

AmeriCorps VISTA Teleservice & Virtual Service Site Policy Update FY2023 Overview - External Release

Updated Version as of 4.19.23

AmeriCorps VISTA updated the VISTA teleservice policy that took effect on January 1, 2023.

The new teleservice and virtual service site policy reflects the changing nature of work in an increasingly digital and “post-pandemic” landscape. This policy expands the opportunities for sponsors and sites to continue to plan for and design successful teleservice and virtual service site assignments while recommitting to the “place-based” model of the VISTA program. The policy does not allow remote service as AmeriCorps has defines it: where members are serving a community but not having the expectation to be a part of that community.

AmeriCorps allowed for a grace period until March 31, 2023, to permit VISTA members to align with the policy.

- The teleservice and virtual service site policy replaced the previous teleservice policy and superseded any temporary policy exceptions made to the teleservice policy during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Remote service is NOT permitted under the policy, as members must reside within the commuting area of the geographic community of the assigned sponsor or site.
- Commuting area will be defined by the sponsor as a reasonable commute per community varies across the country.
- Teleserving, up to full time, is permitted from a location within the commuting area of the assigned sponsor or site and members are to be physically present at the sponsor or site and/or community events when required.
- Virtual service sites refer to organizations that do not have a physical location (e.g., brick and mortar building) but maintains a defined geographic service area. Virtual service sites are permitted but must be located within the commuting area, as members are to be physically present to meet with their supervisor and/or attend community events when required.
- The policy is applicable to all members, which include fulltime members, leaders, and summer associates.
- Teleservice and virtual service site request / agreement form is still required and will be maintained by the sponsor.
- AmeriCorps VISTA allowed for a “grace period” until March 31, 2023, to permit sponsors and members to align with this new policy and allow a limited exemption from the policy for currently serving members, in certain circumstances. As of April 1, 2023, all members who enroll (either as new placements, re-enrollments, or extensions) must follow the teleservice and virtual service site policy that was released on January 1, 2023

What the policy does NOT change:

- While the policy is applicable to all VISTA member, **NOT all VISTA members are eligible** for teleservice or virtual service site opportunities. Sponsor and sites must have the capacity and internal policies to support teleservice and virtual service site opportunities.



- Teleservice agreements under the auspices of reasonable accommodation are excluded from this policy. They are covered in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- Sponsors and sites still need to be able to meet certain parameters, project requirement and oversight to be successful in a teleservice or virtual service site environment.
- VADs must continue to lend themselves to tasks to be completed successfully in a teleservice or virtual service site environment.

The teleservice and virtual service site policy will be updated in the member handbook. Should you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please reach out to your designated portfolio manager.

You can also connect the AmeriCorps Hotline at 1-800-942-2677

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This FAQ is to help address questions related to implementing the Teleservice and Virtual Service Site for VISTA members, as it replaced VISTAs previous policy and supersedes any temporary policy exceptions made to the teleservice policy during the COVID-19 outbreak. VISTA sponsor or member questions should be directed to the project's designated Portfolio Manager.

1. When did this policy change formally take effect?

January 01, 2023

2. Will VISTA members be able to serve remotely under the Teleservice and Virtual Service Site Policy?

The AmeriCorps VISTA program has determined and defined the difference between teleservice, virtual service sites, and remote service. While teleservice and virtual service site arrangements are allowable in certain circumstances, remote service is NOT permitted under the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Definitions are provided below.

3. Why is VISTA removing “remote” service from the program?

The VISTA program implemented this policy change to reflect the changing nature of work in an increasingly digital and “post-pandemic” landscape. Prior to the COVID-19 policy exceptions declared during the national emergency, VISTA's teleservice policy allowed for a member to serve up to two days in a pay period from a teleservice location. The Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy expands the opportunities for sponsors and sites to continue to plan for and design successful teleservice and virtual site assignments. At the same time, this policy recommits to the “place-based” model of the VISTA program and does not allow remote service (members serving a community but not having the expectation to be a part of that community).

4. Is there a grace period, to allow sponsors and VISTA members to align with the new policy?

AmeriCorps VISTA allowed for a “grace period” until March 31, 2023, to allow VISTA members to complete service and sponsors to align future VISTA placements with the new Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy in certain circumstances. The Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy replaced the previous teleservice policy and supersedes any temporary policy exceptions made to the teleservice policy during the COVID-19 outbreak. As of April 1, 2023, all project sponsors who place new members, re-enroll members, or extend service terms must follow the Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy that was released on January 1, 2023.



