

Overcoming Poverty

Building Capacity



VISTA

Volunteers In Service To America

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1201 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20525
202-606-5000 (TTY 202-606-3472) www.nationalservice.gov

The Corporation for National and Community Service improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year we engage four million Americans of all ages and backgrounds through the Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs. For more information, visit nationalservice.gov.

October 2008

Upon request this material will be available in alternative forms for people with disabilities.

Message From Director of AmeriCorps VISTA

Every day, throughout our nation, dedicated men and women are making a positive impact on the lives of poor Americans through VISTA, Volunteers In Service To America.

Our nationwide corps of VISTAs, nearly 7,000 strong, brings the skills and the passion to low-income communities that are committed to their own development and to building prosperity. Their partners are nonprofit, grassroots organizations and local government agencies—the mainstay of the anti-poverty mission of AmeriCorps VISTA.

Locally managed and locally focused, community organizations provide the impetus and customized service that empower local impoverished communities. The VISTA program recognizes the critical role of these organizations. It offers VISTAs as a resource to the organizations to build their capacity to carry out programs that fight poverty.

In this book, we point with pride to the record of our VISTAs and their projects to alleviate poverty and, as a result, change lives in tangible, meaningful, and sustainable ways.

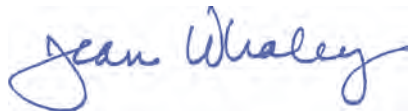
In this 43rd year of helping America's most vulnerable citizens, VISTAs served with nearly 1,000 local projects, generated \$172 million in cash and in-kind resources for their projects, and mobilized nearly 611,000 community volunteers, an average of 110 volunteers per VISTA.

The profiles of the projects in this book only begin to illustrate the successes realized by VISTAs in hundreds of schools, senior citizen programs, hospitals, prisons, shelters for homeless people, community organizations, and public agencies—wherever there is a need and a VISTA-affiliated project to address that need.

The book presents profiles of 52 VISTA projects—one for each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Among the profiles are ten feature-length stories. The diversity of these projects demonstrates the determination of the VISTA program to meet the wide variety of needs of youth, families, and communities affected by poverty. We hope documenting their activities will promote an exchange of ideas and information, leverage technical and financial resources, and encourage partnerships, collaboration, and coordination among VISTA project sponsors.

I invite you to read about these projects and VISTAs' work with them. Their compelling efforts make strong contributions in the best way they can, and we are proud to showcase them.

VISTA is a national service of choice. We welcome you to join us and fight poverty with passion.



Jean Whaley
Director, AmeriCorps VISTA





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Core Principles

Anti-Poverty Focus: VISTA supports community efforts to overcome poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, or tribal or public agency with a project explicitly designed to alleviate poverty may sponsor a VISTA.

Community Empowerment: VISTA values the inherent strengths and resources of the community. VISTA expects project sponsors to involve residents of the community in planning, developing, and implementing the VISTA project. This approach allows low-income individuals the freedom to speak for themselves in determining the projects that suit their specific needs.

Capacity Building: VISTA expands the ability of sponsor organizations to fight poverty. Rather than providing services to low-income individuals and communities, VISTAs strengthen and support organizations by building infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, securing long-term resources, coordinating training for participants, and much more.

Sustainable Solutions: VISTAs serve as a short-term resource to help sponsor organizations achieve lasting solutions to poverty.



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National Statistics for 2007

VISTAs	6,852
Hours served by VISTAs	11.4 million
VISTA projects	943
Community volunteers mobilized	610,785
Community volunteers mobilized per VISTA	110
Hours served by community volunteers	7.4 million
Value of cash and in-kind resources raised	\$172 million
Cash and in-kind resources raised per VISTA	\$25,000

Annual Budget

Fiscal year 2008	\$93.80 million
Fiscal year 2007	\$95.46 million
Fiscal year 2006	\$95.46 million
Fiscal year 2005	\$94.24 million
Fiscal year 2004	\$93.73 million

West Virginia



Featured Project: Rural Appalachian Improvement League
Location: City of Mullens and Wyoming County
Project Sponsor: Coal Heritage Highway Authority
Project Issue Area: Environmental and economic development
VISTAs: 8

The city of Mullens and Wyoming County have been faced with many poverty issues due to the decline in coal industry activity and a devastating flood in 2001. The Rural Appalachian Improvement League (RAIL) addresses the root causes of poverty in southern West Virginia by building human and civic capacity through the incubation of nonprofit and grassroots organizations and through the provision of health, home repair, and education programs.

VISTAs serving at RAIL and at its partners, the Office of Surface Mining and the Upper Guyandotte Watershed Association, built the foundation for a watershed agency, secured a \$200,000 Brownfield Assessment Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, and, most recently, secured for Wyoming County the prestigious Groundwork USA Pilot Community designation.

The Upper Guyandotte Watershed Association is a nonprofit corporation that oversees the installation of decentralized wastewater treatment and other projects aimed at clearing streams of dangerous pollutants. The association's work addresses 260 square miles from the headwaters of the Guyandotte River to the mouth of Pinnacle Creek, through portions of Wyoming and Raleigh Counties. The EPA grant is being used to study mine-scarred lands in eastern Wyoming County.

