

AmeriCorps VISTA: COVID-19 FAQs

Reference Point: Posted COVID-19 FAQs:

<https://www.americorps.gov/coronavirus/ameri-corps-vista-questions>

Currently posted COVID-19 FAQs: Last Updated 1/3/22

Updates to AmeriCorps VISTA COVID-19 FAQs: Update for January 2023

AmeriCorps continues to monitor developments related to COVID-19. As America responds and recovers to the COVID-19 pandemic, you may have concerns about the potential and ongoing impacts on your program. The FAQs below address questions posed by the outbreak. Check back as they are updated regularly.

Last update: January 2023

These FAQs do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies. Refer to AmeriCorps' statute and regulations for applicable requirements.

I am an AmeriCorps VISTA member with questions about my service/benefits, who should I contact?

VISTAs (members, leaders, or summer associates) with questions should review the FAQs below and contact their project sponsor or supervisor with specific questions. If you have additional questions after speaking with your sponsor or supervisor, contact the AmeriCorps Hotline at 1-800-942-2677, via [webform](#), or [LIVE CHAT](#).

TELESERVICE AND EMERGENCY LEAVE

1. May AmeriCorps VISTA members teleserve full time?

Effective January 1, 2023, the AmeriCorps VISTA program updated the Teleservice Policy. This policy change allows for teleserving up to full time or service to be conducted via a virtual service site when VISTAs are eligible to serve and supported by their project sponsor and site. However, under the policy update remote service as defined by the VISTA program is not allowable. Please review [the VISTA member handbook](#) for complete details. In accordance with VISTA policies, a VISTA project

should ensure that the member has an approved teleservice agreement in place before permitting a VISTA member to engage in teleservice activities. The teleservice agreement can be found [online](#). [updated: January 2023]

2. What does it mean for an AmeriCorps VISTA member to be early terminated at this time, during the COVID-19 pandemic?

When an AmeriCorps VISTA member is early terminated for Compelling Personal Circumstances (CPC) due to COVID-19, it means their term of service has permanently ended and they are no longer enrolled in the VISTA program. As such, all member benefits (living allowance, health care allowance, childcare allowance, etc.) stop, effective the day of the early termination. Members who are early terminated for CPC due to COVID-19 are eligible for noncompetitive eligibility status, regardless of how long the member served. Please see the additional questions on Member Early Exits for information on how early termination impacts Education Awards and end of service cash stipend benefits.

Members who are early terminated for non-compelling circumstances are not eligible for noncompetitive eligibility status or an end of service benefit (Education Award or cash stipend). [updated 05/14/2020] [no change January 2023]

3. Can VISTA members use a combination of reporting to site & teleservice?

Yes, VISTAs may use a combination of reporting to site in-person and teleservice. AmeriCorps VISTA maintains certain parameters are required for successful VISTA service; these parameters include:

- A VISTA needs to understand the organization and the people within the organization well so they can have an impactful term of service;
- A VISTA needs to understand the community and the people in the community so they can serve them well;
- VISTA service is not a 9-5 job; and
- The supervisor has a role as coach & mentor that goes beyond the responsibilities of a supervisor to an employee.

Additionally, the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) must lend itself to teleservice or virtual service tasks; and the supervisor and VISTA need to be intentional about connecting and collaborating in a teleservice or virtual service site environment. So long as a sponsoring organization, service site, and VISTA understands and can meet these parameters, a VISTA may serve via teleservice and at a virtual service site provided the sponsoring organization has the capacity and internal policies to support such service opportunities. [updated January 2023]

4. May a VISTA teleserve from a place other than their residence?

VISTAs who are approved for teleservice from their supervisor must complete a Teleservice Request and Agreement Form ([found online](#)) which asks for the alternative

service site address the VISTA plans to teleserve from. This request and agreement form must be completed and approved by the site supervisor prior to a VISTA serving from any alternative location. [updated January 2023]