5. Which type of VISTA slots is the policy applicable to?

The policy is applicable to all VISTA members, which include yearlong members, leaders, and summer associates

6. Are all VISTA members automatically eligible for teleservice or virtual service site opportunities?

No, sponsors and sites must have the administrative capacity and internal policies to support teleservice and virtual service site opportunities at their organization. If the sponsor or site do not allow work from home opportunities, VISTA members will not be eligible for these opportunities and will need to report to the sponsor or site as directed. In addition, the VAD (VISTA Assignment Description) must lend itself to tasks that can be performed in such an environment with appropriate supervision. If the VAD does not support tasks that can be performed in such a manner the VISTA member will not be eligible for such opportunities. Additional details about administrative capacity and internal policies can be found in other FAQ questions below.

7. What are the key definitions relevant to the Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy? How does VISTA define teleservice, virtual service sites, and remote service?

Sponsor: refers to the non-profit organization or government agency that applies for and receives an award to place AmeriCorps members and operate a VISTA project, and if applicable, receive a VISTA support or program grant.

Project: refers to the set of activities, as set forth in the project application, for which the federal award of VISTA resources was made.

Site: refers to a non-profit organization or government agency, usually separate from the sponsor, that hosts VISTA members who were assigned to the sponsor's VISTA project, and where a VISTA member performs service activities.

Commuting Area: The geographic area surrounding an AmeriCorps VISTA sponsor or site location that encompasses the localities where people live and reasonably can be expected to travel back and forth daily to work / serve.

Teleservice: Teleservice refers to a service flexibility arrangement in which a VISTA member may perform duties and responsibilities of their assigned VAD from an approved alternate location other than the location of the assigned sponsor or site. VISTA members may teleserve up to and including fulltime, in alignment with the policies of the sponsor or site. VISTA members are allowed to teleserve from a location within the commuting area of the geographic community of the assigned sponsor or site and are to be physically present at the sponsor or site and/or community events when required.

Virtual Service Site: Virtual service sites refer to organizations that do not have a physical location (aka brick and mortar building). The sponsor or site is a virtual organization but still maintains a defined geographic area where the organization provides service and/or where the VISTA member's assignment is focused (as described in the VISTA application). VISTA members are allowed to serve from a virtual site but must be located within the commuting area of the geographic community where the sponsor or site/assignment provides service and are physically present to meet with their supervisor and/or attend community events when required. VISTA members may teleserve up to and including fulltime at a virtual service site, in alignment with the policies of the sponsor or site.



Remote Service: Remote service is defined as an arrangement in which a VISTA member is not located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site and is not expected to be physically present at the sponsor or site and/or community events. **Please note, remote service is NOT permitted under the AmeriCorps VISTA program.**

8. What if my organization does not support alternative work locations for our staff or volunteers, and we require individual to report to our office? Do I still need to provide this opportunity to VISTA members?

Sponsors and sites must have the administrative capacity and internal policies to support teleservice or virtual service site opportunities at their organization for VISTA members to be eligible. If the sponsor or site does not allow alternative work locations, VISTA members will not be eligible for these opportunities and will need to report to the sponsor or site as directed.

9. Who provides resources, such as phone, computer, internet, etc. for VISTA members who are serving via teleservice or from a virtual service site?

Per the VISTA Memorandum of Agreement (MA) Provisions: *"The Sponsor will provide service-related transportation, administrative resources and other project support needed to successfully conduct the project activities"*. The VISTA Sponsor must ensure VISTA members have proper equipment, workspace, and capabilities to teleserve or serve from a virtual service site in alignment with both the VISTA MA and their own organizational policies and procedures.

10. Can a VISTA member who was active as of the effective policy change date January 01, 2023, but not located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site because of COVID-19, continue to serve in this capacity to finish out their current service term?

Sponsors must have notified the AmeriCorps ORO-Regional Office before the end of the grace period (March 31, 2023) that member(s) serving under their VISTA project wanted to complete service from a location not within the commuting area of the sponsor / site. Such a placement must be supported by the VISTA sponsor / site. A master list of members completing service not within the commuting area of their sponsor/site was compiled for official record. As of April 1, 2023, all project sponsors and members must follow the Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy that was released on January 1, 2023.

11. As a VISTA sponsor, I had been actively (as of the effective policy change date of January 01, 2023) recruiting candidates for VISTA positions not located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site because of COVID-19. Can I still nominate candidates I have selected for positions that have a future start date?

