

Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project



Progress Report August 2017- August 2018



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QUICK FACTS

Summary of VISTA

The AmeriCorps VISTA program was designed to be the domestic counterpart to the Peace Corps. The AmeriCorps VISTA program, short for Volunteers in Service to America, is considered a form of National Service and it emphasizes capacity building using sustainable solutions. VISTA Members sign up to serve full-time for a year and can choose to either serve locally or relocate to another part of the country.

During their VISTA service year, the VISTAs are to live at the financial level of the individuals they serve in order to better understand the complex problems in the community that they are addressing. The monthly stipend they receive is calculated to be at 100% of their county's poverty level, which for Tom Green County is approximately \$33.73 per day. In addition to their monthly living stipend, VISTAs also receive relocation allowance (if applicable), health benefits, their choice of an end of service award (the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award worth \$5,920 or a \$1,500 cash stipend), childcare benefits (if applicable), and federal Non-Competitive Eligibility hiring status for one year. VISTAs serve in a professional setting and build the capacity of the agency where they are placed.

Number of VISTAs Placed

Since the beginning of the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project (CVVPP), 23 VISTAs have been placed (including one leader). Out of those 23, 13 were recruited in the last year and one has decided to re-enroll. Recruitment for an additional seven VISTAs is ongoing. So far, nine have successfully completed their year of National Service and three have left the program before their year was completed (which is well below the nation average.)

Number of VISTA Partner Agencies

In last year, the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project established project sites with 17 different Partner Agencies. Of these agencies, three are taking on more than one VISTA at a time, and seven are renewing their project proposals in order to get a second-year VISTA.

Operational Highlights

Over the last year, the Concho Valley VISTA Placement project has significantly grown. We estimate that **23,000** hours have been spent by VISTA members on capacity building projects at the community. New initiatives have been put in place to improve VISTA training and professional development, reporting procedures, and communication between the CVVPP and Partner Agencies.

Looking Ahead

In the upcoming year, the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project hopes to recruit more VISTAs to the area, work on a plan to incentivize VISTAs to spend their End of Service Education award at ASU, and continue to improve training and communication to both VISTAs and their Site-Supervisors.

FINANCIAL CHANGES

Overview

Angelo State University's Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project (CVVPP) will remain as the intermediary organization between the federal AmeriCorps VISTA program and local Partner Agencies. The CVVPP will now fall under the ASU's Department of Psychology and Sociology. This will continue to allow VISTAs to be placed at organizations that may not have otherwise had the infrastructure to receive a VISTA on their own. Angelo State University's CVVPP will continue to handle the large-scale federal grants, federal reporting, Partner Agency and VISTA recruitment, and the basic training components for the program. The program will continue to have one full-time employee, the Project Manager, who will oversee the projects at all the Partner Agencies.

Cost-Share

For the upcoming fiscal year, Partner Agencies will be asked to take part in a cost-share program. They will be asked to provide \$3,075 per VISTA in order to cover a small part of the administrative costs associated with the program.

The Corporation for National and Community Service will then pay the VISTAs living stipends (\$12,311 per VISTA per year), health benefits, relocation allowances (if applicable), childcare allowances (if applicable), some professional development and training, and an End of Service Award (the VISTAs can choose either a cash award valued at \$1,500 or the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award valued at \$5,920).

In addition to the cost share, the Partner Agencies will still be responsible for the financial obligations of office space, equipment, specialized training, and the designation of a Site-Supervisor at the agency. If the Partner Agency requires that the VISTA travel to complete their VAD (VISTA Assignment Description), the Partner Agency is responsible for directly reimbursing the VISTA for mileage at the federal rate. The Partner Agency has no responsibility to assist with any other costs for the VISTA.

Grant Funding

Due to the Project Manager position being open for three months, \$37,117.20 remains in the budget from the San Angelo Health Foundation's grant. The Corporation for National and Community Service has also awarded a grant totaling \$50,000. These grant funds combined with the cost share income will go towards paying the administrative costs of the program and the program fees owed to the Corporation for National and Community Service. It is estimated that the cost-share program will bring in \$43,050 for the upcoming year.

RECRUITMENT

Online Recruitment

AmeriCorps Website

All VISTA opportunities are posted on the AmeriCorps website. This website is the only spot where applicants can officially apply to the open positions. This website is used by prospective VISTAs looking for service opportunities throughout the nation in order to match them with projects they may be a good fit for. Prospective VISTAs are able to search by qualifications, geographic area, focus areas, and skills in order to find positions they are interested in.

