

CREATING EFFECTIVE VADS TUTORIAL – TEXT VERSION

WHAT IS A VAD?

VAD stands for a VISTA Assignment Description.

The VAD details the activities a VISTA member will perform during a year of service.

IN THIS COURSE, YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:

- The importance of the VAD
- Preparing the VAD
- Saving and Submitting the VAD
- Tips and Effective Practices

This course will take about 10 minutes to complete.

IMPORTANCE OF THE VAD

The VAD is both a position description and a work plan. It's used for recruiting purposes and tracking a VISTA's performance.

THE VAD: POSITION DESCRIPTION AND WORK PLAN

- Turn milestones into actions

The VAD takes the milestones you've identified in your Project Plan and translates them into a realistic set of activities.

THE VAD: POSITION DESCRIPTION AND WORK PLAN

VADs should include the following:

- The poverty mission of the project
- Activities that clearly show how the VISTA will build capacity (at the organization or in the community)

The VAD helps VISTAs identify a course of action

Supervisors can use the VAD to frame a few important conversations with a VISTA. The VAD indicates project priorities, organizational and community challenges, and the purpose of the project.

The VAD is a living document. The VAD can be adapted as the project evolves and the unique strengths of the VISTA become apparent. Significant changes to the VAD should be discussed with your Corporation State Office.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR VADS:

- VADs are written per year, per assignment. For example, a three-year project will require three separate VADs. Similarly, projects with several VISTAs will require a unique VAD for each VISTA member.
- All VADs must be created through your eGrants account.

PREPARING THE VAD

Now that you know what a VAD is and the functions it serves, you're ready to put one together. Here are some simple steps for writing an effective VAD.

ELEMENTS OF A VAD

TITLE

Each VAD you create requires a distinct title. If you happen to be creating multiple, similar VADs, consider creating a naming system. This might include attributing the year or creating a job number in addition to a descriptive title.

It might also be helpful for you to review a sample VAD. Click the button below to locate this resource on the Campus.

Tip: When creating multiple VADs for VISTAs doing similar work, you can save time by copying and pasting some elements of the text into those VADs. (Remember, each VAD requires its own title.)

To view a sample VAD, visit this link: <http://vistacampus.org/course/view.php?id=50&page=51>

DETAILS

The VAD requires you to input project details such as the project name, project period, number of members, etc. Much of this information can be found in your project application. Conveniently, your application is available within your organization's eGrants account so you can easily copy and paste the appropriate content.

GOAL

Review this example of a project goal:

The VISTA project will strengthen the coordinated response to end hunger across New York City. Throughout one year of service, 5 full-time VISTAs will provide 100 member agencies with 25 hours of critical sustainability training and will engage 25 volunteers in service to these agencies to help build their capacity to be completed within 10 months.

Tip: Copy and paste the Goal of the Project directly from the Goal Statement in your Project Plan (part of the Project Application).

OBJECTIVES

The objectives you identify for the VAD should articulate what the VISTA will achieve during his or her assignment. Each VAD should include more than one objective and include completion dates for each objective. The objectives should form a bridge between your goal statements and the VISTA's activities.

Follow these steps:

1. Describe the outcome of a set of activities in a sentence of two.
2. Check that what you've written aligns with your goal statement.
3. Check that you've included a completion date.

Sample Objective:

Provide member agencies with critical sustainability training that will help them build their capacity to provide future services by (month and year).

Follow this checklist to ensure you've written a good objective:

- Does the statement summarize a set of outcomes?
- Does the statement align with your goal?
- Is there a completion date?

ACTIVITIES

The activities section of the VAD identifies more specifically what VISTAs will be doing to achieve their objectives. To begin, start with the Performance Milestones in the Action Plan section of your project application and edit them into appropriate activities.

Helpful Hints:

- Begin your activity sentences with active verbs.

- The activities you write should be clear and specific, and avoid too much detail.
- There is a 2,500 character limit for each activity (about 500 words).

EXAMPLE: ACTIVITIES

Sample of a Performance Milestone (from the Project Application):

VISTA members will use a train-the-trainer model to provide sustainability training to staff of member agencies.

Sample of VAD ‘Member Activity’ Language:

Design and deliver a training-of-trainers regarding project sustainability to staff members of community organizations.

In this example, the Performance Milestone was rewritten to be active and clear, using the active verbs – design and deliver. This reflects the VAD’s function as a position description.

SAVING AND SUBMITTING THE VAD

After you’ve put together the elements of the VAD, you are ready to save it, submit it, and use it.

As you write the VAD, you will be able to save your drafts in eGrants. In fact, the VAD is stored in the same location as many other key VISTA documents. This allows other colleagues with member management rights in eGrants to view VADs, share ideas and give you feedback.

Once you are ready to submit the VAD, select Save & Submit. The VAD will then be ready for your CNCS State Office to review and approve. The State Office will review to ensure the activities in the VAD are realistic and appropriate to the VISTA’s capacity-building role.

Once approved, the VAD is used to:

- Recruit and select VISTA candidates
- Guide VISTA members and assess performance
- Manage the project

USING THE VAD

RECRUITMENT

Since the VAD includes refined language describing a member’s activities, it becomes an excellent resource for writing position announcements that appeal to applicants best suited for the VISTA roles you have defined. You can use the activities described in the VAD to populate the “Member Duties” section of a position announcement.

