

# AmeriCorps VISTA Terms and Conditions

---

## Contents

---

- Screen 1..... 3
  - Welcome to VISTA Terms and Conditions ..... 3
- Screen 2..... 4
  - VISTA focuses on capacity building and anti-poverty ..... 4
- Screen 3..... 4
  - The terms of your VISTA service ..... 4
- Screen 4..... 5
  - As a VISTA you will.... ..... 5
- Screen 5..... 5
  - Conditions of Service ..... 5
- Screen 6..... 6
  - Consequences ..... 6
- Screen 7..... 6
  - Explore the Terms and Conditions in detail ..... 6
- Screen 8..... 7
  - Religious activities..... 7
- Screen 9..... 8
  - Practicing my religion - what can I do? ..... 8
- Screen 10..... 9
  - Religious Activities - Key Points ..... 9
- Screen 11..... 9
  - Outside employment ..... 9
- Screen 12..... 10
  - Outside Employment ..... 10
- Screen 13..... 10
  - Employment - Key Points ..... 10
- Screen 14..... 11
  - Educational Enrollment..... 11
- Screen 15..... 12
  - Educational Enrollment..... 12

Screen 16..... 13  
    Educational Enrollment - Key Points..... 13  
Screen 17..... 13  
    Political Activities - Key Points ..... 13  
Screen 18..... 14  
    Participating in a Political Campaign..... 14  
Screen 19..... 14  
    Staying politically active - what can I do? ..... 14  
Screen 20..... 15  
    THE HATCH ACT AND SOCIAL MEDIA KEY POINTS..... 15  
Screen 21..... 16  
Screen 22..... 17  
Screen 23..... 18  
    Congratulations! You have successfully completed this course... ..... 18

## Screen 1

---

### ***Welcome to VISTA Terms and Conditions***

As a VISTA member, you'll gain experience, a wide range benefits, such as a living allowance, health care, financial help with school or student loans, and a lot more. You'll also have to adhere to a few terms and conditions while you serve.

This course will help you make sense of the requirements. Once you've completed it, you can print a copy of *the Terms and Conditions Acceptance Form* to bring to Pre-Service Orientation (PSO)

Check out this short video to get started.

#### **Overview video script**

There are many benefits to joining AmeriCorps VISTA (!) apart from the service itself- including a living allowance, professional development and training, help with educational costs, and more.

In return, you're also expected to follow a number of terms and conditions of service.

There's a good reason for this. As a VISTA, your efforts should always be focused on helping organizations build the capacity they need to fight poverty and support our communities.

At the same time, and especially because VISTA is a federal program, it's important that members are never seen to be taking sides, or excluding people for political or religious reason, or any bias for that matter.

This course will help you understand the basics. You'll find answers to common questions about political and religious activities, taking courses while you serve, social media guidelines, and outside employment.

Once you've completed the course, you'll be able to fill out and print the official Acceptance Form that you'll bring to Pre-service Orientation.

## Screen 2

---

### ***VISTA focuses on capacity building and anti-poverty***

*AmeriCorps VISTA focuses exclusively on strengthening communities and ending poverty. What does that mean?*

As a VISTA you will

- Strengthen, expand, and increase the reach of anti-poverty programs; and
- Serve people in need through work with project staff and volunteers, rather than directly serve the clients of an organization.

You'll learn more about the mission of VISTA and capacity building at your PSO.

## Screen 3

---

### ***The terms of your VISTA service***

*Do you know the terms of your service commitment?*

- VISTA is a 12-month, full-time commitment.
- VISTA is not a 9-to-5 job.
- You might serve within the work hours of your sponsoring organization, but you are expected to be available evenings and weekends, as needed by your project.
- You may serve up to 5 terms of year-long AmeriCorps VISTA service. This limit does not apply to VISTA Summer Associates service.
- The tasks for your service year will be outlined in your VISTA Assignment Description (VAD). If you haven't seen this yet, ask your supervisor right away.

You must also successfully complete a National Service Criminal History Check in order to serve. This includes being fingerprinted at Pre-Service Orientation. VISTA is investigating for past sexual offenses and other criminal offenses that could have a direct bearing on an individual's service assignment.

## Screen 4

---

### ***As a VISTA you will....***

- Make a year-long commitment of service to a community.
- Carry on a legacy of national service started in the 1960s.

Your VISTA year will be full of opportunities. At the same time, because VISTA is a federal program certain activities are limited or forbidden by law and policy.

Which of the following activities do you think are allowed during your year of service?