5. May a VISTA member teleserve if the member is quarantined?

All VISTAs should follow the health and safety measures put in place by the sponsor and site for staff and volunteers related to quarantining and isolating. The AmeriCorps VISTA program defers to the local project sponsor and site policies and procedures related to local health and safety measures. [updated January 2023]

6. May summer associates teleserve full time, for the duration of their assignment?

Effective January 1, 2023, the AmeriCorps VISTA program updated the Teleservice Policy. This policy change allows for teleserving up to full time or service to be conducted via a virtual service site when VISTAs are eligible to serve and supported by their project sponsor and site. However, under the policy update remote service as defined by the VISTA program is not allowable. Please review [the VISTA Member Handbook](#). The policy update is applicable to all VISTAs, which include member, leaders, and summer associates. But not all VISTAs are eligible for teleservice or virtual service site opportunities, as sponsor and sites must have the capacity and internal policies to support teleservice and virtual service site opportunities. In accordance with VISTA policies, a VISTA project should ensure that the member has an approved teleservice agreement in place before permitting a VISTA member to engage in teleservice activities. The teleservice agreement can be found [online](#). [updated January 2023]

VISTA PROJECTS AND GRANTS

1. May sponsors amend VISTA assignments so that activities related to COVID-19 response efforts are added? Can the activities include direct service?

Sponsors may make modifications so that assignments include COVID-19 response efforts. Sponsors may do so, as long as the activities align with the VISTA program's purposes, as set forth in section [104\(a\) of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended](#). The activities must relate to combatting poverty or addressing poverty-related problems in communities across the country. However, full year members may not engage in direct service activities as a primary function of their assignment.

Sponsors must formally document changes made to VISTA assignments via an amendment to the project application and/or an update to the VISTA Assignment Description, depending on the nature of the change. Please work with your Portfolio Manager to make these changes. [updated 08/06/2020] [no change January 2023]

2. What should a VISTA member do if a service site is closed for a significant amount of time?

If the physical service site is closed, the VISTA should consult with their project sponsor and site supervisor to see if they are eligible to teleserve. See above for details. If the service site is ceasing operations altogether, the VISTA Supervisor should contact the assigned Portfolio Manager in the Regional Office. [updated January 2023]

3. Can VISTA grant funds be used to offset costs of additional expenses related to coronavirus?

No. The use of VISTA grant funds is restricted to payroll, supervision, training, and travel. [updated 03/12/2020] [no change January 2023]

4. I have a Project Progress Report (PPR) due soon. Due to the COVID-19 response/impact, the project has not met planned accomplishments for the reporting period, and/or I am not able to collect data from some sites. What should I do?

You should complete the PPR by the established due date and include the information you have available. Document your challenges, how you mitigated them, and any technical assistance you need from AmeriCorps. The PPR is a way for sponsors to document project accomplishments during a certain reporting period, as well as challenges, support provided to VISTA members, and technical assistance needs. AmeriCorps personnel use the PPR to assess progress and to determine what feedback, technical assistance, or other interventions are needed.

By completing the PPR, you are providing AmeriCorps with information about your COVID-19 related challenges in implementing the project, which allows us to work with you on potential changes to programming, flexibilities, or other technical assistance that your organization, partners, staff, and members need. You can document what has transpired (successes, challenges, changes in member status and recruitment plans, technical assistance needs, etc.) in the narrative section of the PPR. Please be specific in the narrative section. For performance measures, if you would like to provide any additional information for a performance measure set, you should provide it in the "Sponsor Note" section. If targets are not on track to be achieved, provide an explanation, such as "No data from ABC After-School Program due to closure at XYZ Elementary School in response to COVID-19. [updated 01/03/2022] [no change January 2023]

5. My organization can no longer afford cost share due to financial difficulties related to COVID-19. Do we still need to recruit and make placements for all of the cost share positions in our Memorandum of Agreement?