Tip: Programs that recruit successfully through the portal also add a touch of marketing 'flair' to their descriptions of Member Duties. The supervisor section of the VISTA Campus includes a section on effective practices for recruiting VISTAs.

To learn more, visit this link for Recruitment Resources:
<http://vistacampus.org/course/view.php?id=50&page=55>

SELECTING VISTA CANDIDATES

VISTA applicants can and should view their VADs through their My AmeriCorps accounts. The VAD presents the VISTA's tasks and responsibilities, approximate timelines, and priorities. Applicants should assess their motivation and ability to perform the capacity-building tasks you've outlined in the VAD, as well as identify areas where they could use additional training. In turn, you have an opportunity to weigh the applicant's skills, motivation, and support needs during the selection process.

Candidates/Members must bring their VADs with them to Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) for a variety of activities that help prepare them for their assignments.

GUIDING VISTA MEMBERS AND ASSESSING PERFORMANCE

Once a VISTA candidate has attended a PSO, taken the oath of service, and arrived on site, the VAD is a platform to orient the VISTA to the project, organization, and community. Use it to work together to determine the initial steps to begin service and to guide the VISTA's work throughout the year. These may be based on the strengths and interests that the members bring to their assignments, as well as recent developments in the project. Since the VAD spells out the activities and objectives, it is useful in assessing how well the VISTA is doing in his or her role.

Note: If timelines are modified as a result of this conversation, the CNCS State Office does not need to review the steps or new completion dates.

TIPS AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Let's hear from some supervisors and get their helpful hints for creating effective VADs.

BE SPECIFIC. BE SIMPLE.

Strike a balance between specifics and simplicity. If the activities listed in the VAD are too general, the VISTA won't understand what he or she is supposed to do. On the other hand, if there is too much detail in the activities, innovation and flexibility might be stifled.

ARTICULATE THE ANTI-POVERTY MISSION.

The VISTA program is dedicated to addressing the causes of poverty with the goal of eliminating it. It's important to make sure the VAD speaks to the anti-poverty mission of your specific project.

FOCUS ON CAPACITY BUILDING.

When writing member activities, focus on tasks that build organizational and/or community capacity. Describe what the VISTA will leave behind when his or her year is complete or discuss how the community will benefit in the long term from this VISTA's service.

BE REALISTIC.

Avoid overly ambitious sets of activities. Be as realistic as possible about what your VISTAs can accomplish. This is important for empowering VISTAs to feel capable and successful in their assignments.

DELINEATE THE WORK FOR EACH YEAR.

Differentiate your VADs for each year of the project. Tasks in Year 1 (for example, creating systems and other start-up tasks) might differ substantially from those in Year 3 (for example, training volunteers to carry on the project, and other winding down tasks). Identifying how the project will progress demonstrates a specific plan for achieving the project objectives.

Congratulations! You have learned about the importance of the VAD, the multiple functions of the VAD, the key steps for writing the VAD, how to use the VAD, as well as tips and effective practices.

SUMMARY

Remember these important points about the VAD.

VADs...

...help guide VISTAs in achieving project milestones

...enable members to understand their responsibilities.

...help recruit potential applicants.

...allow supervisors and VISTAs to monitor performance and assess whether the project is on track.

RESOURCES

Access these valuable resources to assist you in creating effective VADs.

[Action Verbs List \(PDF\)](#)

[Sample VAD \(DOC\)](#)

[Blank VAD \(DOC\)](#)

Downloading and saving this blank template will allow you to draft and refine the VAD in Word, and then copy-and-paste into eGrants. If you try to compose in eGrants, you may be timed out of the system.

[Tips for Preparing a VAD \(PDF\)](#)

QUIZ

1. WHAT DOES VAD STAND FOR?

- a. VISTA Assignment Description
- b. VISTA Assessment Document
- c. VISTA Application Description

ANSWER: A. VISTA Assignment Description

Correct feedback: While a VAD functions as an assessment tool, and is an integral part of the application, it essentially describes the goals, objectives, and activities of a VISTA's assignment.

Incorrect feedback: While a VAD functions as an assessment tool, and is an integral part of the application, it essentially describes the goals, objectives, and activities of a VISTA's assignment.

2. TRUE OR FALSE? IF YOU HAVE MULTIPLE ASSIGNMENTS THAT ARE PRACTICALLY THE SAME, YOU ONLY NEED TO WRITE ONE VAD FOR ALL OF THEM.

- a. True
- b. False

ANSWER: B. False

Correct feedback: Each assignment requires a unique VAD.

Incorrect feedback: While many parts of the VAD can be the same, each assignment requires a unique VAD with a distinct title.

3. TRUE OR FALSE? YOU CAN COPY AND PASTE CERTAIN ELEMENTS FROM YOUR SPONSOR APPLICATION ONTO THE VAD.

- a. True
- b. False

ANSWER: A. True

Correct feedback: You can copy the project name, project goal, project period, number of members, and other details from the project application.

Incorrect feedback: There are some elements of the VAD that can be found in the project application.

4. THE VAD CAN BE USED FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:

- a. Recruiting
- b. Tracking a VISTA's progress
- c. Ongoing conversations about the progress of the project
- d. All of these

ANSWER: D. All of these

Correct feedback: The VAD has a variety of uses to help ensure you find the right individual for the VISTA assignment.

Incorrect feedback: The VAD is used for recruitment and selection of VISTA candidates, guiding VISTA members, and assessing progress of the project.