	Allowed?
• Attend weekly worship services	<b>Yes Why?</b>
• Make extra cash selling crafts	<b>No Why?</b>
• Fundraise for a mayoral candidate	<b>No Why?</b>
• Defer student loan payments	<b>Yes Why?</b>
• Take a grant-writing class to build skills for your project	<b>Yes Why?</b>

Attend weekly worship services: *VISTAs are free to participate in religious services, but they should not actively promote their religion to others, evangelize, or recruit while they are identified as VISTAs. For example, handing out religious literature while wearing a VISTA shirt is not allowed.*

Make extra cash selling crafts: *You may sell arts and crafts as long as work does not interfere with your service, fully complies with the law, and has the support of your supervisor.*

Fundraise for a mayoral candidate: *While VISTAs can participate in some political activities when they are off-duty and not visibly associated with the VISTA program, they are not allowed to solicit or accept monetary contributions for partisan political candidates.*

Defer student loan payments: *VISTAs are allowed to defer student loan payments while serving.*

Take a grant-writing class to build skills for your project: *VISTAs can generally take college courses while they serve, however you should always clear this with your VISTA supervisor before enrolling.*

## Screen 5

---

### ***Conditions of Service***

Your VISTA year will be full of opportunities. However, because VISTA is a federal program, certain activities are limited or forbidden by law and policy. Every year, a small number of VISTAs are removed

from service for taking on part-time jobs to earn extra cash or violating other terms of service. This impacts not only the VISTAs involved, but also the organizations and communities they serve.

**Remember, as a VISTA member, you are ultimately responsible for:**

- Understanding the benefits available to you, and making timely choices about your benefits.
  - Benefits of Service contains a detailed list of the benefits available to VISTAs. Several benefits, such as Health Coverage, require you to make important choices at specific times. Be sure to read the VISTA Member Handbook, and always contact your state office if you feel that you need additional information.
- Knowing, and following, all of the terms and conditions of service.
  - This course offers an overview of these, but you'll find a fuller description in the VISTA Member Handbook. If you cannot find an answer to your question, contact your state office.

## Screen 6

---

### *Consequences*

These terms and conditions are intended to protect you, your program, the people you serve, and the VISTA program itself. You should report violation of these conditions to your program or state office.

If you are arrested for **any offense** during your term of service, you are **required** to inform your state office within seven days.

Members **may not serve** in a VISTA project when they are related by blood, marriage, or adoption, to project staff, sponsoring organization staff, officers or members of the sponsoring organization's board of directors, or Corporation program staff responsible for the VISTA project.

Remember, violating any of the conditions covered in this course is cause for termination, so make sure you understand all of them. For more information about these conditions, you can always view the member handbook, or ask your supervisor.

## Screen 7

---

### *Explore the Terms and Conditions in detail*

Now that you know a bit about the general terms and conditions of VISTA service, it's time to learn more about the details and how they could affect your everyday life. Complete each of the topics below to finish the course. Once you have completed all five sections, print the official Acceptance Form, complete it, and bring it with you to PSO.

- Religious activities
- Political activity
- Outside employment
- Educational enrollment
- Social media

## Screen 8

---

### ***Religious activities***

#### Partnering with a local minister

##### **Partnering with a minister**

**Narrator:** As part of your service, you've been talking with a local minister about the possibility of working together to train the community on common health hazards. She has an idea about how you might be able to help each other.

**Minister:** We're so glad you're working with us! I wonder if some of the folks at the workshop might also be interested learning more about our church. *Why don't you encourage them to come to worship with us on Sunday?*

**Narrator:** *What should you do?*

How should you respond to her request?

- Tell the minister you'd be happy to.
- Agree to do the workshop, but tell her you can't encourage people to attend religious services.
- Decline to do the session or work with this organization again.

Feedback for correct answer:

- *Explain to the minister that you are not allowed to participate in religious activities as a part of your VISTA service.*

Feedback for incorrect answers:

- *Sorry, that's not correct. Try again, and remember: VISTAs cannot participate in religious activities while on duty or perceived to be on duty.*

## Screen 9

---

### ***Practicing my religion - what can I do?***

*As a VISTA, you cannot participate in religious activities while on duty or perceived to be on duty. So what can you do during your free time?*

Belong to a religious organization	Yes
Recruit fellow VISTAs to my religion	No
Attend worship services	Yes
Hold my own beliefs	Yes
Wear a VISTA shirt to a benefit concert for my place of worship	No
Attend a potluck dinner at my religious organization	Yes
Lead my co-workers in prayer	No