The Project Manager is also able to use this tool for recruitment. The Project Manager is able to see users who have created their profiles on the portal and see if they have the required qualifications and interests. The Project Manager periodically 'fishes' through these profiles, finds individuals whose interests and qualifications align with our current openings, and then sends them an email letting them know about our program.

Other Online Sources

The openings are also posted on other outlets as well and link back to the main posting on My.AmeriCorps.gov. Other online outlets where Concho Valley VISTA Positions are posted:

- Jobs4Rams – Angelo State University's job board for recent graduates
- Angelo.edu/VISTA – Our webpage
- Texas Tech University Job Board
- Handshake – A nationwide university job board management tool. We are currently connected with 160 southern universities in the US (including several from Texas) who have the ability to re-post all of our open opportunities.
- University of Texas Job Board

College Based Recruitment

The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project also is recruiting recent local college graduates. All positions are listed on ASU's CVVPP webpage and on ASU's Jobs4Rams portal. The CVVPP has attended and will continue to attend on-campus job, internship, and volunteer fairs in order to recruit upper level college students and future alumni. The CVVPP has attended events both on Angelo State University's and Howard College's campus. Some VISTAs who are ASU alumni have also been invited to campus by former professors in order to speak about VISTA to their current classes.

Community Outreach Events

The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project has been invited to speak at several local community events. In the last month, the CVVPP has spoken at Education Service Center Region 15's College, Career, and Military Readiness Fair, and the Hiring Our Heroes (Goodfellow's military spouse organization) monthly meeting about the VISTA program.

VISTA IMPACT

VISTAs Impact in the Concho Valley



431

Volunteers
Recruited



2,000

Volunteer Hours
Managed



\$701,709

Total Monetary
Resources
Leveraged



\$133,268

Cash and In-
Kind Donations



\$568,441

Grant Funds
Secured

Our Program Areas



Healthy
Families



Economic
Opportunities



Education



Veterans and
Military Families

Statistics based on the CVVPP 2017-2018 reporting year

Grants

Notable Grants Brought in by VISTAs

- \$265,000 Blue Cross Blue Shield grant for the San Angelo Diabetes Coalition
- \$161,841 Wagner-Peyser 7(b) grant for the Work Ready Program
- \$80,000 grant for the Nonprofit Education Project at Howard College
- \$60,600 in funds for the Workforce Bootcamp Project

Summary of Grants

VISTAs from the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project have secured **\$568,441** in grant funds for their Partner Agencies. These grants are going towards furthering their goals listed in their VADs and are used to build capacity in the organization they serve. Majority of the grants went to developing a completely new program for the Partner Agency.

Donations & Fundraising

A total of **\$133,267.91** of cash and in kind donations were raised by VISTAs in the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project. The funds went to support their Partner Agencies and respective projects.

Volunteer Recruitment

VISTAs in the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project have recruited a total of **431** volunteers. The volunteers managed by VISTAs spent a total of **2153** hours volunteering at events sponsored by their Partner Agencies.

Program Development

A total of five VISTAs in the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project focused on program development initiatives. These VISTAs focused on developing program infrastructure, securing funds, and educating the community on their new programs. Based on VISTA efforts, the following programs have been established and are sustainable for near future.

- The San Angelo Diabetes Coalition
- Howard College's Non-Profit Education Program
- ACT Work Ready Community
- The Basic Needs Closet at Public Housing Authority

Outreach Initiatives

This year, seven Partner Agencies have requested VISTAs to help with outreach initiatives. These VISTAs have accomplished a lot over their tenures, but due to the complex nature of outreach it can be difficult to quantify their accomplishments. Listed are some of the major quantifiable outreach accomplishments:

- The VISTAs at the **San Angelo Diabetes Coalition** have interacted with over 2,000 community members at outreach events. Over 350 free blood glucose tests have been performed and over 330 individuals have attended their educational sessions.
- The VISTA at **La Esperanza Clinic** has increased Facebook likes by 170% and in some months received up over 16,000 social media content impressions.
- The VISTA at **West Texas Guidance and Counseling** helped plan and execute five major outreach and fundraising events. Approximately 700 community members attended and \$118,500 were raised.
- The VISTA at the **Laura W. Bush Institute of Women's Health** created a new signature outreach event for the Hispanic population in San Angelo. A total of 200 community members attended and approximately 90 of them scheduled a free health checkup.
- The VISTA at the **Dunbar Historical Library** has implemented an outreach plan that resulted in approximately 1,000 visitors. The Library was also named the Wayne Williams Library Project of the Year.
- The VISTA at **MHMR of the Concho Valley** attended approximately 50 outreach events on behalf of their Partner Agency.
- The VISTA at **Frontera Health Network** is working on creating an outreach plan.