VISTA in West Virginia

No. of VISTAs: 134

Projects: 9

Project Sponsors:

Citizen's Conservation Corps of West Virginia

Coal Heritage Highway Authority

Doddridge County Family Resource Network

Eastern Regional Family Resource Network

LifeBridge, Inc.

Pocahontas Communications Cooperative

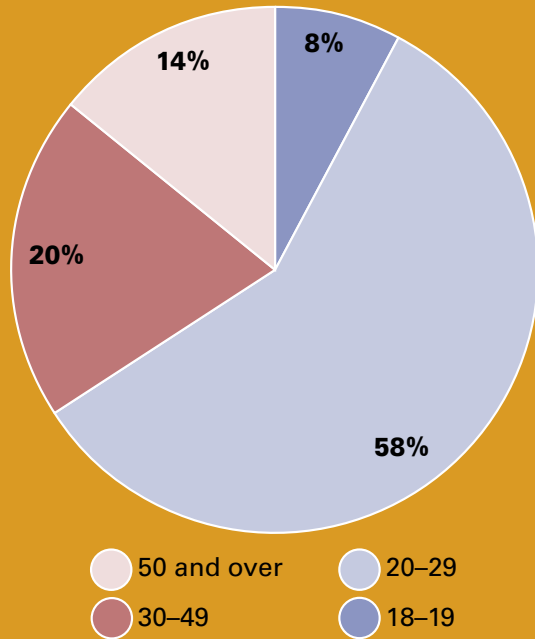
Step by Step, Inc.

**West Virginia Commission for National and
Community Service**

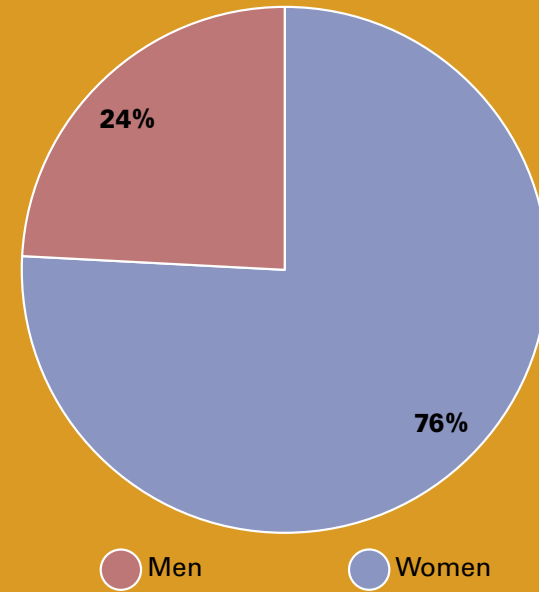
West Virginia University Extension Services