As of January 1, 2023, VISTA sponsors who were actively recruiting candidates for VISTA positions who were not located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site because of COVID-19, could nominate candidates within the determined timeframe. **The VISTA member's service start date must have occurred by or before March 31, 2023.** As of April 1, 2023, all project sponsors who place new members or re-enroll members must follow the Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy that was released on January 1, 2023. Meaning, new members who start after April 1, 2023, must be located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site.

12. Can a VISTA member serving (as of the effective policy change date January 01, 2023) and not located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site because of COVID-19, REENROLL for an additional term of service and not have to relocate?

A VISTA member who was active as of January 1, 2023 and not located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site because of COVID-19 could reenroll for



an additional remote term **IF** the notice of reenrollment was given by the sponsor to the ORO-Regional Office by or before the end of the grace period (March 31, 2023) **AND the first day of the reenrollment term started by or before March 31, 2023**. As of April 1, 2023, all project sponsors who re-enroll members must follow the Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy that was released on January 1, 2023. Meaning, members who re-enroll after April 1, 2023, must be located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site.

13. Can a VISTA member serving (as of the effective policy change date January 01, 2023) and not located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site because of COVID-19, [Extend Service](#) and not have to relocate?

A VISTA member who was active as of January 1, 2023 and not located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site because of COVID-19 could extend their service term **IF** the notice of extension was given by the sponsor to the ORO-Regional Office by or before the end of the grace period (March 31, 2023) **AND the first day of the service extension period started by or before March 31, 2023**. As of April 1, 2023, all project sponsors who extend members service terms must follow the Teleservice and Virtual Service Site policy that was released on January 1, 2023. Meaning, members who want to extend their service term after April 1, 2023, must be located within the commuting area of the geographic community of the sponsor or site.

14. Who defines the reasonable commuting area? And how do they define it?

AmeriCorps VISTA defines “commuting area” in general terms. Commuting area is defined by the AmeriCorps VISTA program as the geographic area surrounding an AmeriCorps VISTA sponsor or site location that encompasses the localities of where people live and reasonably can be expected to travel back and forth daily to work / serve. Sponsors and sites will be responsible for defining what is considered a “reasonable commuting distance” based on their geographic location, and program design, as well as any relevant organizational policies and procedures. Sponsors will work with their designated Portfolio Managers to ensure a definition of “a reasonable commuting area” is either in the application, continuation, or some other way before recruitment begins. Any questions from a VISTA candidate about “if teleservice is allowed” or what the “commuting area” is should be addressed by the sponsor.

15. Can VISTA support grants or VISTA program grant funds be used to support VISTAs commuting cost to their sponsor or site location?

No, VISTA support grants and program grants are not to be used to support VISTA member commuting costs to their sponsor or site location. The budget instructions outline more detail about the appropriate use for support and program grant funds.

16. Where do current and potential sponsors include details about a teleservice or virtual service site arrangement in the application?

As of the policy implementation date, the VISTA application instructions document update is still going through the clearance process. However, current sponsors can add details about teleservice and virtual service site arrangements during the continuation application process or through an application amendment.

- a. The “Sites” section of the application must reflect all current sites and future placement sites for VISTA service. The Sites section of the application must include the name of the organization, EIN number, address, and zip code, along with the supervisor’s name and contact information.
- b. Information regarding teleservice or virtual service sites must be included in the application Narrative under each of the following sections: the Project Management, Intermediary



Justification (as applicable), Recruitment and Development, and VISTA Assignment section.

- **Project Management:** In this section, sponsors should include plans for providing daily supervisor to VISTA members onsite, in teleservice, or serving via virtual service sites; and how the site supervisors will be intentional about connecting and collaborating with VISTA members in a teleservice or virtual service site environment.
- **Intermediary Justification:** In this section, sponsors provide information about sites they will partner with for the project implementation. If the service sites will be teleservice or virtual service site, sponsor should note which sites will support this type of service for VISTA members and how the project sponsor plans to monitor activities.
- **Recruitment and Development:** In this section, sponsors describe whether their organization provides teleservice opportunities or is a virtual site for VISTA members. Describe how VISTA members will be serving (less than 5 days per week and/or up to full time) and how often VISTA members will be expected to meet with project staff.
- **VISTA Assignment:** The tasks and activities the VISTA member will perform should be summarized in this section and noted if they will be conducted via teleservice or virtual service site. Service activities must lend themselves to be conducted in a teleservice or virtual service site environment.