Organizational Development

This year, five VISTAs created systems that will aid in organizational development for their Partner Agency.

- The VISTA at the **Concho Valley Workforce Development Board** created templates for and wrote 75 organizational policies. The VISTA also created templates for memorandums of understandings and wrote over 20 of them. Additionally, the VISTA conducted a job wage analysis.
- The VISTA at the **Educational Service Center Region 15** developed an online tool hosted on Canvas for counselors in the 43 school districts based on their research into local college application habits. It includes what should be done at each grade level to prepare students for college, future careers, and military. A networking function to the tool was also integrated so counselors in more isolated regions can connect with each other to ask questions and share advice.
- The VISTA at **La Esperanza Clinic** created training materials for current employees on how to keep external facing communications compliant with current federal accessibility guidelines. A system for internal communication was also initiated by the VISTA in order to bridge the communication gap between the two clinic locations and administrative staff.
- The VISTA at **MHMR** of the Concho Valley created the first annual report for the organization in over five years that showed 23% growth and led to a budget increase of 3.2 million.
- The VISTA at **City of San Angelo Development Corporation** achieved a Work Ready Status for Tom Green County, secured funding, and to date 1,946 individuals have received the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate™.

PARTNER AGENCIES

Adult Literacy Council

Service Date: June 2018 – June 2019
Current VISTA: Martha Howard
Project Objective: To assist with communications and marketing

Angelo State University

Service Date: August 2017-February 2018
Former VISTA Leader: Fay Schwieger
Current VISTA Leader: *Currently recruiting*
Project Objective: To assist the Project manager with recruitment, professional development training for VISTAs, and outreach

City of San Angelo Development Corporation

Service Date: March 2017-March 2018
Former VISTA: Sara Lamog
Project Objective: To achieve Work Ready Status for Tom Green County
Current VISTA: *Currently recruiting*
Project Objective: To serve the community leveraging resources to diversify the economy, expand the tax base, and foster business growth

Concho Valley Community Action Agency

Service Date: April 2017-October 2018
Former VISTA: Daniel Loyer
Project Objective: To assist a program to secure housing for veterans

Concho Valley Workforce Development Board

Service Date: June 2017-June 2018
Former VISTA: Carrie Caldwell
Project Objective: To develop several templates for organizational policies and Memos of Understanding (MOUs)
Current VISTA: *Currently Recruiting*
Project Objective: To promote the economic well-being of residents seeking job placement and training opportunities

Education Service Center Region 15

Service Date: February 2018- February 2019
Current VISTA: Kelly McKeon
Project Objective: To increase career and college readiness of students
Current VISTA: *Currently Recruiting*
Project Objective: To organize a Human Resources Cooperative

Frontera Health Network

Service Date: June 2018- June 2019
Current VISTA: Renee Heflin
Project Objective: To assist with outreach initiatives

Goodwill – West Texas

Current VISTA: *Currently Recruiting*
Project Objective: To build capacity in their Career Services Center

Habitat for Humanity of San Angelo

Current VISTA: *Currently Recruiting*
Project Objective: To recruit and manage volunteers

Howard College

Service Date: August 2017- August 2019
Former VISTA: Tracy Simmons
Current VISTA: Tracy Simmons
Project Objective: To develop an educational program designed to train non-profit Executive Directors, CEOs, Staff, and board members

Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health

Service Date: January 2017-January 2018
Former VISTA: Miah Wagnon
Project Objective: To develop a new signature outreach program targeting the Hispanic population in San Angelo

La Esperanza Clinic

Service Dates: June 2017-August 2017; September 2017-September 2018
Former VISTA: Sonia Ramirez
Current VISTA: Jordan Walker
Project Objective: To develop outreach materials following federal accessibility guidelines, an online presence, and a long-term marketing plan

MHMR

Service Dates: May 2017-May 2018; August 2018-August 2019
Former VISTA: Cynthia Salas
Project Objective: To assist with fundraising, grant research, report writing, and outreach
Current VISTA: Janelle Donahue
Project Objective: To develop a trauma informed care program