If due to COVID-19 your organization can no longer afford to place the originally agreed upon number of cost share members, you will need to work with your

designated Portfolio Manager from the Regional Office to adjust any changes to your recruitment and placement efforts. In addition, any permanent changes to your VISTA project application related to the number of VISTAs assigned to your project will need to be discussed with your designated Portfolio Manager from the Regional Office.

Please note that AmeriCorps cannot convert unfilled cost share positions to standard positions. This means that, for example, if you were planning on recruiting and placing three standard members and two cost share members, but you can no longer afford to cost share future member placements due to COVID-19, you may need to limit your recruitment and placement efforts to the three standard members. Please work with your designated Portfolio Manager from the Regional Office to adjust your recruitment and placement plans. [updated: January 2023]

MEMBER EARLY EXITS

1. Can AmeriCorps VISTA members get a full education award if they have to early terminate due to circumstances related to COVID-19?

It depends. With regard to VISTA members who elect the AmeriCorps Segal Education Award (Education Award) as their end-of-service award, there are three situations that have different outcomes:

AmeriCorps VISTA members who have served less than 15 percent of their term of service at time of exit: AmeriCorps VISTA members who elect the Education Award as their end-of-service award, but who have served less than 15 percent of their term of service at the time they exit, are not eligible for a full or prorated Education Award, even if their early exit is due to a Compelling Personal Circumstance (CPC) related to COVID-19. See [45 CFR § 230\(a\)\(2\)](#).

AmeriCorps VISTA members who have served between 15 and 50 percent of their term of service at time of exit: AmeriCorps VISTA members who elect the Education Award as their end-of-service award, and who completed between 15 and 50 percent of the term of service at the time they exit, may be released for a CPC and receive an Education Award proportional to the number of days they have served. They are not eligible for a full Education Award with a CPC exit related to COVID-19. See [45 CFR § 230\(a\)\(2\)](#); [45 CFR §2556.320\(i\)](#).

AmeriCorps VISTA members who have served more than 50 percent of their term of service at time of exit: AmeriCorps VISTA members who have completed more than 50 percent of their term of service at the time they exit (i.e., at least 183 days of a yearlong term of service) may be eligible to receive the full Education Award amount with a CPC exit related to COVID-19. See section [3514\(a\) of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#); see also [45 CFR §2556.320\(i\)](#).

[updated 04/15/2020] [no changes January 2023]

2. Can an AmeriCorps VISTA member get a full cash stipend as his or her end-of-service benefit if the member has to early terminate due to circumstances related to COVID-19?

No, VISTA members who elect to receive the cash stipend (instead of the Education Award), and who are released from the program early due to COVID-19, are not eligible to receive a full cash stipend. The CARES Act does not allow for a VISTA member who selects the stipend as their end-of-service benefit to receive the full value of the stipend.

Exiting from the VISTA program early due to COVID-19 could be considered a medical Compelling Personal Circumstance (CPC) exit. Thus, a VISTA member who exits early from the VISTA program due to COVID-19, and elects the stipend, could be eligible to receive a prorated stipend CPC (i.e., due to circumstances related to COVID-19). See [45 CFR §2556.320\(i\)](#). [updated: January 2023]

3. For VISTA members who elect the Education Award, and have served over 50 percent of their service term, what qualifies as “circumstances related to COVID-19”?

AmeriCorps VISTA members who elect the Education Award as their end-of-service award, and who have served at least 50 percent of their service term, may need to early terminate from their term of service due to a medical Compelling Personal Circumstances related to COVID-19.

See section [3514\(a\) of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#). AmeriCorps will promptly review and decide on all requests for early terminations due to COVID-19 made by, or on behalf of, VISTA members. Upon review of the requests and related information submitted (including supporting documentation), our agency will decide whether such an early termination is due to circumstances related to COVID-19, and whether the member is eligible for a full or pro-rated Education Award. [updated January 2023]

4. What process may sponsors use to request a full education award for VISTA members who have served more than 50 percent of the term of service and need to early terminate due to circumstances related to COVID-19?

