Map when you first create a VISTA Campus profile. Once you are on the map, you can access the VISTA Map feature by logging into your VISTA Campus account and clicking VISTA Map in the "Connect & Learn" tab of the VISTA Campus homepage.

The VISTA Map page allows you to search for, among other groups, active VISTA members, VISTA leaders, alumni, and supervisors. As an example, let us say you are a VISTA member and your focus area is education:

- Click the Filters button, find Education under Focus Area and limit your search to VISTA members only. This pulls up other VISTA members also focusing on education!

- You will then click on their individual profiles and, if you want to connect with them through the Learning Connection feature, you click the plus to send a Learning Connection request!

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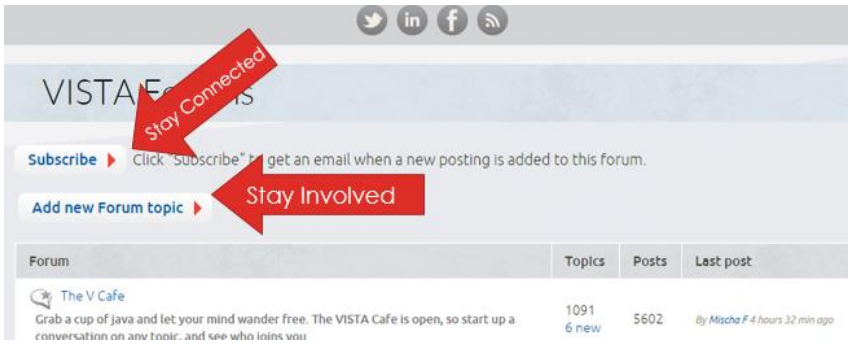
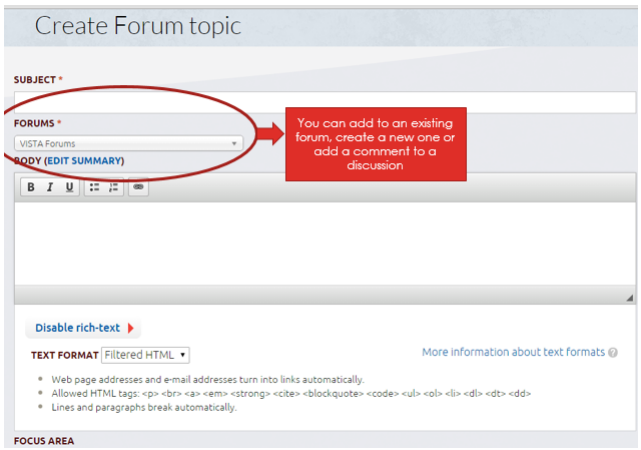
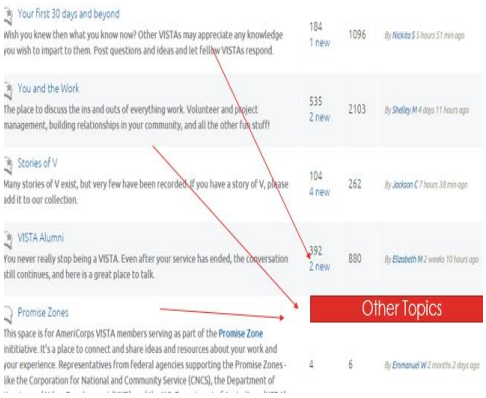
VISTA Forums

The Forums page is divided into three sections: forums for VISTA members, VISTA leaders, and VISTA supervisors. The VISTA member forum page is itself divided into a number of different subjects, all of which are helpful for connecting VISTA members with one another. For example, in one post in the V Café forum (a general post forum), a VISTA member new to the Chicago area asked other VISTAs in the area for information about Facebook groups, email lists, or other ways of connecting with other AmeriCorps VISTA members in the area. Three VISTA members responded to the post with welcomes and information about getting connected with the local VISTA community!







The VISTA Leaders forum has several sub-sections as well. If you're a new VISTA leader it makes sense to check out the "I'm a New Leader" forum. For networking and collaboration resources and tips as well as much more information on a variety of VISTA-related topics, leaders can go to the Leader Open Space forum.

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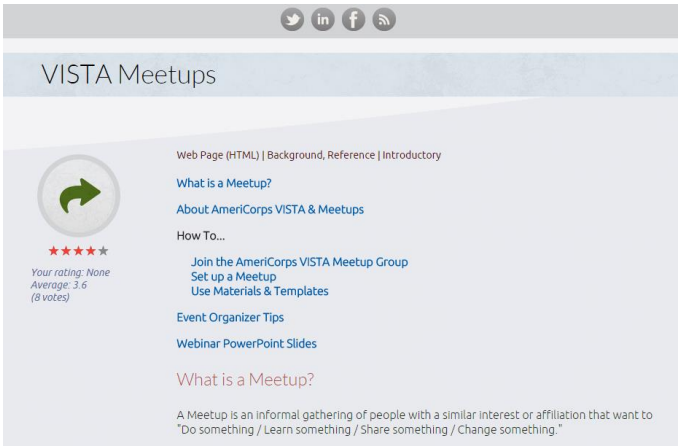
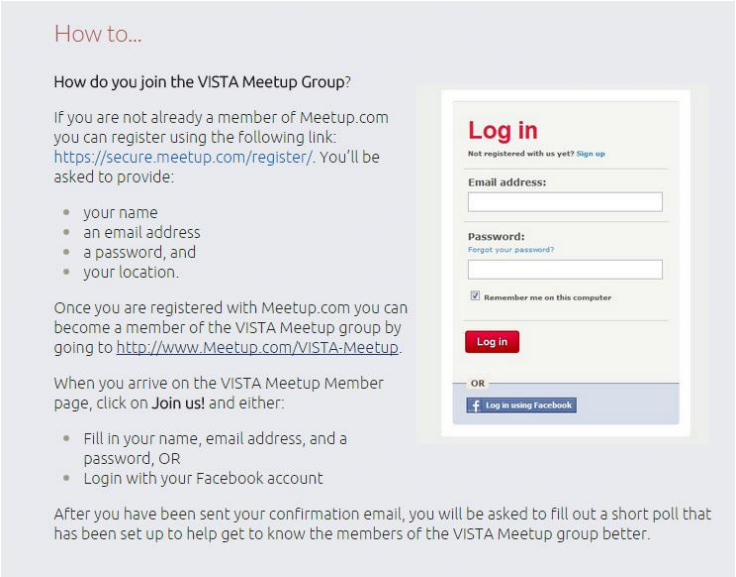
VISTA Campus and Meetup.Com

Are you looking for a way of finding and meeting up with other VISTA members in your area? AmeriCorps VISTA has collaborated with Meetup.com to make this process much easier! Meetup.com is the world's largest network of local groups. This online tool makes it easy for anyone to organize a local group or find one of the thousands of existing groups.

For AmeriCorps VISTA leaders and members, Meetup.com is an ideal way of organizing an informal event or get-together for local VISTAs. Go to the Meetup registration page, create an account and follow the instructions provided in VISTA Campus to set up a VISTA Meetup event. By facilitating face-to-face meetings of VISTA members through Meetup.com, you can help build a sense of community among your fellow VISTAs and increase opportunities for collaboration and networking!





How to...

How do you join the VISTA Meetup Group?

If you are not already a member of Meetup.com you can register using the following link: https://secure.meetup.com/register/. You'll be asked to provide:

- your name
- an email address
- a password, and
- your location.

Once you are registered with Meetup.com you can become a member of the VISTA Meetup group by going to http://www.Meetup.com/VISTA-Meetup.

When you arrive on the VISTA Meetup Member page, click on **Join us!** and either:

- Fill in your name, email address, and a password, OR
- Login with your Facebook account

After you have been sent your confirmation email, you will be asked to fill out a short poll that has been set up to help get to know the members of the VISTA Meetup group better.

If you are looking for more information about increasing VISTA collaboration by hosting events and meetups, see the Events section of this toolkit.

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Can I Get a Copy of That?

If you are a VISTA leader looking for ways of increasing collaboration and networking opportunities for VISTA members on your team, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. The Can I Get a Copy of That? section, located under the "Leaders" tab on the VISTA Campus homepage, provides VISTA leaders with products and templates ready for use or adaptation.

Conclusion

The more members of this Action Learning Challenge team explore VISTA Campus, the more we realize how much this site has to offer. For the purposes of building community and increasing collaboration among VISTAs, the VISTA Campus is extremely helpful!

The VISTA Campus is not only a great resource but also an existing collaborative tool for VISTA members, Leaders and supervisors! It is an alternative to traditional social media and brings together all those dedicated to fighting poverty across the nation.

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SECTION III: USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO FOSTER COLLABORATION AMONG VISTA MEMBERS

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Social Media Guide: Introduction

In this rapidly developing age of social media, it has very quickly become a vital tool used in making not only personal, but professional, connections. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have become well known and frequently used platforms for people to keep in touch and to network.

VISTA members start using social media during or right after Pre-Service Orientation -- usually one person takes the initiative to create a Facebook group or other collaborative tool. Throughout the year the group becomes a great way for members to share resources and keep in touch with each other. However, it is easier to create and join social media groups than to keep members engaged. This section will highlight some commonly used social media tools in the non-profit world and how to keep VISTA members collaborating and networking via social media throughout their service terms.

Where to Start

As mentioned in earlier sections, it is important for VISTA members to form, maintain and expand a network to share resources, workshop challenges, connect with AmeriCorps VISTA alumni and form relationships with key community partners. One platform that we as members and leaders should utilize more is the VISTA Campus! That is a great place to start. VISTA Campus has crucial information for VISTA members' and leaders' years of service as well as tools for forming connections with VISTA members and leaders locally and nationally. The Campus may seem daunting, so we added a quick how-to webinar with this toolkit. Please click here.

Utilize the campus as a resource to share professional development opportunities for your VISTAs and promote the collaborative tools at intervals. Keep an eye out for events and networking opportunities promoted on the campus that you can share with your members.

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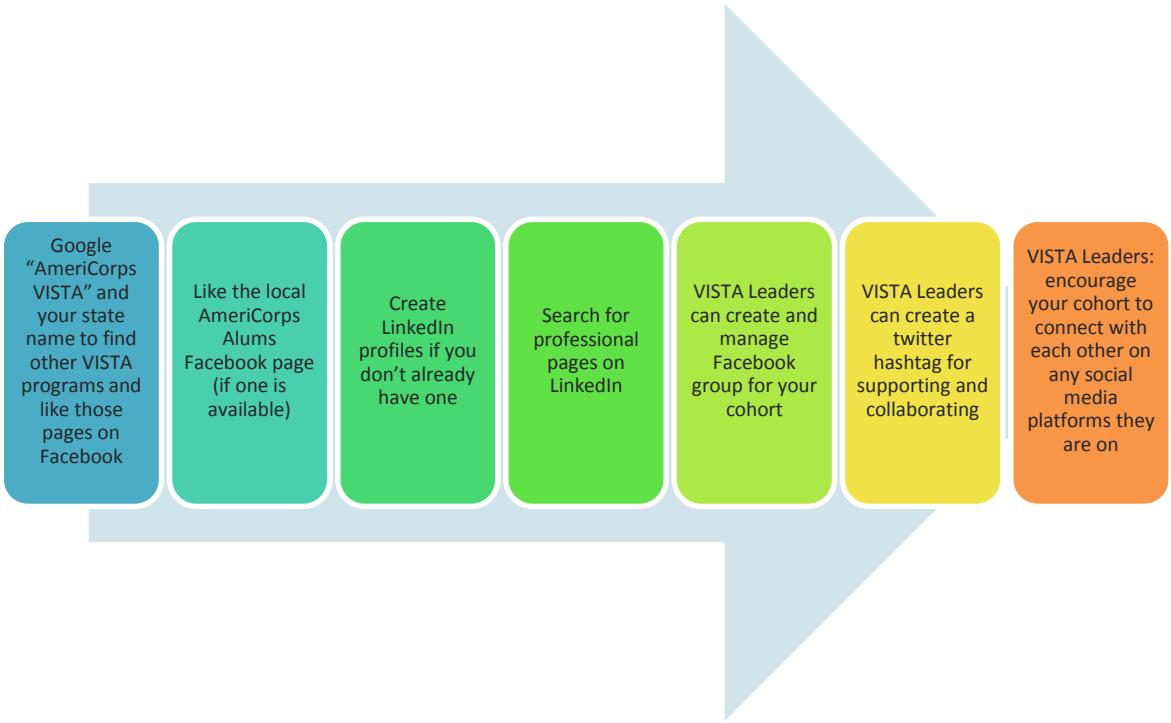
Utilizing Social Media To Collaborate

Social media is not just a great tool for connecting with other VISTAs. It can also be utilized for building and maintaining a collaborative network of VISTA members, leaders, supervisors, and alumni. Facebook groups and Twitter hashtags are a good example of this and are highlighted below.