Public Housing Authority

Service Dates: July 2017-May 2018
Former VISTA: Ashley Porter
Project Objective: To establish a Basic Needs Closet
Current VISTA: *Currently Recruiting*
Project Objective: To develop an education program

San Angelo Lions Charities | Dunbar Library

Service Date: July 2017- July 2018
Former VISTA: Erma Brooks
Project Objective: To create an outreach strategy and to develop educational and cultural events

Shannon | San Angelo Diabetes Coalition

Service Dates: June 2017-July 2018; August 2018-August 2019
Former VISTAs: Rachel Lisewsky & Elise Mitchell
Current VISTAs: Zoe Gibbons & Ashley Woods
Project Objective: To develop diabetes programs, develop community partnerships, and secure grant funding

West Texas Guidance and Counseling

Service Dates: August 2017-August 2018; September 2018-September 2019
Former VISTA: Mariam Lowe
Project VISTA: To assist with event planning and fundraising
Current VISTAs: Sam Swisher, Myrna Lackey, & Margarita Ramirez
Project Objective: To assist with the organizations Veterans program

GOALS

Accomplished

Secure Affordable Housing for VISTAs

The Project Manager was able to secure an agreement with River Ranch Apartments. It is a fully furnished apartment complex in San Angelo that rents by bedrooms rather than unit. River Ranch has agreed to house VISTAs in the same units when possible, discount their rent, and reduce their deposit fees. This should reduce the stress of VISTAs transitioning into the Concho Valley and prevent rent disputes between VISTA roommates. By reducing the stress experienced by VISTAs during their transition to a new community and alleviating some of the financial stress associated with relocating, VISTAs will be able to better serve their Partner Agencies.

Create Formal Orientation for VISTAs

A formal orientation presentation has been created for VISTAs joining the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project (CVVPP). This is an interactive day-long orientation that has six parts and six activities. It includes information on the history and mission statement of the Corporation of National and Community Service, AmeriCorps, VISTA, and ASU's CVVPP. It also includes information on how to best settle in, understand poverty in the community, and begin their projects. Additionally, it goes over VISTA Benefits, time off policies, and reporting requirements. Also, it has a section on the professional development requirements for the program and free and low-cost professional development opportunities. The last section of the presentation goes over rules and policies for VISTAs at both the national level and the local program as well as how to report harassment and discrimination.

Create VISTA Welcome Guide

A VISTA Welcome Guide was created. It will be sent to VISTAs relocating to the Concho Valley a few weeks before they move. It includes information on the culture of San Angelo, local attractions, and details about local cost of living. This is a tool that should help ease the transition of VISTAs to our community and aide in VISTA retention.

Create Site-Supervisor Orientation Guide

The Project Manager has created a guide intended to ease the transition into becoming a Site-Supervisor that manages VISTAs. It goes over the basics of the program, requirements, resources, and rules. It answers most basic questions Site-Supervisors have through their VISTA year and will help facilitate better communication between VISTAs, Site-Supervisors, and the Project Manager.

Develop Better Communication for Site-Supervisors

The CVVPP has instituted a monthly email newsletter to all Site-Supervisors. It includes one main story on a VISTA guideline, rule, policy or best practice. It also includes a spotlight on a current VISTA member and their project, a VISTA fun fact, and a reminder of how to get in contact with the Project Manager.

In addition to the email newsletter, the CVVPP has created a formal quarterly check in process for Site-Supervisors. The Project Manager will email each Site-Supervisor as their

VISTA approaches their three month, six month, nine month, and 12 month benchmark. The Site-Supervisor will be asked to fill out the form, sign it, submit it to the CVVPP, and schedule a Quarterly Performance Review with their VISTA. The form will ask the Site-Supervisor about the professionalism of their VISTA and their progress towards completing their VAD (VISTA Assignment Description). Additionally, it provides the Site-Supervisors a place to make suggestions on CVVPP sponsored VISTA professional development and list any concerns they have about their VISTA or the program. It will also have a spot where the Site-Supervisor can request a meeting with them, the VISTA, and the Project Manager if needed.

