

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: TALKING ABOUT AMERICORPS*VISTA WITHIN A HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

Source: Scott Craven, MCC AmeriCorps*VISTA, Michigan Service Scholars 2004-2005

Issue(s) Being Addressed:

Describing AmeriCorps*VISTA and national service to the higher education community can be challenging.

Actions to Consider:

Here are five questions to think about as an AmeriCorps*VISTA when talking about your service:

Who am I?

AmeriCorps VISTA's are at least 18 years old and are college graduates or have at least a few years of work experience and skills. VISTA's are organizers, resource-builders, self-starters, and are passionate about their service. They are the leaders of tomorrow in such fields as non-profit management, business, medicine, and law.

What do I value?

The role of the AmeriCorps* VISTA member is primarily to build the capacity and sustainability of their project and community and ultimately, to leave programs and structures in place that no longer require staffing from a VISTA member. They value building mutually beneficial relationships which can lead to long-term partnerships between community-based organizations and colleges and universities; enhance the quality of campus community service and service-learning programs; improve student leadership in service and increase the number of students coordinating programs and the number of students in direct service with the community.

What is my State View?

More than 76,000 people of all ages and backgrounds are helping to meet local needs, strengthen communities, and increase civic engagement through 122 national service projects across Michigan. Serving with national and local nonprofits, schools, faith-based organizations and other groups, these citizens tutor and mentor children, coordinate after-school programs, build homes, conduct neighborhood patrols, restore the environment, respond to disasters, build nonprofit capacity and recruit and manage volunteers.

How do I learn?

AmeriCorps VISTA's are not experts in the communities they serve; however, they have the ability to listen and learn and offer support. VISTA's learn in multiple ways from reading up on material, to conducting site visits in the community, to listening to people talk about their struggles and successes. There is no limit to what a VISTA can learn as long as they are given the opportunity.

How do they connect?

AmeriCorps* VISTA is part of the AmeriCorps national network of service programs within the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The AmeriCorps* VISTA program has been addressing the needs of impoverished communities since 1965. In total, more than 146,000 committed individuals have joined forces with 13,000 local organizations to strengthen poor communities and help people escape poverty across the nation. This year, the CNCS will commit more than \$22,300,000 to support Michigan communities through three national service initiatives.

*More information about AmeriCorps*VISTA can be found at <http://www.americorps.org/>

Context and Setting:

The MCC AmeriCorps*VISTA program was created in 2003 through a partnership between MCC and the Michigan CNCS state office. This program was developed in response to the needs of MCC member campuses and in recognition of the potential for institutions of higher education to more responsibly address the local needs of children and youth in low-income communities. MCC AmeriCorps* VISTA members will act as transformative agents between institutions of higher education and their surrounding communities.

Outcome Achieved:

Training VISTA members to talk about what they do and what they are a part of nationally and at their local institutions helps establish professionalism, respect, and confidence in the service they provide. Michigan Campus Compact AmeriCorps VISTAs are about supporting service in higher education.