As a VISTA Leader, you have a unique position to look at your cohort and spark possible partnerships. For example, members who are geographically apart but who are working on similar food insecurity projects are great potential candidates for collaboration. You can maintain closed Facebook groups among your cohorts, encourage your members to join local AmeriCorps Alums Facebook groups or connect members with social media groups related to community partners. All of these connections have the potential for fostering personal and professional growth for your VISTA cohort members.

Where and How to Reach Members on Social Media



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Social Media Platforms and Keeping Members Engaged

This section of the toolkit revisits some common social media platforms used by VISTA members and leaders. We wanted to approach this section to share how to utilize social media to form partnerships between VISTA members both within and outside your cohort. It is simple to find someone on Facebook but that is not what connection is about. It is important to engage in meaningful conversations, and VISTA leaders have an opportunity to take a lead on doing that online.

Another aspect of that is to talk about your VISTA service. If you are managing your organization's social media, constantly update and talk about what is currently happening. Collaboration is not only about you reaching out to others, it is also about attracting others to collaborate with YOU.

The following is a list of tools and ways to collaborate online:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Blogging
- Tumblr
- Slideshare
- Online Meeting Platforms
- Scheduling Tools

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Facebook

You can utilize this highly popular platform to connect with members, leaders, alums and project organizations. You can like pages and share resources on your personal timelines. But the easiest way to maintain a network of VISTA members who are geographically apart is to organize a Facebook Group. Groups are a great way to create a virtual private and safe space for VISTAs to casually engage with one another.

Tips and Tricks to Maintain Interest:

Daily Interaction

- Be sure to interact with your members every day.
- Do not be an absentee leader.
- Provide the opportunity for your members to interact in different ways each day. For example:

  Monday – Share your site info day.
  Tuesday — Post a tip day.
  Wednesday – Like a page day.
  Thursday – Your favorite quote day.
  Friday – VISTA reflection day.

Ask for group members' advice

- They may want to change the structure of daily topics.
- They may have something insightful to add to the group.

Hold Events

- Encourage participation in the group by holding contests, games or other similar events that would arouse interest in your members.

Just Be There

- Do not neglect your group.
- Make sure you can put in the time and effort your group and members will need before creating the group.
- A group will need constant attention, nurturing and encouragement if it is going to grow into an effective means of collaboration.

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Facebook Continued

Making it Personal

The vital component to keeping members engaged is to connect with them. There are many ways that you can create a personal connection through Facebook:

Photo of the Day :–

Multipurpose tool to thank donors/partners, show behind the scenes, and highlight the accomplishments of your VISTA members.

Use Meaningful Quotes :-

Quotes can engage the reader into commenting. Try different ways of including quotes through photos, memes, even comic strips can provide an engaging and entertaining way to connect.

Reply, Reply, Reply :-

Always take the time to reply to comments and questions even if it's a few days later. Like comments that are appropriate.

For more information on Facebook group logistics: https://www.facebook.com/help/167970719931213#How-do-I-create-a-group?

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Twitter

Since Twitter has a character limit, using photos is a good way to catch people's attention. If you are interested in sharing important information with other VISTAs via Twitter, you can always capture a screenshot and convert into a picture. (see appendix for information on screenshots). By doing this you are still able to present the information you need without using up your characters.

As a VISTA leader, you can also:

- Use a hashtag that is unifying for your members such as #SupportTheCohort (Something used at NC Campus Compact).
- Create a culture where members can use that hashtag to connect and share resources with each other.
- Another way you can connect two members is by posting something like:

Hey @VISTA1! @VISTA2 is working on a #CampusKitchen project like yourself and was featured in this news article! You two should talk!

Tips and Tricks to Maintain Interest

For more information about Twitter: https://support.twitter.com/groups/50-welcome-to-twitter

For more information on how to find content on Twitter: https://support.twitter.com/groups/53-discover

Photo of the Day –
Provide a brief description of photo, relevance, and use Twitter handles when possible

Blogging –
Share any posts through twitter for better exposure and content

Retweet –
Connect with partner organizations and retweet their posts

Make it Relevant –
Share data about the targeted community issues for your VISTA site i.e. homelessness. Statistics can motivate people to retweet.

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LinkedIn

LinkedIn is not only a great platform to make professional connections for individuals, but can be used to foster a professional group environment as well. It can sometimes be more dependable as it has gained a reputation for being career and professional development oriented rather than just another social media platform.

It is important to keep in mind that LinkedIn is a professional network. Your posts should be more directed and less light hearted than other social media outlets, such as Facebook.

VISTA Leaders: connect to VISTAs in your cohort.

When you send out connections requests, personalize them. i.e. "It was great meeting you at PSO. I hope that we can connect and further talk about..."

Post articles related to professional development, VISTA, or issues related to your site.

When creating your profile, make sure it's complete and don't skip over things that make your profile well rounded include hobbies and volunteerism. These are possible connection opportunities.

As you make connections, comment on others' success. & updates i.e. a new job or article posting

Request informational interviews. Don't ask professional contacts for a job. Instead, ask for a brief phone conversation to seek their job search advice. VISTA Alumni, partner organizations, and industry leaders are often willing to do so.

For more information regarding using LinkedIn, please visit: https://help.linkedin.com/

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YouTube

For those who are more visual, having a YouTube channel is a great way of keeping them engaged. VISTAs can talk about their service, make catchy videos or even do a speaker series. VISTA leaders can post tutorials or videos of interest for members and encourage them to view and comment on the videos. You are able to keep your YouTube channel private to avoid outside comments.

Ideas for Youtube:

Keep it Relevant

- Make sure you keep subscribers engaged by staying on topic.
- Connect relevant content from partner organizations.

Local News

- Community engagement events and festivals.

Speaking engagements

- Make sure the content is relevant to your VISTA site and audience.

Promotional Videos

- Recruitment for new VISTAs, information about your site, recruitment for volunteers for your site or partner sites.

Evergreen content

- This is a great place to share this content that can be viewed at anytime.
- It should have no ties to anything that could date the video such as statistics or local events. (For more information regarding evergreen content see the appendix).

For more information on how to manage Youtube content:
https://support.google.com/youtube/?hl=en#topic=4355266

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Blogging

Using blogging sites is a great way to tell stories and get others interested in VISTA and VISTA collaboration. Provide opportunities for members to write blog pieces highlighting their service projects, their growth as a VISTA, and ways they collaborate and network with other VISTAs.

Examples of blog ideas and tips for blogging:

- **Share stories from days of service (September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance; Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service; National Volunteerism Day)**
- **Share reflections on AmeriCorps themed days (VISTA anniversary; AmeriCorps week)**
- **Share the origin story of your sites**
- **Follow other blogs that are related to your site and VISTA**
- **Ask for guest stories from community partners.**
- **Highlight a contributor of the month.**
- **Above all else, include photos!**

For more information regarding creating a blog:
https://support.google.com/blogger/#topic=3339243

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Tumblr

Encourage your members to utilize platforms like Tumblr to share photos and stories that are of interest to other VISTA members. This is another tool for those who are visual. It is also a cross between a photo sharing platform and a blog so this is also a great spot to highlight service events, networking opportunities, alternative breaks, etc.

For more information on how to find content on Tumblr:
https://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/discovery

Slideshare

Another way to collaborate is to share work pieces. SlideShare is a great tool to share or search for existing Powerpoints. Encourage your members to share presentations with each other, especially common ones such as community volunteer training, VISTA member orientation slideshow presentations.

For more information on how to manage content on Slideshare:
http://help.slideshare.com/categories/20066309-Managing-content-on-SlideShare

Online Meeting Platforms

Google Hangouts, Skype or other professional platforms such as Adobe Connect can be used to hold virtual meetings and networking events. Ask check-in questions to get everyone talking, provide opportunities for smaller group conversations, and host virtual meetings such as a book club. Online meeting platforms are great for connecting VISTAs who serve geographically disparate locations.

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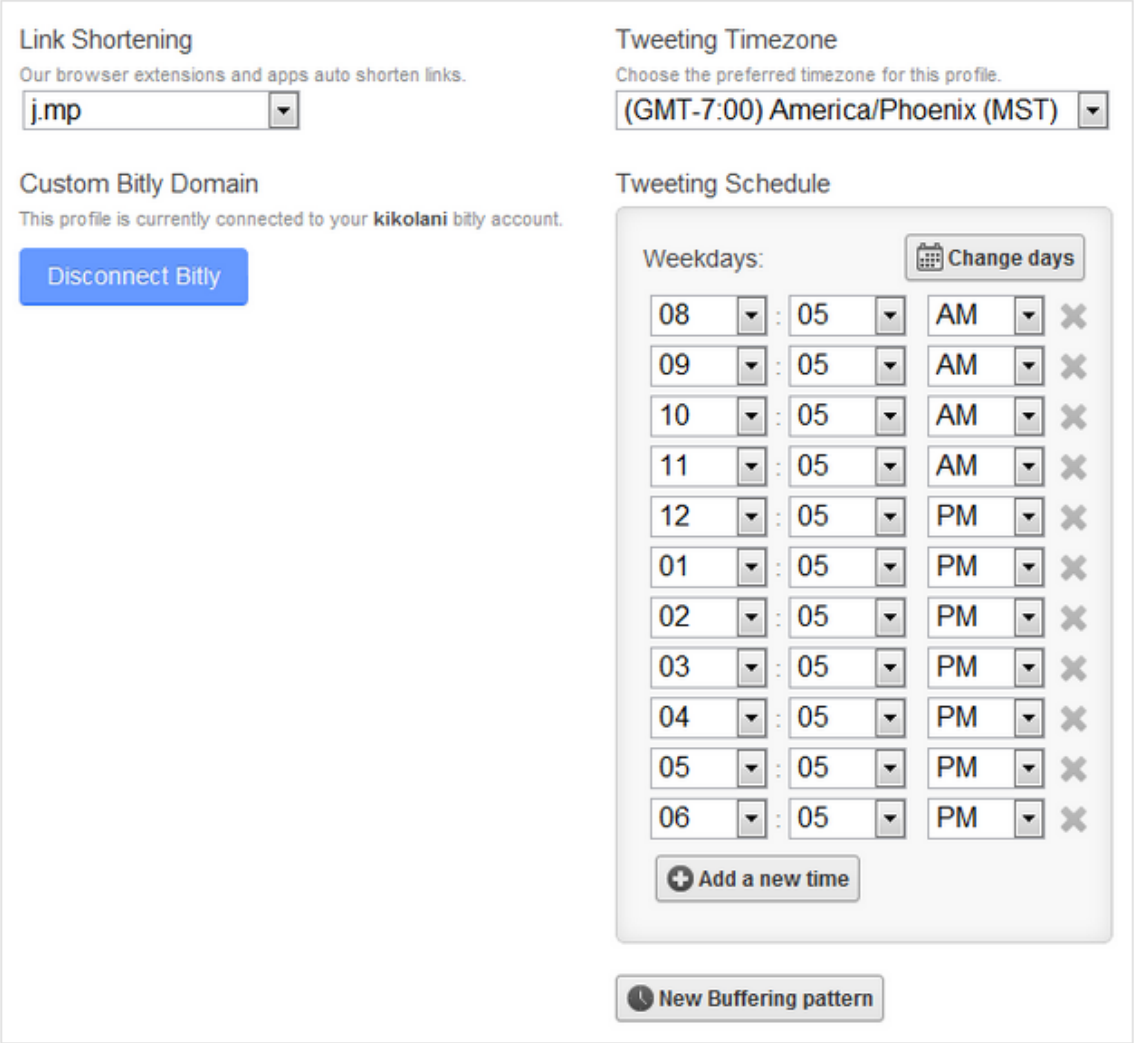
Scheduling Tools

Our final tip is to use scheduling tools. In order to maintain engagement, it is important to get a steady schedule. By using a scheduling tool, things will get posted at times even if you don't have the time. This constant communication will keep people engaged but be careful of stale content or over-posting.