VISTA by the Numbers

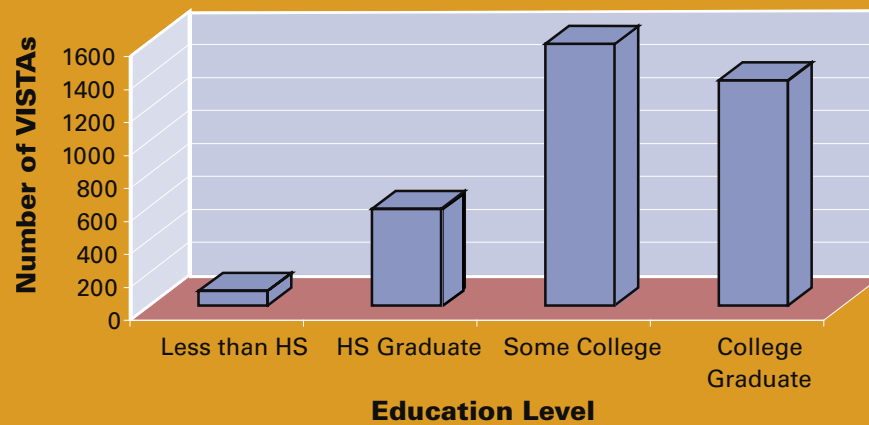
VISTAs by Age



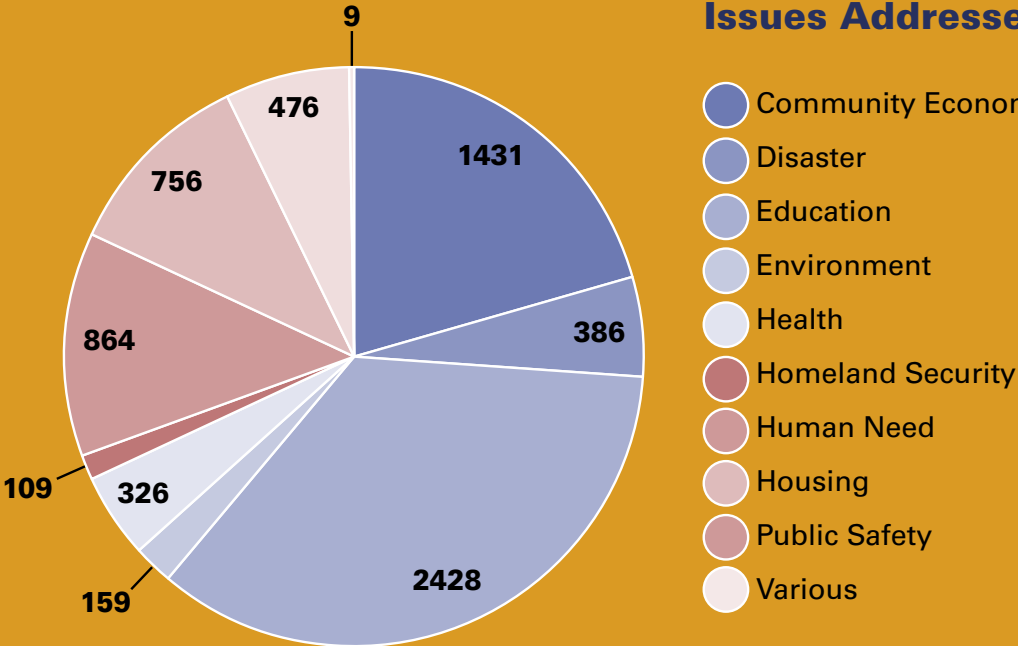
VISTAs by Gender



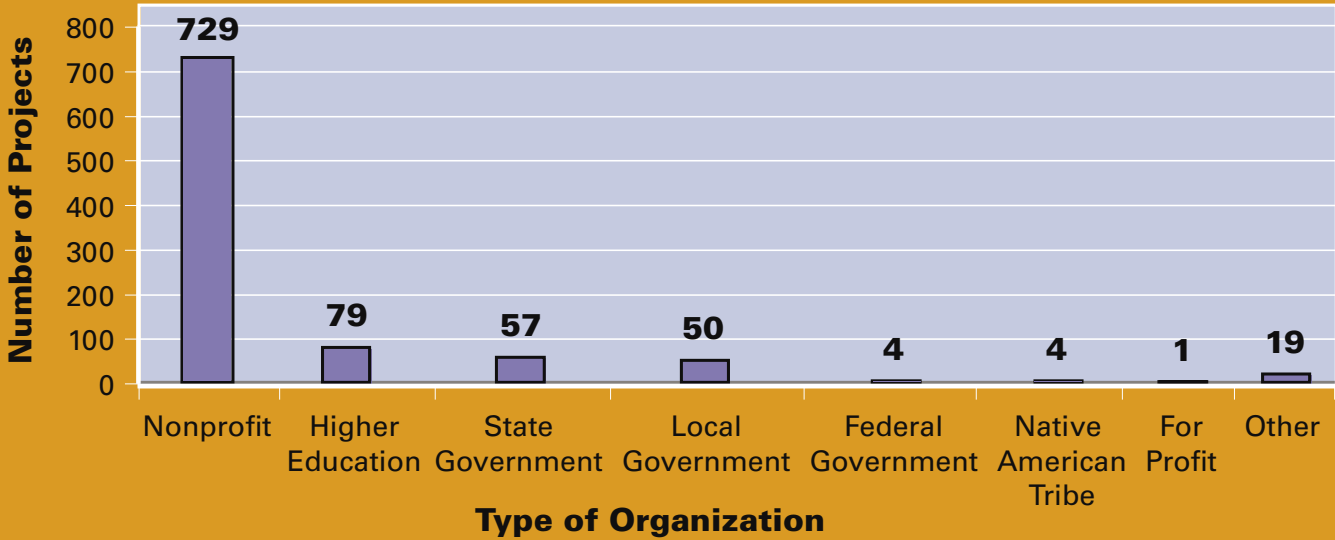
VISTAs by Education Level



Issues Addressed by VISTAs



Projects by Organizational Type





Become a VISTA

VISTAs choose from projects throughout the country, based on their skills and interests, and serve full time for one year with community-based organizations, working to overcome poverty. Assignments may involve starting new programs; recruiting and training volunteers; writing grant proposals; seeking out sponsorships; establishing partnerships with local businesses, organizations, churches, and schools; planning community meetings; or handling public relations. Whatever the task or challenge, VISTAs make a lasting difference for low-income communities in need.

Join the more than 177,000 individuals who have dedicated a year of their lives to fighting poverty in the United States. Join AmeriCorps VISTA.

Find out more at americorps.gov

Or call 800.942.2677

TTY 800.833.3722

Sponsor a VISTA Project

Develop a VISTA project and host VISTAs as they work to expand your organization's capacity to solve community problems. VISTAs help organizations like yours to create the sustainable infrastructure needed to fight poverty in their communities.

Contact your local Corporation State Office

Or call 202.606.5000

TTY 202.565.2799

Email: vista@americorps.gov



Call 800-942-2677 (TTY 800-833-3722)

americorps.gov

AmeriCorps VISTA is an anti-poverty program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. VISTA offers service opportunities to individuals 18 or older without regard to race, color, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation or other nonmerit factors. Applicants must be U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, or lawful permanent residents.