Feedback for correct answer: That's right! *Remember, you can practice your own religion while you are a VISTA, but cannot participate in religious activities while you are on duty or are perceived to be on duty.*

Feedback for incorrect answers: *Sorry! That's not quite correct. Remember, while you can practice your own religion while you are a VISTA, you cannot participate in religious activities while you are on duty or are perceived to be on duty. Try again.*

## Screen 10

---

### ***Religious Activities - Key Points***

While you are entitled to your religious beliefs, you cannot participate in religious activities when *you are on duty or perceived to be on duty as a VISTA*. You cannot:

- Provide religious instruction
- Conduct worship services
- Proselytize (attempt to convert someone to a religion)
- Be admitted to a VISTA program based directly or indirectly on religious affiliation
- Induce others to participate in religious activities

Participation in any of these activities while serving as a VISTA is cause for termination of service. This does not preclude you from private prayer during service hours. Religious accommodation permits an individual time and space to privately practice religion.

## Screen 11

---

### ***Outside employment***

Picking up an extra job

#### **Outside employment script 1:**

Being poor isn't easy. You've been serving as a VISTA for a few months, and your living allowance just *\*barely\** covers your rent and utilities. On your way to work one day, you run across a flyer seeking painters to freshen up a local restaurant. You could really use the extra money lately. Is it OK for you work a few hours to earn a bit of extra cash?

Could you work as a painter part-time to earn little extra money?

- Maybe, as long as your supervisor agrees it won't interfere with your VISTA duties.
- No, you may not work for pay while you're a VISTA.
- It depends on whether the extra money makes your income rise above 110% of the poverty level.
- Yes. Your ambition and work ethic are admirable.

Feedback for correct answer:

- *Maybe, as long as your supervisor agrees it won't interfere with your VISTA duties and the work does not violate any law or VISTA policy.*

Feedback for incorrect answers:

- *You may have outside employment as long as your supervisor agrees it won't interfere with your VISTA duties and the work does not violate any law or VISTA policy.*

## Screen 12

---

### ***Outside Employment***

Playing music for cash

#### **Outside employment script 2:**

You've been playing guitar with your band ever since high school. Last year, you started getting a few paid gigs at a local restaurant. Even though your band understands you've joined VISTA, they still want you to play just a few more times until they can find a new guitarist. Should you go ahead and accept a couple of gigs and earn a little extra money?

*Should you accept a couple of gigs and earn some extra money?*

- It depends on whether it makes your income rise above 110% of the poverty level.
- Maybe, as long as it does not interfere with your VISTA duties.
- No, you made a commitment to VISTA and your community.

Feedback for correct answer:

- *You may have outside employment as long as your supervisor agrees it won't interfere with your VISTA duties and the work does not violate any law or VISTA policy.*

Feedback for incorrect answers:

- *You may have outside employment as long as your supervisor agrees it won't interfere with your VISTA duties and the work does not violate any law or VISTA policy.*

## Screen 13

---

### ***Employment - Key Points***

While in VISTA service, you may only accept outside employment for positions that are:

- Legal;
- Part-time;
- Not in conflict with your service or service hours,
- Not in violation of any applicable Federal, state, or local laws and regulations; and
- Not in conflict with any AmeriCorps VISTA program requirements or policies.

For more details, please see the Outside Employment Policy & FAQs and Outside Employment Request Form.

## Screen 14

---

### ***Educational Enrollment***

Taking a Spanish class to better communicate with the community you serve.

#### **Educational enrollments script 1:**

An important part of your VISTA service includes developing a family literacy project. This includes training that will be offered in both Spanish and English. Even though you know a little Spanish, it's pretty rusty. So you checked the local community college, and found a five-week course that looks just right. The best part is that it meets on Saturday mornings, outside your normal service hours. What do you need to do before you can take the course?

*What do you need to do before you can take a course?*

- Forget the whole thing because taking a course is never allowed while serving as a VISTA
- Get permission from your state office director.
- Determine the course's time commitment to ensure it won't interfere with project duties.
- Register for the course and then get approval.
- Talk with your supervisor and ensure that enrolling in the course will not interfere with your project duties.