Buffer is a scheduling tool that allows you to schedule and publish updates. Unlike other platforms where you have to schedule each update at a specific time, Buffer allows you to set up a specific scheduling pattern. When you add an update to your Buffer, it will be set out at the next available time slot. Updates can be sent to your Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. You can use Buffer to update one Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn account for free with up to 10 updates scheduled at a time.



Screenshot of the Buffer scheduling platform

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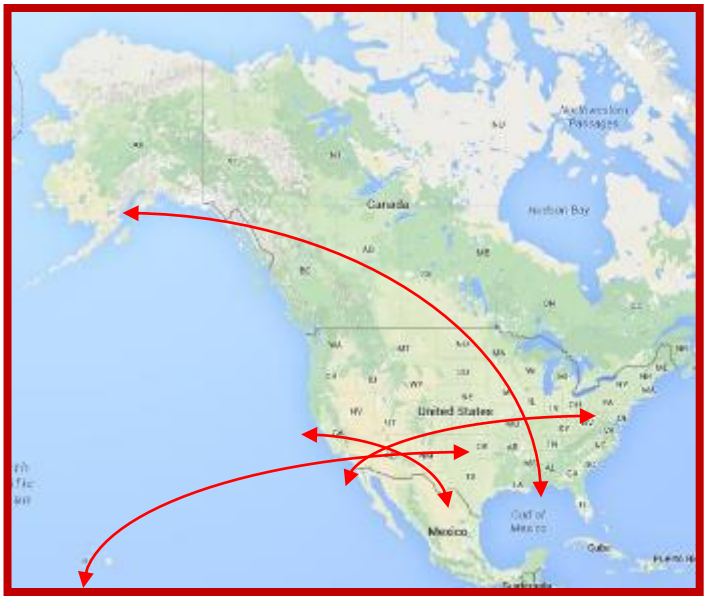
SECTION IV: COLLABORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES DURING NEW VISTA ORIENTATION

New AmeriCorps VISTA members, especially those relocating for their service term, often arrive at their host sites enthusiastic about serving but apprehensive about new responsibilities and unsure about how to connect with other VISTA members in their area. VISTA leaders and VISTA site supervisors can alleviate this apprehension and uncertainty and build a sense of community among members by incorporating tools for collaboration into new VISTA orientations or On-Site Orientation and Training sessions. The purpose of this section is to highlight several collaborative opportunities and tools to include in new VISTA orientation and training.



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Incorporating Collaborative Opportunities during On-Site Orientation (OSOT)

Previous sections in this Action Learning Challenge project provide more detailed information about fostering collaboration using VISTA Campus and social media. However, there are a number of ways for individuals conducting new VISTA orientation or OSOT trainings to promote collaboration and foster a sense of VISTA community at the local level. The following is a step by step guide to help you do that:

Send new VISTA members a welcome letter that includes information about collaborating with other members of the VISTA cohort

Utilize PowerPoint (click here for a template) for leading a new VISTA orientation and training session

Create an organizational chart that includes any VISTAs in your cohort, their site information, & contact information. sure to include leadership slots for VISTA supervisors, site supervisors, and VISTA Leaders.

Promote the use of VISTA Campus tools such as Learning Connections, Forums and the VISTA Map

Create a closed Facebook group for the VISTA cohort (a closed group allows VISTA members to interact with one another in a private, secure online setting); invite new VISTA members to join the group once they are selected

Ask VISTA members to like the Facebook page and follow the Twitter account of their VISTA site, their VISTA cohort, and/or their state Corporation for National & Community Service office as well as other appropriate organizations or agencies (i.e. AmeriCorps intermediaries such as Campus Compact; the state office of volunteerism and community service; etc.)

Continued on Next Page

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OSOT Guide Continued

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To promote collaboration and networking while giving members the opportunity to protect their privacy, ask new VISTA members (in writing) for permission to share their contact information with other members in the cohort. If the new members give their permission, connect them with other members of the VISTA team!

8

For the purposes of promoting collaboration and providing VISTAs with professional development opportunities, VISTA leaders or supervisors should design meetings, conference calls, or webinars throughout the year that divide members of the VISTA cohort by focus area or location. Connecting members who serve in the same area or who are focusing on similar projects are great ways of spurring collaboration and fostering a sense of belonging among VISTA cohort members.

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Connecting members who serve in the same area or who are focusing on similar projects are great ways of spurring collaboration and fostering a sense of belonging among VISTA cohort members.

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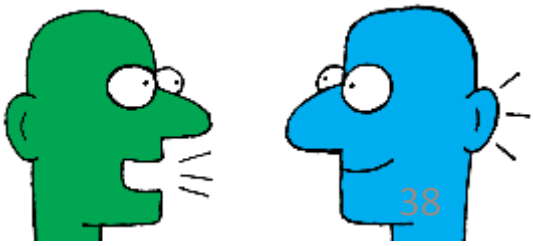
Connect new members of the VISTA team, especially those who already served in AmeriCorps, with the local or state AmeriCorps Alums chapter. AmeriCorps Alums chapters offer VISTA members and VISTA alumni with unique networking and collaborative opportunities!

If new VISTA members are encouraged to communicate, collaborate, and network with one another from the beginning of their service terms and provided with specific ways of doing this, it is much more likely that they will continue collaborating throughout their VISTA terms. These connections and relationships make VISTA service more enjoyable and personally rewarding while also creating a support structure for VISTAs dealing with personal or professional challenges.

For more information about and resources for On-Site Orientation and Training, including a new VISTA orientation PowerPoint template, see the Appendix.



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SECTION V: PLANNING EVENTS

As VISTAs and VISTA Leaders, we often don't have the luxury to meet in-person. Our members can be spread out over a large geographic region, it is not always affordable and there are many moving parts while planning an event that needs to be coordinated. However we all crave the human to human interaction, and there are affordable and creative ways that we can create opportunities for VISTAs to meet. This section will highlight some ways in-person meetups can be planned to maximize outcomes.

Western Washington State VISTAs at a recent BBQ meetup at Golden Gardens in Seattle.

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Why Plan Events and Meetups?

Meetups and events are fun and effective ways of fostering a sense of community and creating opportunities for collaboration and networking within VISTA cohorts.

To build relationships and connections you need to have shared experiences

- If you're only an email address or voice on the phone, it's hard to build those lasting connections
- If you only meet or speak to someone when you need them to do something for you, they will notice and respond accordingly. Be someone who genuinely cares about connections and people.

People can be more comfortable discussing topics in different settings

- People tend to be more willing to discuss the "reaching for the stars plans" in these more casual settings

These relationships may outlast your job and may lead to greater networking opportunities

Spending non-work time together builds trust, which in turn encourages people to share valuable ideas and depend on each other when the VISTA term gets tough

Having fun and enjoying the people you serve with is good for its own end. People are more likely to stay for their entire VISTA term, reach their highest potential, and get more satisfaction out of their VISTA term if they have other people with whom they can share their experiences.

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One-on-One and Casual Gatherings

One-on-ones

Decide frequency.

- Monthly, quarterly, every other month? Make a decision and set this expectation with your group.

When and where?

- Somewhere casual like a coffee shop?
- Lunch hour or right after work?

What to talk about?

- What are they working on?
- Things they are proud of or want to brag about? Accomplishments?
- What are their goals as a VISTA or after VISTA?
- Problems and challenges they are facing at work?
- Things they want to do as a group or individual?

Casual Gatherings

Decide frequency and form

- Dinners, happy hours, potlucks, picnics?
- Monthly, quarterly, weekly?

When and where?

- Decide and inform ahead.
- Change it up and be inclusive.
- Work with their schedule.
- At the same time, be decisive about when and where!

Why?

- For fun as well as for building relationships and fostering collaboration

Check out the "Meetup" section on the VISTA Campus for more tips and advice:

- Some Ideas:
  - Ethiopian Food: Cheap and perfect for communal gatherings.
  - Potlucks: Again, affordable and great to show off cooking acumen.

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Planning a Formal Meetup?

- **What is the main purpose of the meetup?**
  - Training
  - Social
  - Future career networking
  - Project based networking

- **Who to invite**
  - Your cohort
  - All VISTAs in area
  - All AmeriCorps members
  - Site supervisors
  - All supporters of national service

- **Where will the meetup take place?**
  - Locally
  - Regionally
  - Virtually
- **When on the calendar year makes the most sense to plan a meetup?**
- **Where will the meetup take place?**
  - Keep cost in mind: Since VISTAs are on a set stipend, it is important to make sure your events are accessible to all the people you invite. There are many free and inexpensive options that you can plan a gathering around, such as:
  - Local festivals
  - Happy hours specials
  - Restaurant daily specials: i.e. Taco Tuesday (all tacos are $1)
  - Public spaces: parks, museums, zoos, local monuments, art installations
  - Historical societies: often host free tours in government buildings
  - Minor league sports events
  - Geocaching: occurs in public spaces
  - Libraries: often host free events that range from book clubs and tax advice to crafting
  - Volunteering: cleanup event, painting, neighborhood revival

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Planning a Retreat or Networking Summit

As with other event planning be sure to have your time and place set along with why you're meeting.

Ideas for possible Summit or Retreats:

- Camping or staying at a cabin at a national park.
- Staying at a VISTAs or other supporters home.
- Hotel Conference rooms.

Get ideas by joining a local network (Example: Young Non-Profit Professionals Network)

A weekend might be the best time to plan such an event be sure to coordinate with your VISTAs on an appropriate time.

Locate possible sponsors for any costs that might be associated with more involved retreats.

Offer professional development at the retreat including training in relevant events.

Offer networking opportunities (table topics, human bingo)

Open Space for topics

- Open Space is a concept of letting the attendees dictate and run their own conversations on topics of their choosing.
- Give them time to talk freely and set locations where people can float in and out on topics of the groups choosing.

Look into any Team building/Collaborative exercises you might want to do at the retreat. You can find many of these online or get ideas from webinars.