17. How does the sponsor identify the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) as a teleservice or virtual service assignment?

At the time of the policy implementation date, the VAD Title must include a notation if the service will be performed via teleservice or virtual service site. Example: Resource Development VISTA _ Virtual Service Site. The process for identifying VADs as teleservice or virtual service assignments may evolve as technology updates are made in the eGrants portal. *Please note, the VAD title field has a character limit of 199 characters.*

18. How does the VISTA sponsor note the position is teleservice or a virtual service site on the Service Opportunity Listing (SOL) on My AmeriCorps?

On the Service Opportunity Listing (SOL) under "What benefits does your program offer?" in the "Other" field please include text that identifies the opportunity as either "permits teleservice" or "virtual service site as defined by VISTA". The process for identifying a SOL as a teleservice or virtual service site assignments may evolve as technology updates are made in the eGrants portal.

19. How does AmeriCorps VISTA establish the county of service for the living allowance for Virtual Service Sites?

Virtual Service Sites are those organizations who do not have a physical location but still maintain a defined geographic area. All VISTA members, including those in teleservice and virtual service site arrangements, are paid a living allowance that is based on the poverty rate for a single individual in the geographic area where the VISTA member serves. The allowance rate will be determined by the county of the site location selected for each individual VISTA member as listed on the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD). It is important the Sites section of the project application include the correct address of the sites for the project and that the VAD is tied to the correct site for each member.



20. If I have an intermediary project, do all VISTA service placements need to be the same? Can we allow teleservice at one service site, and not at another?

Not all service site placements need to be the same for an intermediary project. Each site under an intermediary sponsor will determine if they allow teleservice or have a virtual service site. The intermediary sponsor will be responsible for tracking and reporting that information to the ORO-Regional Office and AmeriCorps VISTA program, as applicable.

21. Who maintains and keeps the teleservice or virtual service site request and agreement form?

The VISTA project sponsor and service site are responsible for approving, acknowledging, and maintaining records related to the teleservice and virtual service site request and agreement form. Sites must approve or decline the request. Sponsors must acknowledge and maintain access to the record of the AmeriCorps VISTA Teleservice Request & Agreement Form for each individual member who submits a request for either a teleservice or virtual service site arrangement. This form is intended to be collected during or before orientation of the VISTA members and maintained in file in accordance with record retention policies.

22. Where can I find the updated teleservice or virtual service site request and agreement form?

The updated [VISTA Member Teleservice Request Form](#) has been migrated to the My AmeriCorps Member Portal and approvals can be completed by site supervisors (via an email notification and direct link to the system) and project directors through the eGrants Portal. This form serves as a checklist to assess the safety of a teleservice or virtual service site arrangement and serves as the agreement form relevant to the VISTA teleservice policy update effective January 1, 2023.

A [reference guide](#) has been created to better understand the approval flow in the system. The reference guide can be found the VISTA Sponsor Page (<https://www.americorps.gov/grantees-sponsors/vista>) under VISTA Resources, then from the drop down menu select "Managing Members".

23. Does my project sponsor / site have to have specific internal policies, procedures, and agreements for teleservice or virtual service site?

For VISTA members to be eligible for teleservice, project sponsors and sites must first have the administrative capacity and internal policies, in place, to support teleservice and virtual service site opportunities. This includes ensuring VISTA members have proper equipment, workspace, and capabilities to teleserve or serve from a virtual service site in alignment with both the VISTA MA and their own organizational policies and procedures. If the sponsor or site do not allow work from home opportunities, VISTA members will not be eligible for these opportunities and will need to report to the sponsor or site as directed. In addition to internal policies, tasks on a member's VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) must be performable in such an environment with appropriate supervision. If the VAD does not support tasks that can be performed in such a manner the VISTA member will not be eligible for such opportunities.

24. What should such an internal policy entail?

Specifics to what an organization's internal teleservice policies and procedures should entail are at the discretion of the VISTA sponsoring organization and sites. VISTA members are still subject to all AmeriCorps VISTA rules, regulations, and prohibited activities. It is recommended, that while developing such policies and procedures, sponsors / sites look at the purpose and scope of the



policy, eligible positions, work expectations, legal considerations, tools, equipment and supplies along with technical support options for members. Sponsors and sites should also consider guidelines for setting up a safe and efficient work environments as well as maintaining security and confidentiality rules.