Develop New Professional Development Outlets

In order to better accommodate the Corporation for National and Community Service's 80/20 rule that states that VISTAs should spend up to 20% (about seven hours a week) of their time on professional and personal development, the CVVPP has instituted new professional development outlets. The current professional development outlets are:

- Weekly self-paced professional development materials posted to private Facebook group
- Weekly/Bi-Weekly one-on-one meetings with Site-Supervisor
- Monthly in-person professional development and networking events
- Monthly one-on-one meetings with the Project Manager
- End of Service Exit Presentations

Currently in Progress

Develop Recruitment Plans for ASU Alumni and Seniors

As per the advice of ASU leadership, the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project is developing a more thorough recruitment plan for ASU Seniors, Graduate Students, and Alumni. All VISTA openings are posted on ASUs Jobs4Rams job portal, and on ASUs website on the CVVPP page. The CVVPP will also be attending on campus job, internship, and community service fairs. One of the VISTAs, who is an ASU Alumni, has also created a contact sheet with 20 student organizations, faculty members, and professors that could aid in recruitment efforts in the upcoming year. The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Program plans to reach out to these contacts during the upcoming school year to see if they would be willing to allow the program to come in and present information on VISTA.

Expand Project Proposal Form

The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project is in the process of revising our Request for Proposal (RFP) forms. The updated forms will include more basic information about taking on a VISTA and the federal rules for maintaining a VISTA. The form will also be updated in order to better follow ASU style and branding guidelines. In addition, the questions will be evaluated to make sure they are written as clearly as possible.

Expand Social Media Presence

The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project is in the process of expanding its online reach beyond just Facebook. Over the last year the CVVPP has also created a LinkedIn account, an Instagram account, and a Twitter account. The program plans to develop a thorough social media strategy and track results of those efforts. In the month of June 2018, the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project received over 3,000 monthly impressions of social

media content. The project hopes to reach 6,000 monthly impressions of social media content by next year. Whenever possible, the CVVPP tries to link the social media content back to the ASU website (especially with VISTA impact stories).

Recruit VISTA Leader

The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project is in the process of recruiting a VISTA Leader. The VISTA Leader will aide in recruitment, outreach, professional development training for VISTAs, and answer VISTA related matters. Currently, one VISTA member serves part-time assisting with some of the tasks a traditional VISTA Leader would take on.

Goals for Next Year

Recruit 18-20 VISTAs

The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project has received permission from the State Office to recruit up to 20 VISTAs for the upcoming year. The CVVPP has recruited 11 of these VISTAs and has seven VISTA positions it is currently recruiting for. The CVVPP is in search of one more Partner Agency to sign up to take on a VISTA.

Boost Community Awareness with Outreach

The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project seeks to increase community awareness about the VISTA program. In the coming year, the CVVPP plans to create a comprehensive outreach plan in order to get the community familiar with what a VISTA is, the VISTA program and benefits, and how a VISTA is different from a volunteer or intern. Hopefully, this will result in a better understanding of the program, garner interest from potential future Partner Agencies, and reduce barriers for VISTAs in the community. The CVVPP also hopes this will have a secondary benefit of increasing community interest in becoming a VISTA. Many Partner Agencies have mentioned they would prefer to recruit individuals who are already familiar with West Texas and its unique culture.

Provide Incentives for VISTA Alumni to Attend ASU

The Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project hopes to work with Angelo State University Leadership in order to develop incentives for VISTAs to remain or move to San Angelo to spend their Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (SAEA). Other placement projects sponsored by other Texas based universities have done this by negotiating a reduction or removal of application fees for VISTAs. Some institutions have even gone further and became SAEA Matching Institutions which allows them to be listed on the AmeriCorps website that attracts VISTA Alumni nationwide. Some Universities match the SAEA automatically while others, like Baylor, do it by scholarship application and apply existing university scholarships in order to match a portion of the award. According to the VISTA Program at Baylor, these incentives have increased the number of VISTAs that apply to their graduate programs.

LOCAL VISTA ALUMNI NEXT STEPS

VISTA Alumni - Where are they Now?

So far, the Concho Valley VISTA Placement Project has 12 VISTA Alumni. Here is the breakdown of what they are doing the year following their VISTA year of National Service.



58%

Have been accepted into Masters Programs in their respective fields and will be attending classes in the following semester.



25%

Secured employment based on connections they made while a VISTA.



33%

Went on to another AmeriCorps project to engage in additional National Service

Awards

Two Alumni from the 2017-2018 service years were nominated for a Governor's Volunteer Award sponsored by the One Star Foundation based on their AmeriCorps service year. Rachael Lisewsky was nominated for her service with the San Angelo Diabetes Coalition and Sara Lamog was nominated for her service with City of San Angelo Development Corporaton. Sara Lamog was awarded the National Service "Make a Difference" Award. The winners for this award were publically announced in mid-August..