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SECTION VI: MAKING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

During our service years, we get the chance to work with and connect with various community organizations and individuals that result in relationships of mutual benefit. This section will outline how to make, sustain and maximize on those connections with community partners. These Community Connections are what will last beyond your year as a VISTA and provide a foundation to future VISTAs to build off of and resources to deepen your program

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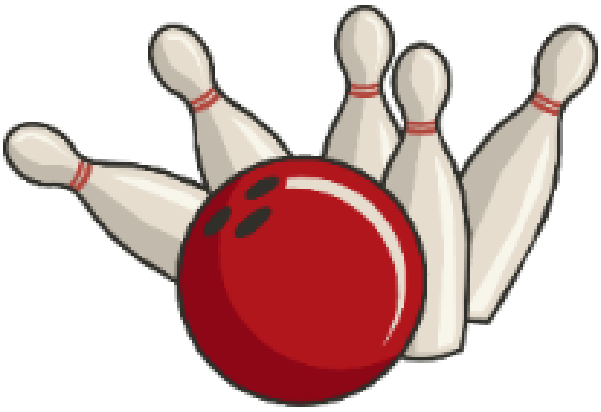
Benefits of Building Community Connections

- Diverse outcomes
- Brings in new voices and ideas
- Involves community in decisions
- Brings more resources to organization
- Exposes community to you and your organization
- Personally connect with others for mutually beneficial outcomes

Possible Partners

- Local activities (bowling alleys, laser tag, mini golf, museums, community centers)
- CNCS focus areas: find organizations/projects addressing those areas as well
- Colleges/Universities: student volunteers, student chapters etc.
- Non-profit organizations that fit your mission and goals
- AmeriCorps members outside your cohort
- Local AmeriCorps Alums and chapters
- VISTA alums from your program
- Local gyms/fitness facilities
- VISTAs in YOUR cohort
- Your CNCS State office
- Local media outlets
- Sports teams



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How to Find and Make Connections Outside VISTA

Step 1: Identify Existing or Future Potential Partners

Your supervisors and people working/living in the community

Supervisors may be able to give an introduction that will get you an interview

They should be aware of the resources in the community and what are the friendliest businesses in the area

Contact Alums who've worked in your area before. They may already have a list or now some places to contact

Compile a list using excel, word, or what works best for you.

Include names, contact info, address, and notes regarding what sort of assistance they might give or have given in the past.

Update the list whenever you get in touch with the potential partner

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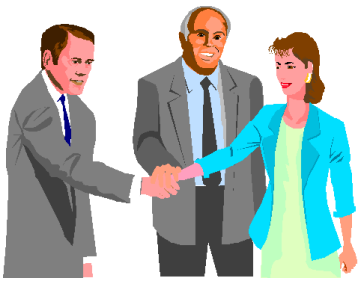
How to Find and Make Connections Outside VISTA Continued

Step 2: <u>Decide the Purpose of Partnering</u>

Professional

- Some partnerships are easy and straightforward. e.g. a restaurant might **donate** food or give you space to meet. Others are less straight forward A restaurant might offer incentives for employees to volunteer with your organization..
- If you're looking to host an **event** you might look to do it somewhere other than your site. Look for other organizations, nonprofits, community centers, etc. That might be good locations for events. This can be a great way to start making connections and get you out of your office.
- If you're looking to **start a new program** at your site use this as an opportunity to build connections by partnering with similar organizations doing similar work rather than building from scratch.
- Be clear of what they are getting out of the arrangement.



Personal

- Connections for future potential employment or career advancement
- Social events and activities

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How to Find and Make Connections Outside VISTA Continued

Step 3: Making the Initial Contact

CONNECT

- First contact would ideally be through someone who already is connected with you and the organization or partner you are trying to reach.
- Make first contact just to say hello and introduce yourself before you need to ask for anything.
- If possible it's best to do this in person.
- Take your business cards with you.

Step 4: Making the Ask

- When making an ask be clear, direct, and concise.
- Even if the project or ask might be open ended try to **be as specific** as you can.
- Open-endedness can lead to indecisiveness.
- If possible ask in person, over phone, or email.
- Make sure you talk to the decision maker directly if possible rather than leaving a message.
- Don't ask for too much from one partner/organization
- Be gracious if they turn you down. Still thank them and stay courteous.
- Thank them multiple times in different ways.

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How to Find and Make Connections Outside VISTA Continued

Step 5: <u>Follow up!</u>

When making a request for donation, assistance, or partnering always remember to follow-up!

Be sure to **thank them** for their time and help even if they can't give you what you're asking for.

Emails are easily lost and people can be forgetful. **Be persistent, but not a pest**.

Connecting Without an "Ask"

- Walk around your community and don't be afraid to introduce yourself to new businesses and organizations.
  - Getting your face out there and seeing them is crucial to building that connection.
- Search for similar organizations to yourself and make a first approach/ ask them if they now other friendly organizations.
- **Volunteer** with some local organizations. This can also be a great way to start making connections where you are the one giving back. You may introduce yourself at the end as someone working for AmeriCorps or some local nonprofit organization.
- Host a happy hour or dinner at supportive businesses and invite people you want to connect with to these events.
  - Try to break out of your usual group of people to hang out with

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Summary

Remember, you are trying to make a connection with someone for either a professional or personal benefit. This relationship works the best when it's mutual. It needs be beneficial for the other person as well. Whether it is a recognition or the having a sense of belonging, there is more to this than it just being the right thing to do.

- Most Important Things to Remember:
  - Identify Connections—be broad!
  - Make first contact before request.
  - Be open to meeting casually at first.

- Consider happy hours, dinners, or volunteering.
  - Be creative and low maintenance when asking.
  - Be specific in your request.
  - Always follow-up on asks.
  - Be considerate to them and have in mind what they will get out of it.
  - Always thank them no matter the outcome.

Additional Resources:
Building Partnerships map
http://diytoolkit.org/tools/building-partnerships-map-2/

This concludes our Guide for VISTA Leaders section. Please see the next page for the VISTA Leader Check-List of Connectedness and the Appendix on Page 92 for additional resources and references.

THANK YOU!

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VISTA Leader Check List of Connectedness

As you complete each of these items feel free to check them off the list and make any notes.

- ❑ Reach out to all of your VISTAs
  - ❑ Obtain contact info from Supervisors, E-grants, or State Office
  - ❑ Send email to make first contact
  - ❑ Give them your contact info
  - ❑ Ask them best way to contact and ask for additional contact info
  - ❑ Create a spreadsheet or document to keep track of all the info

- ❑ Create a Facebook group to further connections
  - ❑ Get in touch with VISTAs on all social media platforms
  - ❑ Connect on the VISTA Campus
  - ❑ Keep your facebook group updated on a regular basis

- ❑ Visit all the sites in which your VISTAs serve
  - ❑ In person if possible. Otherwise over phone/internet.
  - ❑ Introduce yourself and meet their supervisors
  - ❑ Talk about each others goals for the year and what you can do for each other
  - ❑ Invite them to your site and have them visit each others place of work or possibly volunteer

- ❑ Begin planning one-on-one meetings
  - ❑ Decide how often you'd like to meet. Weekly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly?
  - ❑ Agree to a schedule with your VISTAs that works for them
  - ❑ Meet in person if possible, but decide when, where, and how to meet
  - ❑ Contact far ahead of time to schedule your meeting. Be flexible and work with them.
  - ❑ At the meeting discuss their goals for the year and post-VISTA life
  - ❑ Try to conduct meetings in a neutral space: coffee shop, park, meeting rooms

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VISTA Leader Check List of Connectedness

- ❑ Begin planning Group meetups
  - ❑ Again decide how often to meet
  - ❑ Decide on a mutually agreeable time and date. (You may not be able to accommodate everyone, but make a goodwill effort.)
  - ❑ Decide where you will meet. Restaurant, bar, park, someone's home?
  - ❑ Inform your VISTAs well in advance
  - ❑ Publish a social events calendar if scheduling multiple outings
  - ❑ If not all are nearby plan for teleconferences or other ways to meet at a distance
  - ❑ Stick to your schedule and be ready to plan the next meetup

- ❑ Reach others outside your group
  - ❑ Get in touch with local Alums, other VISTAs, and AmeriCorps
    - ❑ It's good for VISTAs to see what others are doing
    - ❑ Check Facebook for alum groups
    - ❑ Check VISTA campus for people in your area
    - ❑ Contact other local nonprofit orgs known to have AmeriCorps or likely to
    - ❑ Ask your VISTAs for contact info from people in the area they met at PSO
  - ❑ Invite them to your group meetups or plan a special meetup for a larger group

- ❑ Stay in contact with your VISTAs by email and phone
  - ❑ Have them send regular updates and reports
  - ❑ Plan group activities like volunteering
  - ❑ Plan a retreat if appropriate
  - ❑ Plan trainings
  - ❑ Send them notes on what you're doing
  - ❑ Keep a google calendar shared between you all with events happening in the community
  - ❑ Share your resources and connections
  - ❑ Do things together for no other reason than to do things together

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A GUIDE FOR VISTA MEMBERS

Action Learning Challenge Toolkit for Increasing Collaboration Among AmeriCorps VISTAs

AMERICORPS VISTA

VISTA

Volunteers In Service To America

Fight Poverty with PASSION

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Section IV: Events and Meetups page 80

Section V: Community Connections page 85

Appendix with Resource List page 92

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Introduction

❖ A Message for VISTA Members

As VISTA members, whether or not you have relocated, going through a year without additional support can be difficult. As a team, the Action Learning Challenge group and have come together to put together a guide for you all to be able to collaborate, share resources and expand your personal and professional network. We have not only highlighted some creative ways of increasing collaboration, but have also revisited some existing tools for making lasting partnerships.

Overall, it is quite evident that VISTAs are missing out on the opportunity to maximize on each others' experiences. The challenge is nationwide and affects every AmeriCorps VISTA member, leader, and project. Even VISTA cohorts with members who are geographically close to one another have little or no knowledge of other AmeriCorps members or AmeriCorps VISTA member in their cities, their states, and their regions. The focus of this guide will be connecting members and alums on the local, regional, and national level with each other and YOUR role as a VISTA in that process.

This guide is visual and contains links to the recorded webinar that we created for better utilization of VISTA Campus as well as links to other online platforms. But it is upto YOU to take the initiative and not miss out on some crucial relationships. The Action Learning Challenge Team believes that this will be an effective guide for you to foster meaningful collaborations that will not only benefit your project, but also you as well.

Happy Reading!

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SECTION I: WHAT WE KNOW NOW?

The members of this Action Learning Challenge team have a combined nine years of experience serving with AmeriCorps VISTA. The longer we serve in AmeriCorps the more we realize the substantial benefits collaboration and networking can bring to VISTA members. In this section we wish to share stories that highlight the importance of collaboration and provide a few key points summarizing what we have learned about collaboration during our VISTA terms. It would have been incredibly beneficial if we knew at the beginning of our first AmeriCorps VISTA terms what we know now. Our hope is that VISTA members and VISTA leaders, especially those just beginning their service terms, will use this information in order to build on our successes and learn from our mistakes.

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Gretchen Chomas

My first two terms of service were spent serving between San Diego and Los Angeles at a small non-profit called Inter Tribal Sports (ITS). Serving without a VISTA leader, placed at a site far from other VISTA members, and lacking information about other VISTAs serving Native communities made my situation quite difficult and frustrating. If I could go back and do this VISTA term over again I would have used the VISTA Campus more to find and communicate with other VISTAs who served close to me and who focused on similar projects.

Perdita Das

In my first year as a VISTA I was tasked with conducting a needs and assets assessment of Bridgeport, CT to identify issue areas and organizations for potential VISTA projects. The task was quite daunting, and I went through the .conventional routes of searching on the internet about how to do a needs assessment. About four months in I had designed a new survey and started visiting community meetings. Around that same time I took up the responsibility of organizing the Mayors Day of Service, through which I obtained the contact information of all the other AmeriCorps programs in Bridgeport. In the process of contacting people for the event I was able to talk with a number of AmeriCorps members, including a Public Ally (an AmeriCorps member) who mentioned she conducted a community needs assessment in Bridgeport six months prior to mine. After learning this I was able to collaborate with the Public Ally and build on her results.