Feedback for correct answers:

- *That's right. You need to be available for your project duties, and should always check with your supervisor before enrolling in any course.*

Feedback for incorrect answers:

- *Sorry, that's not correct. Try again, and remember: VISTAs can take classes under many circumstances. You must be available for your regular duties, and always check with your supervisor before taking a class.*

## Screen 15

---

### ***Educational Enrollment***

Completing your degree

**Educational Enrollment script:** When you joined VISTA, you were only twenty credits away from completing your degree in accounting. Now, you'd like to take a course so you will only have one semester left when you return to school after VISTA. Can you take this course to earn credits towards your degree while serving as a VISTA?

*Can you take a course to earn credits toward your degree while serving as a VISTA?*

- Yes, as long as the course does not interfere with your VISTA project and you tell your supervisor you are taking the course.
- No, as a VISTA your commitment is to your community and you cannot take any courses.
- Take the course. No one at VISTA tracks your enrollment in classes.

Feedback for correct answer:

- *Yes, as long the course does not interfere with your VISTA project, you can enroll. However, it is important to discuss this choice with your supervisor before you enroll. Your supervisor needs to agree that your studies will not interfere with the VISTA project.*

Feedback for incorrect answers:

- *Sorry, that's not correct. Try again, and remember: VISTAs can take classes under many circumstances. You must be available for your regular duties, and always check with your supervisor before taking a class.*

## Screen 16

---

### ***Educational Enrollment - Key Points***

As a VISTA you are allowed to attend class(es) as long as your studies do not interfere with your VISTA responsibilities. You and your supervisor will need to determine whether or not the class(es) will detract from your commitment to the VISTA project.

If you enrolled in a class(es) before you became a VISTA, discuss your study plan right away with your supervisor and make sure that the class(es) will not interfere with your project.

If your class(es) interfere with your VISTA responsibilities, your state office will be contacted. You will most likely be asked to withdraw from the course or end your VISTA service. For more information, please see the Member Handbook.

## Screen 17

---

### ***Political Activities - Key Points***

The Hatch Act applies to VISTA members at all times during their service, including some activities during their off-duty hours and extends to presence on social media. You can't engage in any political activity (either partisan or nonpartisan) that would result in identifying the VISTA program with the activity. While on duty or perceived to be identified with the VISTA program, VISTA members cannot show partisanship or work to direct resources (financial or human) to influence elections or legislation (i.e., lobby), engage in voter registration, or provide voter transportation to the polls.

Specific examples of activities you CANNOT participate in as a VISTA regardless of whether on duty or off duty:

- Soliciting or accepting from others monetary contributions for a partisan political candidate
- Pro-labor or anti-labor organizing
- Running for a partisan elected office

Participating in certain political activities during a VISTA term of service is prohibited and a cause for termination. Refer to the member handbook for more information and a full list of prohibited political activities.

## Screen 18

---

### ***Participating in a Political Campaign***

What can you do *while off duty* as a VISTA? *Check all that apply.*

- A. Wear political buttons on your VISTA t-shirt
- B. Hand out leaflets promoting your candidate
- C. Solicit others for money for your candidate
- D. Vote for your candidate of choice
- E. Run a voter registration drive where you are not identified as a VISTA
- F. Contribute \$20 of your own money to your candidate's election fund

Correct answers are: B, D, E, F

Feedback about incorrect answers:

- a) You may not wear political buttons or other political identity merchandise on any items that identify you as a VISTA, either on or off-duty.
- b) You may not solicit others for money for your candidate, either on or off-duty.

## Screen 19

---

### ***Staying politically active - what can I do?***

What can I do? As a VISTA member, you may not participate in *any* political activities while on duty. But what can you do during your free (off duty) time?

- A. Join a political club
- B. Plan a demonstration
- C. Donate money to a candidate
- D. Ask for donations to my candidate through my VISTA Facebook page
- E. Attend political meetings
- F. Distribute campaign literature
- G. Sign nominating petitions
- H. Register to vote
- I. Run for office in a partisan election

Correct answers are: A, B, C, E, F, G, H

Feedback about incorrect answers: (D & I) You may never run for office in a partisan election during your VISTA service. Nor may you solicit funds for a partisan candidate regardless of whether you are identifiable as a VISTA or you are on your free time.

## Screen 20

---

### ***THE HATCH ACT AND SOCIAL MEDIA KEY POINTS***

When engaging in political activities on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and others, you should be aware that some of the same rules regarding prohibited political activity that apply during your AmeriCorps VISTA service year are applicable both when you are performing your VISTA duties and when you are on personal time. To learn more about prohibited political activity, and how it applies to you during your service year, review the Political Activities section of this course.