If the VISTA member has served at least 50 percent of their service term, and they need to early terminate for circumstances related to COVID-19, the VISTA member must provide a written statement explaining how their early termination is related to COVID-19 and provide any supporting documentation. The sponsor must email the statement and supporting documentation to their designated Portfolio Manager who will work with the VISTA Member Support Unit.

If the circumstances are related to lack of service activities, the sponsor/supervisor may provide the written statement in place of the member. If multiple VISTA members need to early terminate, the sponsor/supervisor may provide one written statement that includes the names of all VISTA members early terminating under the circumstances related to COVID-19.

As with all early terminating members, the VISTA Member Support Unit will review the individual member's exit and the documentation provided to ensure compliance with VISTA policies. In addition, the VISTA Member Support Unit will review the percentage of the service term completed to determine if the member is eligible for a pro-rated or full Education Award. [updated January 2023]

5. Will I still qualify for interest accrual benefits if I was prevented from completing my full term of service due to COVID-19?

Individuals who are prevented from completing their full term of service due to COVID-19 may still qualify to receive interest accrual benefits. In accordance with [45 CFR § 2529.10](#), the National Service Trust (Trust) pays up to 100 percent of the interest that accrued on an AmeriCorps member's qualified student loans during their service. These are the conditions that apply:

An interest payment can only be made after you have exited the program and have earned a full, partial, or prorated Education Award.

The percentage of interest accrual benefit that you are eligible to receive is based upon your total service hours accrued, or the amount of time (in days), you were enrolled when you exited.

If you qualify for additional hours/time under the CARES Act, such hours/time will be provided to the Trust and be considered "hours/time served."

The Trust will only pay interest on qualified student loans, as described on the [Using Your Segal AmeriCorps Education Award web page](#).

For the AmeriCorps VISTA Program, if you successfully completed your term of service, the Trust will pay the interest accrued for the entire term of service. If you exited early from the VISTA program due to a Compelling Personal Circumstance (CPC), the Trust will pay the interest accrued during the days you were enrolled in the VISTA program before your early exit. If you exited the VISTA program early, and your exit was not for a CPC, you are not eligible to have the Trust pay the interest that accrued while you served. [updated 04/15/2020] [no changes January 2023]

6. Is medical documentation necessary to receive a prorated end-of-service benefit if a member needs to early terminate due to coronavirus issues?

VISTA members need to follow the Early Termination process outlined in the Member Handbook.[updated January 2023]

7. Are members who exit AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA, AmeriCorps NCCC, or Peace Corps early due to COVID-19 eligible to apply to serve as a VISTA Leader?

AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC members who have already completed more than 50% of their service term prior to being exited early from service due to COVID-19 are deemed to have satisfied the length of prior service requirement and are eligible to apply to serve as VISTA Leaders. Peace Corps Volunteers who have completed more than 50% of their service terms (i.e., more than one year of their two-year term of service), and who have been forced to evacuate from their posts and exit service early due to COVID-19, are deemed to have satisfied the length of prior service requirement and are eligible to apply to serve as VISTA Leaders.

Under authority in [45 CFR § 2556.7](#), the AmeriCorps CEO has temporarily waived, through the pendency of the COVID-19 national emergency, the length of prior service requirement as it relates to VISTA Leader eligibility as set forth at [45 CFR § 2556.605](#).

This temporary waiver to VISTA Leader eligibility requirements is valid only during the COVID-19 national emergency. Individuals who, for whatever reason, have not served at least one full term of service, in any of the three AmeriCorps programs or in the Peace Corps, will not be eligible to apply to serve as VISTA Leaders. [updated 05/20/2020]

MEMBER BENEFITS

1. What emergency travel benefits are available to VISTA members?

Under section [105\(b\)\(1\) of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended](#), AmeriCorps is authorized to provide VISTA members "travel and other support" that is necessary and appropriate to carry out the purpose of the VISTA program. Accordingly, AmeriCorps may provide VISTA members certain emergency travel benefits to support their continued service in the VISTA program during this critical time.

The VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) will follow up individually with members approved for emergency travel who are scheduled to complete service in the near future and entitled to Close of Service travel. The VMSU will determine the appropriate benefit.

To request emergency travel, the VISTA supervisor should complete the [AmeriCorps VISTA Emergency Travel Request and Approval Form](#) and submit to the VISTA Member Support Unit (vmsu@cns.gov) an email titled "Emergency Travel – Member's Name". The VMSU will follow up with the member to process the request. [updated January 2023]

2. Is emergency assistance available to VISTA members?

Under section [105\(b\)\(1\) of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended](#), AmeriCorps is authorized to ensure that VISTA members have available “allowances and other support” that will enable them to continue their VISTA service and thereby carry out the purpose of the VISTA program. Accordingly, AmeriCorps may provide VISTA members certain emergency assistance to support their continued service in the VISTA program during this critical time.

Therefore, for the duration of a VISTA member's term of service, emergency assistance may be available if the assistance is essential to the VISTA's capacity to serve effectively. Emergency funds may be appropriate in extraordinary circumstances that present the VISTA member with an undue financial hardship. VISTA members may be eligible for a one-time payment of up to \$500 to cover emergency costs.

To request emergency assistance, the VISTA member should send the VISTA Member Support Unit (vmsu@cns.gov) an email titled “Emergency Assistance Request – Member's Name,” with the following information:

- VISTA member's name
- National Service Participant ID (if available)
- Contact phone number and email for VISTA member
- Written statement from the VISTA member detailing:
 - The circumstances surrounding the emergency costs
 - An explanation of why the emergency assistance is essential to the VISTA's ability to serve effectively
 - An itemization of the property with the cost of the item(s) associated with the emergency assistance
- Police report where appropriate
- Indication of whether the property was covered by insurance and if a claim has been presented

The VMSU will follow up with the member to process the request. [updated January 2023]

3. What coverage is provided for COVID-19 testing under the VISTA health benefit? If a VISTA member is diagnosed with COVID-19, what is covered under the VISTA health benefit?

A VISTA member must be enrolled in either the AmeriCorps VISTA Healthcare Allowance or the AmeriCorps VISTA Health Benefit Plan to receive health benefit coverage. If a member is not already enrolled, they can enroll now [online](#).

The best source for COVID-19 resources is the [Centers for Disease Control](#). Follow their guidance on who should be tested and measures for testing. If testing for COVID-19 is recommended, testing is covered under both the AmeriCorps VISTA Healthcare Allowance and the AmeriCorps VISTA Health Benefit Plan.

If a VISTA member is diagnosed with COVID-19, both the AmeriCorps VISTA Healthcare Allowance and the AmeriCorps VISTA Health Benefit Plan will cover medically necessary care, in accordance with the benefit plan.

For further questions about the VISTA health benefit, please contact International Medical Group at: Telephone: 855-851-2974 (toll-free) or 317-833-1711
Email: [VISTAcare](mailto:VISTAcare<imglobal.com)

[updated 03/30/2020][no changes January 2023]

4. Can a grantee, sponsor, or subsite require me to receive a vaccine for COVID-19 to serve onsite?

AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors do not mandate vaccination for our members and volunteers to serve. However, whether a grantee, sponsor, or subsite may mandate vaccination for members or volunteers to serve on site is a determination for the sponsor to make, consistent with federal, state, and local law. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provide guidance applicable to the COVID-19 vaccination at the links provided below. If a grantee or sponsor does mandate vaccination, there may be medical or religious exemptions. Generally, grantees and sponsors are encouraged to follow state and local law, as well as CDC and EEOC guidance around workplace vaccination plans.

- Updated as of Nov. 4, 2021: [CDC: Workplace Vaccination Program](#)
- Updated as of March 1, 2022: [EEOC FAQs: What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws](#)

[updated 04/15/2021][no changes January 2023]

5. I am a currently serving VISTA and would like to change my End-of-Service Award from the Education Award to the Cash Stipend but missed the 10th-month deadline. Am I still able to switch to the Cash Stipend?