If I had taken the initiative ahead of time to contact other AmeriCorps programs and VISTA members I probably would not have had to reinvent the wheel. I now know that it's always a good idea to speak with sponsor programs or state offices to find out about other AmeriCorps programs or VISTA programs in the area. Chances are members from other programs have the same or similar project goals and will provide great opportunities to collaborate and share resources for the purpose of maximizing effective output.

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Ryan Haskell

In my first year as a VISTA member we had a leader for about two or three months before the leader left for personal reasons. The loss of our leader left a big hole in our VISTA group. There were attempts to build a VISTA community, but they were fitful, infrequent, and poorly organized. This experience highlighted to me the importance of having someone in a position to take the lead and organize the sort of events that create a stronger and more cohesive team.

Chris Mackey

For VISTA members: Reach out to your fellow VISTA members! During my VISTA term with the American Red Cross of Montana I did not collaborate and network with VISTAs in my area and across the state very much. I know now that many VISTAs face similar personal and professional issues during their terms. If I could start that VISTA term over again I would make a more concerted effort to collaborate, network, and share ideas with my fellow VISTA members. I would set up professional development activities and informal events and get-togethers. Not only does taking the initiative on collaborative events and get-togethers help make your VISTA term much more enjoyable, but it will help you maximize your potential as a VISTA member and help you professionally in the long run!

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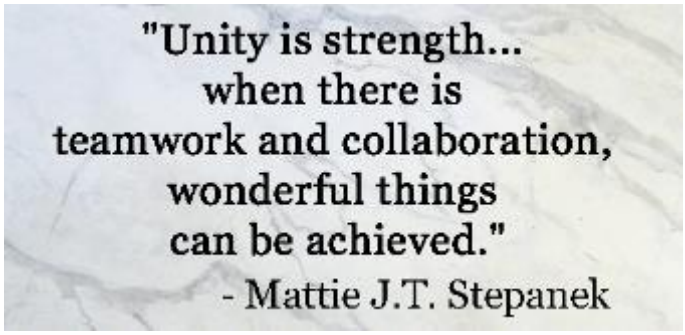
Vanessa Reyes

During my first term as a VISTA, working with Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), I did not take full advantage of the connections that were already set up within the local VISTA cohort. While at BBBS, I was able to overhaul and establish a new system for mentor appreciation which led to higher retention numbers. I created new community connections and solicited donations to put on large scale mentor/mentee events that included thoughtful reflection and relationship building activities. The procedures and community connections are still used today. While my experience with BBBS was highly valuable, I now know that I could have done so much more had I not pigeon holed myself. Had I thought to collaborate with my fellow VISTAs in the mentoring field, I could have established even stronger connections and larger events.



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What we know now: Key Points

Host events and informal get-togethers! VISTAs who know each other are much more likely to communicate and collaborate.

Set expectations for VISTA members about participating in collaborative projects, activities, or events; periodically remind VISTAs about connecting and collaborating throughout their VISTA terms.

Get to know VISTA members so you can connect those with similar projects or focus areas.

Communicate regularly with VISTA members. If your VISTA team members serve far from one another, attempt in-person meetings, but try to connect virtually on a regular basis.

Use social media to connect VISTA members, but try to limit the number of online platforms you use in order to avoid sending redundant information. That said, if one online platform (say, a Facebook group) is not working, try another social media tool to increase collaboration.

Seek out especially motivated VISTA members in your cohort and ask them to help you provide opportunities for VISTA collaboration.

Attempt to connect your VISTA team with other AmeriCorps members and other VISTA members in your area.

Participate as a group in Corporation for National and Community Service Days of Service and in other volunteer projects.

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SECTION II: USING THE VISTA CAMPUS FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

VISTA Campus is an online platform created for the purpose of helping those committed to fighting poverty -- VISTA members, leaders, supervisors and alumni -- learn, connect, collaborate and network. In this section we will provide a brief overview of how to create a profile on VISTA Campus and then highlight several features that promote collaboration and networking between VISTAs at the local and the national level!

The step-by-step guide on how to use the VISTA Campus has been created in two parts

A written guide with pictures included in this document beginning on the next page.

A recorded webinar presented by ALC team members Chris and Perdita with a tour of the VISTA Campus.

Click here to view.

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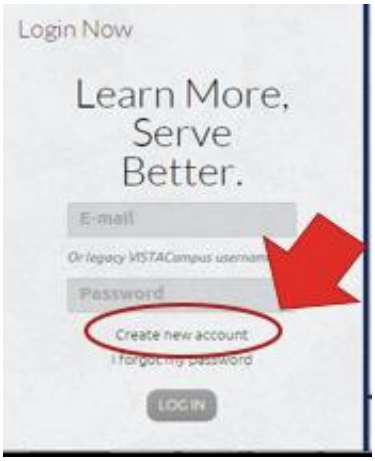
Using the VISTA Campus to Collaborate

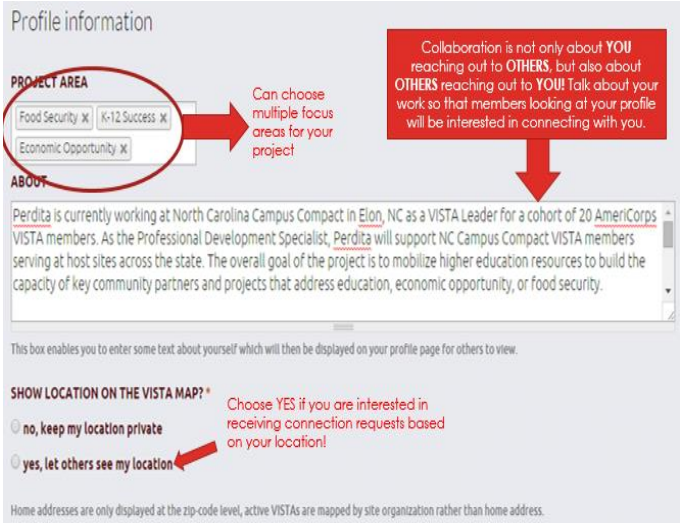
First Step: Creating a VISTA Campus Profile

Setting up a VISTA Campus account and profile is extremely quick and easy! Go to the VISTA Campus website, click the LOG IN button at the top of the homepage, and click Create New Account. To create a new account you will need a valid email address. You will then select your user type (VISTA member, VISTA leader, alumni, etc.) and provide information about yourself that will be included in your VISTA Campus profile.

There are two other aspects of creating a VISTA Campus profile that are important to note:

- You are able to select your privacy settings in order to limit who is able to see your profile
- You can select whether you wish to include your information and location on the VISTA Map. See the VISTA Map section below for more details about the VISTA Map feature.





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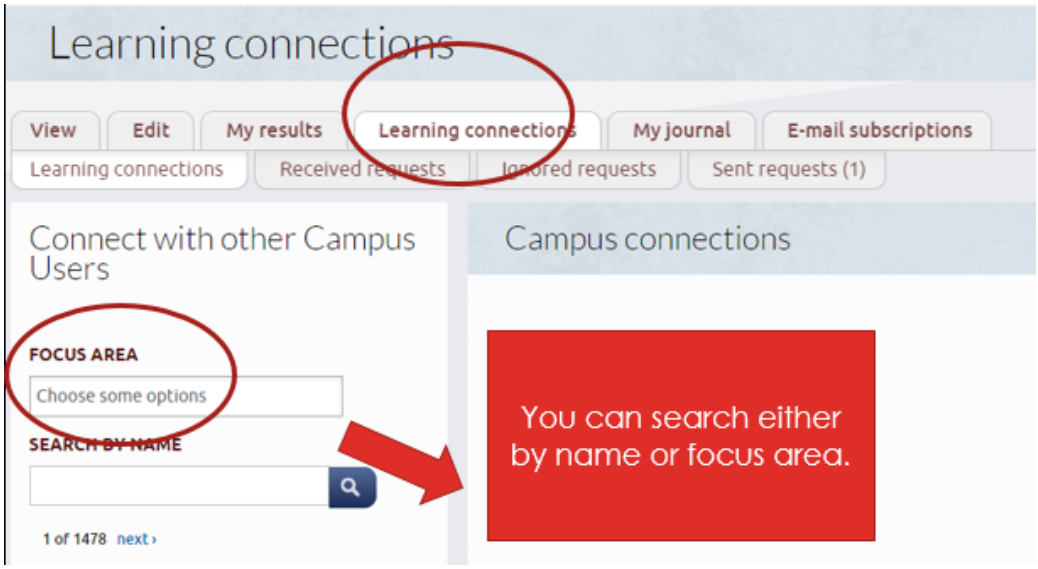
Second Step: Use the Campus to Collaborate!

Learning Connections

The Learning Connections feature on VISTA Campus is a social networking tool for those dedicated to alleviating poverty and building capacity! This feature allows VISTA members, leaders, supervisors and alumni to connect with one another in order to share resources, send messages and keep in touch.

After creating a VISTA Campus profile and logging in to VISTA Campus (which you must do in order to utilize the Learning Connections feature) click on Learning Connection in the "Connect and Learn" tab on the VISTA Campus homepage. In the Learning Connections page you can search for VISTAs by name or by focus area. To send someone a Learning Connection request click the plus sign and click send! Once you send a request you will get an email notification of when the request has been accepted.



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VISTA Maps

When combined with the Learning Connection feature, the VISTA Map is a great tool for VISTA collaboration. Whether you are a VISTA member new to your area or a VISTA leader looking to connect VISTA members on your team; the VISTA map provides a great visual way of building a sense of community and fostering collaboration among VISTAs!

As mentioned above, you are able to post your information on the VISTA Map when you first create a VISTA Campus profile. Once you are on the map, you can access the VISTA Map feature by logging into your VISTA Campus account and clicking VISTA Map in the "Connect & Learn" tab of the VISTA Campus homepage.

The VISTA Map page allows you to search for, among other groups, active VISTA members, VISTA leaders, alumni, and supervisors. As an example, let us say you are a VISTA member and your focus area is education:

- Click the Filters button, find Education under Focus Area and limit your search to VISTA members only. This pulls up other VISTA members also focusing on education!

- You will then click on their individual profiles and, if you want to connect with them through the Learning Connection feature, you click the plus to send a Learning Connection request!