With few exceptions below, as long as you are 1) on your own time, i.e. not on duty; 2) not perceived to be on duty; and 3) not using resources from your service site, you can use your personal social media profiles to advocate for or against political views, parties, groups, and candidates via blog posts, likes, retweets, etc.

You may NOT at any time during your VISTA service, even when not on duty and using your personal social media account(s):

- Post political content (or initiate lobbying) on any of the OFFICIAL AmeriCorps VISTA and CNCS social media pages (including Facebook, Twitter, VISTA Campus forums, etc.). These official sites are designed to share news, resources, and official program policy information.
- “Post”, “like”, “share”, comment on, or retweet political fundraising messages
- Use your site’s computer, workspace, and bandwidth to create or send political social media posts or emails. You cannot use your site’s resources in a manner that supports or identifies your site or the AmeriCorps VISTA program with partisan or non-partisan activities. This is true even when using your personal accounts on your site’s resources and when on break.

**As the next examples will show, you may voice your political opinions, if you follow the guidelines above**

## Screen 21

### Representing yourself on social media

---

While in your VISTA service term, what social media activities can you perform? Check all that apply.

[Correct Answers]

- A. Post your VISTA position title AND on your political party affiliation on your personal social media profiles
- B. "Like", "friend", or "follow" the social media profile of a political party or partisan group
- C. Create an online alias that does not identify with VISTA to solicit political contributions
- D. Post a link on your page that asks for donations for disaster relief
- E. "Like", "share", or "re-tweet", a link to a political fundraiser that friend posts to your profile
- F. Check your personal Facebook at your desk during a break at work and reply to a friend's post about an upcoming political rally

#### Feedback on answers:

- A. Yes, you can identify yourself as a VISTA and also your political party affiliation on your personal social media profiles
- B. Yes, you may engage in these activities when not on duty, not at your site, and not using your site's social media account
- C. No. Even if you create an alias not affiliated with VISTA, the political prohibitions still apply and you cannot seek out political contributions
- D. Yes, you can post fundraising solicitations for non-political causes, such as disaster relief
- E. No. While it's not considered political activity on your behalf if a friend posts a political fundraising link on your wall, it does become political activity if you "like", "share", "retweet", or endorse the link in any way. This is not allowed while you are a VISTA, even in your off-duty hours.
- F. No. You cannot engage in any type of partisan political online activity from your service site. This includes using your personal accounts and during breaks or other off-duty times

## Screen 22

---

While in your VISTA service term, what social media activities can you perform? Check all that apply.

[Correct Answers]

- A. Start a letter writing campaign on a VISTA Campus forum
- B. Post an online petition expressing your dissatisfaction with the Supreme Court decision on the official VISTA Facebook page
- C. Sign, “share”, or “like” an online petition at home after the work day.
- D. Organize a Google Hangout to discuss the recent decision using your personal Google+ account.
- E. Address online posts to elected officials that identify yourself as an AmeriCorps VISTA as you express your political position on certain legislation the official voted on (for example, starting your message with something along the lines of, “As an AmeriCorps VISTA, I think...”)

### Feedback on answers:

- A. No. You may not use the VISTA Campus (or any official federal) for purposes like this. These sites are designed to share news and policy information.
- B. No. You cannot post political stances on any official AmeriCorps VISTA social media platform. These feeds are meant to share news and policy information.
- C. Yes. As long as you are not on duty (or perceived as on duty) and not using your site computer or posting to official AmeriCorps VISTA pages, you can organize political activities like this online.
- D. Yes. As long as you are not on duty (or perceived as on duty) and not using your site computer, you can organize political activities like this online. Note: You cannot promote the Google Hangout by posting to official AmeriCorps VISTA pages.
- E. No. As an AmeriCorps VISTA member, you may not use your official position to influence elections or advocate for or against legislation, referendums, etc. (i.e. lobby).

## Screen 23

---

### ***Congratulations! You have successfully completed this course...***

...and you've also taken the first step to beginning your VISTA service.

Now that you have a better understanding of what you can and can't do during your VISTA year, what do you think? Is VISTA the right choice for you?

We hope your answer is Yes!

### **Final Steps**

If you are already registered for Pre-service Orientation (PSO), be sure to fill out the Acceptance Form, print it, and bring it with you when you attend.

If you are not registered, but want to join VISTA, visit the AmeriCorps *I'm ready to serve* page to search for opportunities.

### **Questions?**

Remember, anytime you have questions regarding the terms and conditions of your year of service, you can submit a request online at [nationalservice.gov](http://nationalservice.gov). You can also read about these topics in more depth, go to the VISTA handbook.