Yes, as a temporary COVID-19 related exception to policy, members are allowed to change their End-of-Service Award from the Education Award to the Cash Stipend during this time. You must submit a request to change your End-of-Service Award from the Education Award to the Cash Stipend to the VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU) at VMSU@cns.gov at least one week prior to your end of service. One week is required for the AmeriCorps agency to complete the necessary actions to make the change to your End-of-Service Award status.

Individuals will not be allowed to switch their End-of-Service Award if:

- The individual already completed service.
- The member selected the Cash Stipend and wants to switch to the Education Award.

Members should contact the VMSU at VMSU@cns.gov if they have any questions or to submit a request. [updated 03/30/2020] [no changes January 2023]

6. Is a VISTA member who early terminates service due to COVID-19 eligible to receive noncompetitive eligibility status?

If a VISTA member demonstrates the ability to satisfactorily complete the full term of service, and early terminates due to COVID-19, then yes, they may receive non-competitive eligibility status, regardless of how long the member served.

AmeriCorps evaluates the facts of each case and makes the determination as to whether a VISTA member's early exit was due to COVID-19. If eligible, the VISTA Member Support Unit will provide a noncompetitive eligibility letter to the member within two weeks of their exit. Members should contact the VISTA Member Support Unit (vmsu@cns.gov) with any questions. [updated January 2023]

7. A VISTA member has tested positive for or been exposed to someone who has tested

If a VISTA tests positive for COVID-19 or is exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, the VISTA should first consult with their service site policy related to isolating and exposure. They may also consult with the [CDC](#) Isolation and Exposure Calculator for additional guidance.

Fulltime VISTA members and Leaders are entitled to personal leave, medical leave, emergency leave, and extended medical leave which can all be utilized to time off related to COVID-19. Additional information available at: <https://americorps.gov/members-volunteers/vista/benefits>

[updated January 2023]

8. May VISTA members utilize leave benefits for vaccine or booster appointments?

VISTA members may utilize up to eight hours of administrative leave per each COVID-19 vaccine or booster appointment. This leave time may be applied retroactively within the current service term. Our agency is using its authority under Section [105\(b\)\(1\) of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended](#), to make an exception to its leave policy to allow administrative leave for COVID-19 vaccine or booster appointments. Per standard VISTA practice, sponsors should track the use of such leave. [updated January 2023]

9. May VISTA members utilize leave benefits for adverse reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine or booster?

VISTA members may utilize up to three days of emergency sick leave per each COVID-19 vaccine or booster appointment for adverse reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine or booster. This leave time may be applied retroactively within the current service term. Our agency is using its authority under Section 105(b)(1) of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended, to make an exception to its leave policy to allow sick leave for adverse reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine or booster. Per standard VISTA practice, sponsors should track the use of such leave. [updated January 2023]

10. What happens when a member does not comply with a sponsor's COVID-19 vaccination policy?

Members are expected to comply with the COVID-19 vaccination policy established by their grantee, sponsor, or subsite. If a member does not comply, the sponsor may request their removal from the project by contacting their Portfolio Manager. The VISTA member will be placed on Administrative Hold and may, depending on the circumstances, be given an opportunity to seek reassignment. [updated 10/18/2021] [no changes January 2023]

11. What happens if the member is unable to find reassignment?

If a VISTA member does not secure a suitable reassignment, they will likely be early terminated from the VISTA program. In accordance with [45 CFR §2556.320\(i\)](#), AmeriCorps will determine whether their early termination is for Compelling Personal Circumstances. Please see the additional questions on Member Early Exits for information on how early termination impacts Education Awards and end of service cash stipend benefits. [updated 10/18/2021][no changes January 2023]

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AmeriCorps is the operating name of CNCS (Corporation for National and Community Service).