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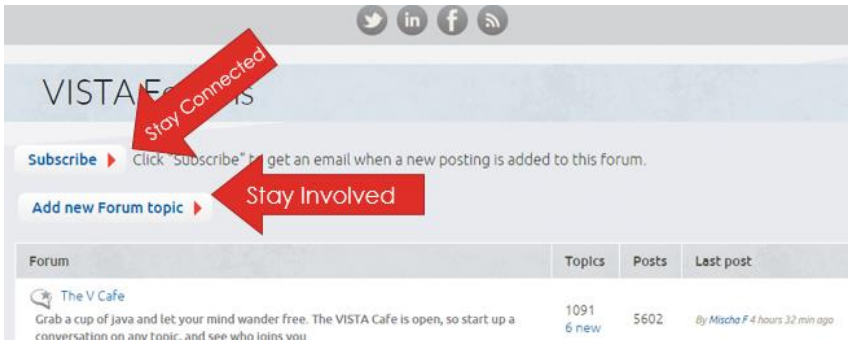
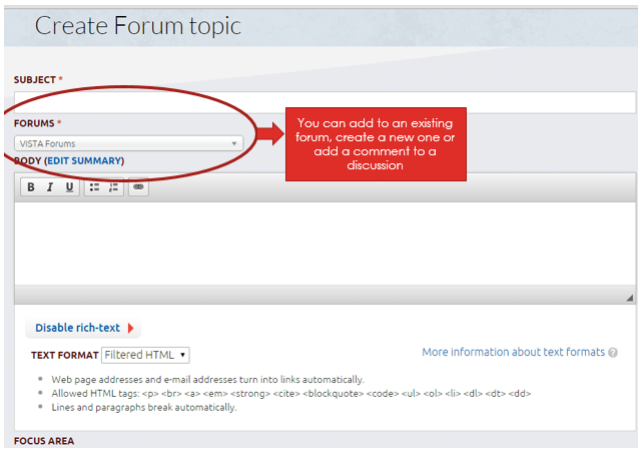
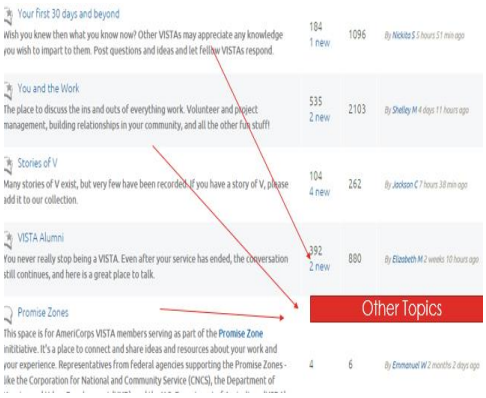
VISTA Forums

The Forums page is divided into three sections: forums for VISTA members, VISTA leaders, and VISTA supervisors. The VISTA member forum page is itself divided into a number of different subjects, all of which are helpful for connecting VISTA members with one another. For example, in one post in the V Café forum (a general post forum), a VISTA member new to the Chicago area asked other VISTAs in the area for information about Facebook groups, email lists, or other ways of connecting with other AmeriCorps VISTA members in the area. Three VISTA members responded to the post with welcomes and information about getting connected with the local VISTA community!







The VISTA Leaders forum has several sub-sections as well. If you're a new VISTA leader it makes sense to check out the "I'm a New Leader" forum. For networking and collaboration resources and tips as well as much more information on a variety of VISTA-related topics, leaders can go to the Leader Open Space forum.

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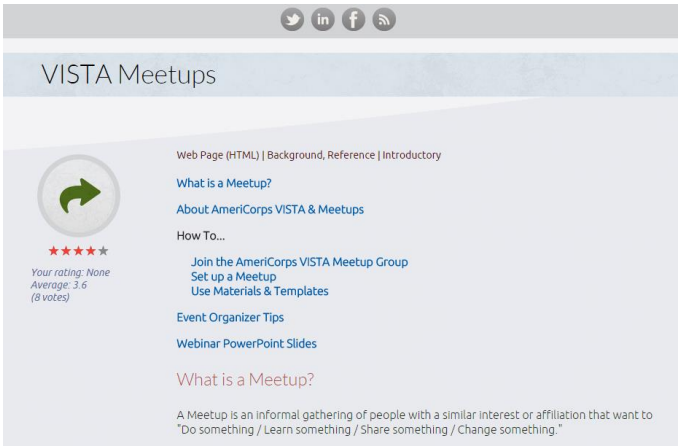
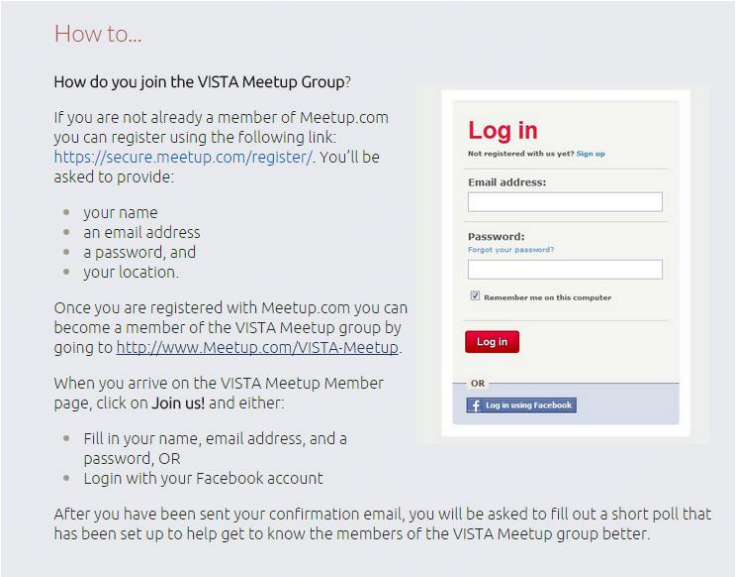
VISTA Campus and Meetup.Com

Are you looking for a way of finding and meeting up with other VISTA members in your area? AmeriCorps VISTA has collaborated with Meetup.com to make this process much easier! Meetup.com is the world's largest network of local groups. This online tool makes it easy for anyone to organize a local group or find one of the thousands of existing groups.

For AmeriCorps VISTA leaders and members, Meetup.com is an ideal way of organizing an informal event or get-together for local VISTAs. Go to the Meetup registration page, create an account and follow the instructions provided in VISTA Campus to set up a VISTA Meetup event. By facilitating face-to-face meetings of VISTA members through Meetup.com, you can help build a sense of community among your fellow VISTAs and increase opportunities for collaboration and networking!





How to...

How do you join the VISTA Meetup Group?

If you are not already a member of Meetup.com you can register using the following link: https://secure.meetup.com/register/. You'll be asked to provide:

- your name
- an email address
- a password, and
- your location.

Once you are registered with Meetup.com you can become a member of the VISTA Meetup group by going to http://www.Meetup.com/VISTA-Meetup.

When you arrive on the VISTA Meetup Member page, click on **Join us!** and either:

- Fill in your name, email address, and a password, OR
- Login with your Facebook account

After you have been sent your confirmation email, you will be asked to fill out a short poll that has been set up to help get to know the members of the VISTA Meetup group better.

If you are looking for more information about increasing VISTA collaboration by hosting events and meetups, see the Events section of this toolkit.

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Can I Get a Copy of That?

If you are a VISTA leader looking for ways of increasing collaboration and networking opportunities for VISTA members on your team, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. The Can I Get a Copy of That? section, located under the "Leaders" tab on the VISTA Campus homepage, provides VISTA leaders with products and templates ready for use or adaptation.

Conclusion

The more members of this Action Learning Challenge team explore VISTA Campus, the more we realize how much this site has to offer. For the purposes of building community and increasing collaboration among VISTAs, the VISTA Campus is extremely helpful!

The VISTA Campus is not only a great resource but also an existing collaborative tool for VISTA members, Leaders and supervisors! It is an alternative to traditional social media and brings together all those dedicated to fighting poverty across the nation.

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SECTION III: USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO FOSTER COLLABORATION AMONG VISTA MEMBERS

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Social Media Guide: Introduction

In this rapidly developing age of social media, it has very quickly become a vital tool used in making not only personal, but professional, connections. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have become well known and frequently used platforms for people to keep in touch and to network.

VISTA members start using social media during or right after Pre-Service Orientation -- usually one person takes the initiative to create a Facebook group or other collaborative tool. Throughout the year the group becomes a great way for members to share resources and keep in touch with each other. However, it is easier to create and join social media groups than to keep members engaged. This section will highlight some commonly used social media tools in the non-profit world and how to keep VISTA members collaborating and networking via social media throughout their service terms.

Where to Start

As mentioned in earlier sections, it is important for VISTA members to form, maintain and expand a network to share resources, workshop challenges, connect with AmeriCorps VISTA alumni and form relationships with key community partners. One platform that we as members and leaders should utilize more is the VISTA Campus! That is a great place to start. VISTA Campus has crucial information for VISTA members' and leaders' years of service as well as tools for forming connections with VISTA members and leaders locally and nationally. The Campus may seem daunting, so we added a quick how-to webinar with this toolkit. Please click here.

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Utilizing Social Media To Collaborate

Social media is not just a great tool for connecting with other VISTAs. It can also be utilized for building and maintaining a collaborative network of VISTA members, leaders, supervisors, and alumni. Facebook groups and Twitter hashtags are a good example of this and are highlighted below.

You can use different social media platforms highlighted in this section to search for and connect with VISTA members and VISTA leaders. Often times you will get a more prompt reply on Facebook or Twitter than you will by email. One thing to keep in mind is to respect people's privacy. A good way to start is by following an organization on a social media platform and using that as a conversation starter with individuals. Collaboration doesn't necessary have to be outside your cohort. For example, meeting and collaborating with members with similar focus areas or a similar geographical location can be very beneficial for all involved!

Where and How to Reach Members on Social Media

- Google "AmeriCorps VISTA" and your state name to find other VISTA programs and like those pages on Facebook
- Like the local AmeriCorps Alums Facebook page (if one is available)
- Create LinkedIn profiles if you don't already have one
- Search for professional pages on LinkedIn
- VISTA Leaders can create and manage Facebook group for your cohort
- VISTA Leaders can create a twitter hashtag for supporting and collaborating
- VISTA Leaders: encourage your cohort to connect with each other on any social media platforms they are on
- VISTA members: Connect with your fellow VISTAs on any social media platforms you are on.

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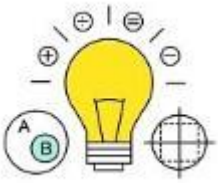
Social Media Platforms and Keeping Members Engaged

This section of the toolkit revisits some common social media platforms used by VISTA members and leaders. We wanted to approach this section to share how to utilize social media to form partnerships between VISTA members both within and outside your cohort. It is simple to find someone on Facebook but that is not what connection is about. As members, take this opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations.

Another aspect of that is to talk about your VISTA service. If you are managing your organization's social media, constantly update and talk about what is currently happening. Collaboration is not only about you reaching out to others, it is also about attracting others to collaborate with YOU.

Remember, you don't always have to rely on your VISTA Leader, you can take the initiative to reach out to potential partners as well. The following is a list of tools and ways to collaborate online:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Blogging
- Tumblr
- Slideshare
- Online Meeting Platforms
- Scheduling Tools



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Facebook

You can utilize this highly popular platform to connect with members, leaders, alums and project organizations. You can like pages and share resources on your personal timelines. But the easiest way to maintain a network of VISTA members who are geographically apart is to organize a Facebook Group. Groups are a great way to create a virtual private and safe space for VISTAs to casually engage with one another.

Tips and Tricks to Maintain Interest:

Daily Interaction

- Be sure to interact with your members every day.
- Do not be an absentee leader.
- Provide the opportunity for your members to interact in different ways each day. For example:

  Monday – Share your site info day.
  Tuesday — Post a tip day.
  Wednesday – Like a page day.
  Thursday – Your favorite quote day.
  Friday – VISTA reflection day.

Ask for group members' advice

- They may want to change the structure of daily topics.
- They may have something insightful to add to the group.

Hold Events

- Encourage participation in the group by holding contests, games or other similar events that would arouse interest in your members.

Just Be There

- Do not neglect your group.
- Make sure you can put in the time and effort your group and members will need before creating the group.
- A group will need constant attention, nurturing and encouragement if it is going to grow into an effective means of collaboration.

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Facebook Continued

Making it Personal

The vital component to keeping members engaged is to connect with them. There are many ways that you can create a personal connection through Facebook:

Photo of the Day :–

Multipurpose tool to thank donors/partners, show behind the scenes, and highlight the accomplishments of your VISTA members.

Use Meaningful Quotes :-

Quotes can engage the reader into commenting. Try different ways of including quotes through photos, memes, even comic strips can provide an engaging and entertaining way to connect.

Reply, Reply, Reply :-

Always take the time to reply to comments and questions even if it's a few days later. Like comments that are appropriate.

For more information on Facebook group logistics: https://www.facebook.com/help/167970719931213#How-do-I-create-a-group?

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Twitter

Since Twitter has a character limit, using photos is a good way to catch people's attention. If you are interested in sharing important information with other VISTAs via Twitter, you can always capture a screenshot and convert into a picture. (see appendix for information on screenshots). By doing this you are still able to present the information you need without using up your characters.

Look for these specific posts! These are all calls for collaboration in different ways:

Photo of the Day –
Provide a brief description of photo, relevance, and use Twitter handles when possible

Blogging –
Share any posts through twitter for better exposure and content

Retweet –
Connect with partner organizations and retweet their posts

Make it Relevant –
Share data about the targeted community issues for your VISTA site i.e. homelessness. Statistics can motivate people to retweet.

For more information about Twitter:
https://support.twitter.com/groups/50-welcome-to-twitter

For more information on how to find content on Twitter:
https://support.twitter.com/groups/53-discover

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LinkedIn

LinkedIn is not only a great platform to make professional connections for individuals, but can be used to foster a professional group environment as well. It can sometimes be more dependable as it has gained a reputation for being career and professional development oriented rather than just another social media platform.

It is important to keep in mind that LinkedIn is a professional network. Your posts should be more directed and less light hearted than other social media outlets, such as Facebook.

VISTA Leaders: connect to VISTAs in your cohort.

When you send out connections requests, personalize them. i.e. "It was great meeting you at PSO. I hope that we can connect and further talk about..."

Post articles related to professional development, VISTA, or issues related to your site.

When creating your profile, make sure it's complete and don't skip over things that make your profile well rounded include hobbies and volunteerism. These are possible connection opportunities.

As you make connections, comment on others' success. & updates i.e. a new job or article posting

Request informational interviews. Don't ask professional contacts for a job. Instead, ask for a brief phone conversation to seek their job search advice. VISTA Alumni, partner organizations, and industry leaders are often willing to do so.

For more information regarding using LinkedIn, please visit: https://help.linkedin.com/

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YouTube

For those who are more visual, having a YouTube channel is a great way of keeping them engaged. VISTAs can talk about their service, make catchy videos or even do a speaker series. You are able to keep your YouTube channel private to avoid outside comments.

Ideas for Youtube:

Keep it Relevant

- Make sure you keep subscribers engaged by staying on topic.
- Connect relevant content from partner organizations.

Local News

- Community engagement events and festivals.

Speaking engagements

- Make sure the content is relevant to your VISTA site and audience.

Promotional Videos

- Recruitment for new VISTAs, information about your site, recruitment for volunteers for your site or partner sites.

Evergreen content

- This is a great place to share this content that can be viewed at anytime.
- It should have no ties to anything that could date the video such as statistics or local events. (For more information regarding evergreen content see the appendix).

For more information on how to manage Youtube content:
https://support.google.com/youtube/?hl=en#topic=4355266

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Blogging

Using blogging sites is a great way to tell stories and get others interested in VISTA and VISTA collaboration. As VISTA members, you should seek opportunities to write blog pieces highlighting service projects, your growth as a VISTA, and ways you collaborate and network with other VISTAs.

Examples of blog ideas and tips for blogging:

- Share stories from days of service (September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance; Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service; National Volunteerism Day)
- Share reflections on AmeriCorps themed days (VISTA anniversary; AmeriCorps week)
- Share the origin story of your sites
- Follow other blogs that are related to your site and VISTA
- Ask for guest stories from community partners.
- Highlight a contributor of the month.
- Above all else, include photos!

For more information regarding creating a blog:
https://support.google.com/blogger/#topic=3339243

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Tumblr

You can also utilize platforms like Tumblr to share photos and stories that are of interest to other VISTA members. This is another tool for those who are visual. It is also a cross between a photo sharing platform and a blog so this is also a great spot to highlight service events, networking opportunities, alternative breaks, etc.

For more information on how to find content on Tumblr:
https://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/discovery

Slideshare

Another way to collaborate is to share work pieces. SlideShare is a great tool to share or search for existing Powerpoints. VISTA members can share presentations with each other, especially common ones such as community volunteer training, VISTA member orientation slideshow presentations. We have used Slideshare to share some templates with you in this toolkit as show in the Appendix.

For more information on how to manage content on Slideshare:
http://help.slideshare.com/categories/20066309-Managing-content-on-SlideShare

Online Meeting Platforms

Google Hangouts, Skype or other professional platforms such as Adobe Connect can be used to hold virtual meetings and networking events. Ask check-in questions to get everyone talking, provide opportunities for smaller group conversations, and host virtual meetings such as a book club. Online meeting platforms are great for connecting VISTAs who serve geographically disparate locations.

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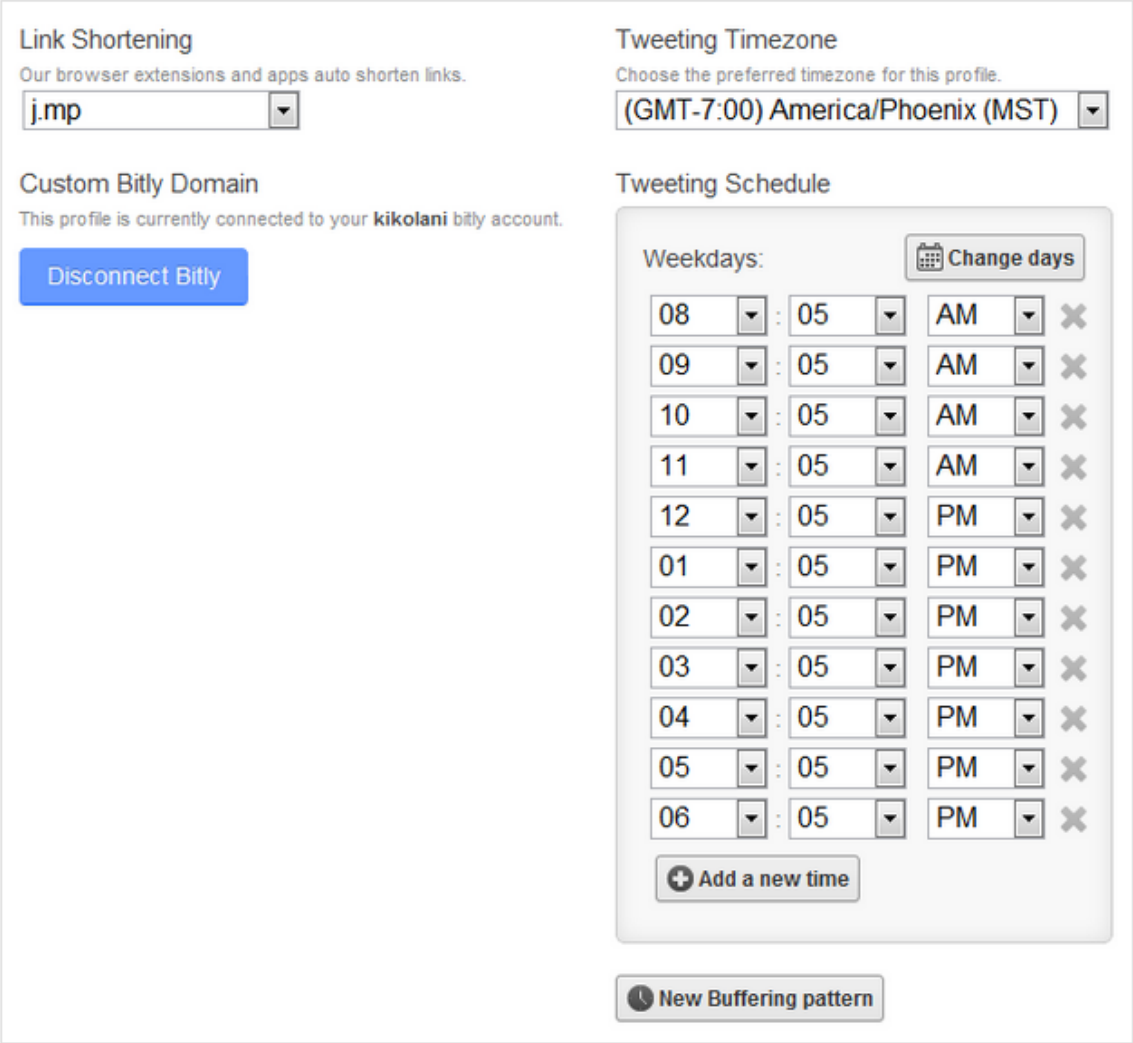
Scheduling Tools

Our final tip is to use scheduling tools. In order to maintain engagement, it is important to get a steady schedule. By using a scheduling tool, things will get posted at times even if you don't have the time. This constant communication will keep people engaged but be careful of stale content or over-posting.

Buffer is a scheduling tool that allows you to schedule and publish updates. Unlike other platforms where you have to schedule each update at a specific time, Buffer allows you to set up a specific scheduling pattern. When you add an update to your Buffer, it will be set out at the next available time slot. Updates can be sent to your Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. You can use Buffer to update one Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn account for free with up to 10 updates scheduled at a time.



Screenshot of the Buffer scheduling platform

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SECTION IV: PLANNING EVENTS

As VISTAs and VISTA Leaders, we often don't have the luxury to meet in-person. Our members can be spread out over a large geographic region, it is not always affordable and there are many moving parts while planning an event that needs to be coordinated. However we all crave the human to human interaction, and there are affordable and creative ways that we can create opportunities for VISTAs to meet. This section will highlight some ways in-person meetups can be planned to maximize outcomes.

Western Washington State VISTAs at a recent BBQ meetup at Golden Gardens in Seattle.

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Why Plan Events and Meetups?

Meetups and events are fun and effective ways of fostering a sense of community and creating opportunities for collaboration and networking within VISTA cohorts.

To build relationships and connections you need to have shared experiences

- If you're only an email address or voice on the phone, it's hard to build those lasting connections
- If you only meet or speak to someone when you need them to do something for you, they will notice and respond accordingly. Be someone who genuinely cares about connections and people.

People can be more comfortable discussing topics in different settings

- People tend to be more willing to discuss the "reaching for the stars plans" in these more casual settings

These relationships may outlast your job and may lead to greater networking opportunities

Spending non-work time together builds trust, which in turn encourages people to share valuable ideas and depend on each other when the VISTA term gets tough

Having fun and enjoying the people you serve with is good for its own end. People are more likely to stay for their entire VISTA term, reach their highest potential, and get more satisfaction out of their VISTA term if they have other people with whom they can share their experiences.

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One-on-One and Casual Gatherings

One-on-ones

Decide frequency.

- Monthly, quarterly, every other month? Make a decision and set this expectation with your group.

When and where?

- Somewhere casual like a coffee shop?
- Lunch hour or right after work?

What to talk about?

- What are they working on?
- Things they are proud of or want to brag about? Accomplishments?
- What are their goals as a VISTA or after VISTA?
- Problems and challenges they are facing at work?
- Things they want to do as a group or individual?

Casual Gatherings

Decide frequency and form

- Dinners, happy hours, potlucks, picnics?
- Monthly, quarterly, weekly?

When and where?

- Decide and inform ahead.
- Change it up and be inclusive.
- Work with their schedule.
- At the same time, be decisive about when and where!

Why?

- For fun as well as for building relationships and fostering collaboration

Check out the "Meetup" section on the VISTA Campus for more tips and advice:

- Some Ideas:
  - Ethiopian Food: Cheap and perfect for communal gatherings.
  - Potlucks: Again, affordable and great to show off cooking acumen.

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Planning a Formal Meetup?

- **What is the main purpose of the meetup?**
  - Training
  - Social
  - Future career networking
  - Project based networking

- **Who to invite**
  - Your cohort
  - All VISTAs in area
  - All AmeriCorps members
  - Site supervisors
  - All supporters of national service

- **Where will the meetup take place?**
  - Locally
  - Regionally
  - Virtually
- **When on the calendar year makes the most sense to plan a meetup?**
- **Where will the meetup take place?**
  - Keep cost in mind: Since VISTAs are on a set stipend, it is important to make sure your events are accessible to all the people you invite. There are many free and inexpensive options that you can plan a gathering around, such as:
  - Local festivals
  - Happy hours specials
  - Restaurant daily specials: i.e. Taco Tuesday (all tacos are $1)
  - Public spaces: parks, museums, zoos, local monuments, art installations
  - Historical societies: often host free tours in government buildings
  - Minor league sports events
  - Geocaching: occurs in public spaces
  - Libraries: often host free events that range from book clubs and tax advice to crafting
  - Volunteering: cleanup event, painting, neighborhood revival

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Planning a Retreat or Networking Summit

As with other event planning be sure to have your time and place set along with why you're meeting.

Ideas for possible Summit or Retreats:

- Camping or staying at a cabin at a national park.
- Staying at a VISTAs or other supporters home.
- Hotel Conference rooms.

Get ideas by joining a local network (Example: Young Non-Profit Professionals Network)

A weekend might be the best time to plan such an event be sure to coordinate with your VISTAs on an appropriate time.

Locate possible sponsors for any costs that might be associated with more involved retreats.

Offer professional development at the retreat including training in relevant events.

Offer networking opportunities (table topics, human bingo)

Open Space for topics

- Open Space is a concept of letting the attendees dictate and run their own conversations on topics of their choosing.
- Give them time to talk freely and set locations where people can float in and out on topics of the groups choosing.

Look into any Team building/Collaborative exercises you might want to do at the retreat. You can find many of these online or get ideas from webinars.

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SECTION V: MAKING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

During our service years, we get the chance to work with and connect with various community organizations and individuals that result in relationships of mutual benefit. This section will outline how to make, sustain and maximize on those connections with community partners. These Community Connections are what will last beyond your year as a VISTA and provide a foundation to future VISTAs to build off of and resources to deepen your program

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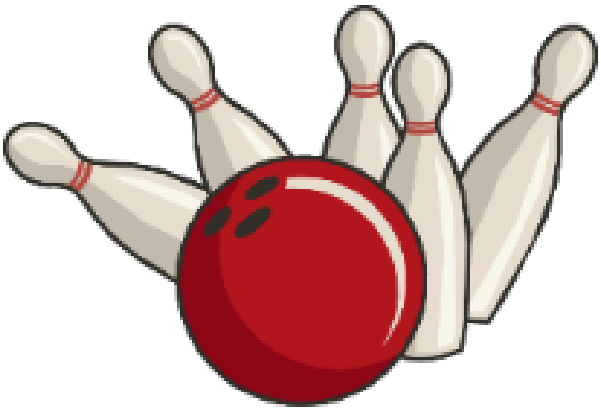
Benefits of Building Community Connections

- Diverse outcomes
- Brings in new voices and ideas
- Involves community in decisions
- Brings more resources to organization
- Exposes community to you and your organization
- Personally connect with others for mutually beneficial outcomes

Possible Partners

- Local activities (bowling alleys, laser tag, mini golf, museums, community centers)
- CNCS focus areas: find organizations/projects addressing those areas as well
- Colleges/Universities: student volunteers, student chapters etc.
- Non-profit organizations that fit your mission and goals
- AmeriCorps members outside your cohort
- Local AmeriCorps Alums and chapters
- VISTA alums from your program
- Local gyms/fitness facilities
- VISTAs in YOUR cohort
- Your CNCS State office
- Local media outlets
- Sports teams



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How to Find and Make Connections Outside VISTA

Step 1: Identify Existing or Future Potential Partners

Your supervisors and people working/living in the community

Supervisors may be able to give an introduction that will get you an interview

They should be aware of the resources in the community and what are the friendliest businesses in the area

Contact Alums who've worked in your area before. They may already have a list or now some places to contact

Compile a list using excel, word, or what works best for you.

Include names, contact info, address, and notes regarding what sort of assistance they might give or have given in the past.

Update the list whenever you get in touch with the potential partner

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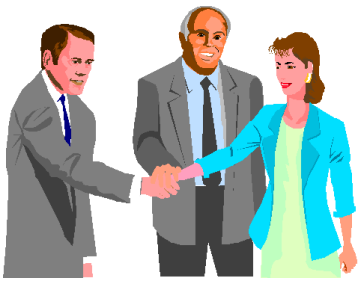
How to Find and Make Connections Outside VISTA Continued

Step 2: Decide the Purpose of Partnering

Professional

- Some partnerships are easy and straightforward. e.g. a restaurant might **donate** food or give you space to meet. Others are less straight forward A restaurant might offer incentives for employees to volunteer with your organization..
- If you're looking to host an **event** you might look to do it somewhere other than your site. Look for other organizations, nonprofits, community centers, etc. That might be good locations for events. This can be a great way to start making connections and get you out of your office.
- If you're looking to **start a new program** at your site use this as an opportunity to build connections by partnering with similar organizations doing similar work rather than building from scratch.
- Be clear of what they are getting out of the arrangement.



Personal

- Connections for future potential employment or career advancement
- Social events and activities

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How to Find and Make Connections Outside VISTA Continued

Step 3: Making the Initial Contact

CONNECT

- First contact would ideally be through someone who already is connected with you and the organization or partner you are trying to reach.
- Make first contact just to say hello and introduce yourself before you need to ask for anything.
- If possible it's best to do this in person.
- Take your business cards with you.

Step 4: Making the Ask

- When making an ask be clear, direct, and concise.
- Even if the project or ask might be open ended try to **be as specific** as you can.
- Open-endedness can lead to indecisiveness.
- If possible ask in person, over phone, or email.
- Make sure you talk to the decision maker directly if possible rather than leaving a message.
- Don't ask for too much from one partner/organization
- Be gracious if they turn you down. Still thank them and stay courteous.
- Thank them multiple times in different ways.

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How to Find and Make Connections Outside VISTA Continued

Step 5: <u>Follow up!</u>

When making a request for donation, assistance, or partnering always remember to follow-up!

Emails are easily lost and people can be forgetful. **Be persistent, but not a pest**.

Be sure to **thank them** for their time and help even if they can't give you what you're asking for.

Connecting Without an "Ask"

- Walk around your community and don't be afraid to introduce yourself to new businesses and organizations.
  - Getting your face out there and seeing them is crucial to building that connection.
- Search for similar organizations to yourself and make a first approach/ ask them if they now other friendly organizations.
- **Volunteer** with some local organizations. This can also be a great way to start making connections where you are the one giving back. You may introduce yourself at the end as someone working for AmeriCorps or some local nonprofit organization.
- Host a happy hour or dinner at supportive businesses and invite people you want to connect with to these events.
  - Try to break out of your usual group of people to hang out with

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Summary

Remember, you are trying to make a connection with someone for either a professional or personal benefit. This relationship works the best when it's mutual. It needs be beneficial for the other person as well. Whether it is a recognition or the having a sense of belonging, there is more to this than it just being the right thing to do.

- Most Important Things to Remember:
  - Identify Connections—be broad!
  - Make first contact before request.
  - Be open to meeting casually at first.

- Consider happy hours, dinners, or volunteering.
  - Be creative and low maintenance when asking.
  - Be specific in your request.
  - Always follow-up on asks.
  - Be considerate to them and have in mind what they will get out of it.
  - Always thank them no matter the outcome.

Additional Resources:
Building Partnerships map
http://diytoolkit.org/tools/building-partnerships-map-2/

This concludes our Guide for VISTA members section. Please see the Appendix on page 92 for additional resources and references.

THANK YOU!

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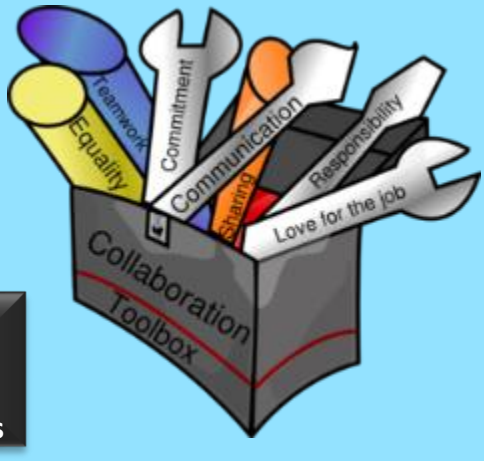
APPENDIX

Additional resources for each section

Action Learning Challenge Toolkit for Increasing Collaboration Among AmeriCorps VISTAs and VISTA Leaders



AMERICORPS VISTA
Volunteers In Service To America

Fight Poverty with PASSION

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RESOURCE LIST

VISTA Campus

•VISTA Campus: http://www.vistacampus.gov/home

Social Media & Marketing Guide

•For more information on Facebook group logistics:
https://www.facebook.com/help/167970719931213#How-do-I-create-a-group?
•For more information regarding creating a blog:
https://support.google.com/blogger/#topic=3339243
•For more information on how to manage content on Slideshare:
http://help.slideshare.com/categories/20066309-Managing-content-on-SlideShare
•For more information about Twitter:
https://support.twitter.com/groups/50-welcome-to-twitter
•For more information on how to find content on Twitter:
https://support.twitter.com/groups/53-discover
•For more information on how to manage Youtube content:
https://support.google.com/youtube/?hl=en#topic=4355266
•For more information on how to find content on Tumblr:
https://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/discovery
•Buffer: https://buffer.com/
•How to capture a screenshot: http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-xp/help/setup/take-a-screen-shot
•Defining evergreen content: http://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2012/10/16/guide-to-evergreen-content-marketing

Collaborative Opportunities During New VISTA Orientation and Training

•AmeriCorps Alums: http://www.americorpsalums.org/
•Organizational chart template (Shared via Slideshare)
•New VISTA Orientation PowerPoint template (Shared via Slideshare)
•Action Learning Challenge project "On-Site Orientation and Training Guidebook"

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RESOURCE LIST

Events & Meetups

•VISTA Campus Meetup: http://www.vistacampus.gov/resources/vista-meetups-0
•Meetup: www.meetup.com
•Doodle Poll (For finding dates): http://doodle.com/
•Doodle Choice (For making choices): http://doodle.com/create-choice
•Survey Monkey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/
•Resturant Guides: https://www.zomato.com/
http://www.yelp.com/

Community Connections

•Building Partnerships map
http://diytoolkit.org/tools/building-partnerships-map-2/

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ADDITIONAL COLLABORATION RESOURCES

The following is a list of articles the Action Learning Challenged team researched and read as they were devising this toolkit. The team believes these are great articles taking different looks at different ways and the importance of collaboration.

Christina Standerfer (2002). "Why Serve? Understanding Service Orientations of AmeriCorps VISTA Members." Corporation for National and Community Service National Service Fellowship Program.
http://beta.orionshoulders.com/Resources/articles/24_18218_C%20Standerfer%20%282002%29.pdf

•"The Future of Collaboration is About Looking Backwards."
http://www.fastcoexist.com/3021062/futurist-forum/the-future-of-collaboration-is-about-looking-backwards

•Collaborative Framework -- Addressing Community Capacity:
http://www.uvm.edu/extension/community/nnco/collab/framework.html

•Corporation for National & Community Service Knowledge Network.
http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources

•More Happy Hours
• http://nonprofitwithballs.com/2014/09/3-reasons-we-all-need-to-go-to-more-happy-hours/

•Strength of Weak Ties
https://sociology.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/the_strength_of_weak_ties_and_exch_w-gans.pdf

•Sense of Community
http://www.feverbee.com/2011/10/senseofcommunity.html

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