

PSP VISTA MEMBER HANDBOOK



AmeriCorps





PUBLIC & SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP VISTA HANDBOOK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	2
PUBLIC & SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP HISTORY AND MISSION.....	3
ABOUT AMERICORPS AND AMERICORPS VISTA	4
PUBLIC & SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP: A UNIQUE AMERICORPS VISTA PROJECT.....	6
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.....	7
ADMINISTRATIVE PROTOCOLS	8
BALANCING VISTA, PSP, AND SITE EXPECTATIONS.....	8
APPROPRIATE VISTA TERMINOLOGY.....	9
ATTIRE	9
COMMUNICATION	10
WORK DAY AND WEEK.....	10
LEAVE DETAILS AND EXPECTATIONS.....	15
LEAVE	15
CLOSED SITE.....	17
MANDATORY DAYS OF SERVICE	18
MANDATORY TRAINING CONFERENCES.....	19
DISCIPLINARY ACTION	20
REPORTING	21
TIME CARDS	21
MONTHLY REPORTING AND SITE VISITS	22
HOW TO PREPARE FOR SITE VISITS.....	22
OTHER ITEMS FOR REFERENCE.....	23
TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT	23
ADDITIONAL INCOME AND SCHOOL ENROLLMENT.....	23
STATE AND FEDERAL BENEFITS.....	24
SUMMER HOURS	25
REMOTE WORK	25
PAY STUBS AND TAX INFORMATION.....	25
PAY DAYS AND UNFORESEEN PAY ISSUES.....	26
BRANDING AND PROMOTION	26
VISTA CAMPUS	27
VISTA MEMBER HANDBOOK.....	27
ENDING YOUR TERM OF SERVICE.....	27
PSP VISTA PLACEMENT SITES	28
CONCLUSION	30
<u>PSP MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT</u>	<u>31</u>

Introduction

Welcome to Public & School Partnership's (PSP) AmeriCorps VISTA program. VISTA Members have been a part of PSP since before 2002, and they have served in schools and nonprofit organizations across northern Utah. VISTA service with PSP has led to the development, implementation, and support of many programs that greatly benefit organizational capacity and sustainability as well as enrich the lives of community members where PSP's AmeriCorps VISTA Members serve.

As you work at your site, you will have many questions. This handbook is designed as a reference for you to combine with knowledge gained during Virtual Member Orientation (VMO, coordinated by AmeriCorps VISTA) and On-Site Orientation Training (OSOT, coordinated by PSP) to help you navigate your new work environment. If you cannot find the answer to your questions in this handbook, please contact the VISTA Leader or a PSP Supervisor. They are always happy to help.



AmeriCorps



PUBLIC & SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

6505 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322-6505

Phone: 435-797-0633

E-mail: pspvista.ut@gmail.com

Web: publicschoolpartnership.com

Facebook: facebook.com/PublicandSchoolPartnership

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Public & School Partnership History and Mission

Historically, PSP has focused its efforts on creating systematic changes within educational institutions and nonprofit organizations by creating collaborations between school personnel, parents, and community entities. In recent years, PSP has expanded into even more schools and community organizations to strengthen local efforts to improve upon academic, emotional, and social well-being and learning.

PSP's mission is:

To provide community members with access to the resources, education, and opportunities to elevate themselves and their neighbors out of poverty.

Within its larger mission, PSP has a threefold obligation to invest in and strengthen its greatest assets: a) the national AmeriCorps VISTA program, b) the placement site, and c) the VISTA Member.

- **National AmeriCorps VISTA Program.** PSP has an obligation to uphold the standards and practices of the national AmeriCorps VISTA program. To uphold the VISTA vision, PSP works in tandem with fellow VISTA programs toward the common goal of eradicating poverty in the United States and its communities.
- **Placement Site.** PSP has an obligation to support its placement sites in meeting their goals to provide quality interventions, programming, and resources to community members. By supporting these entities, PSP is investing in the future of local and national communities. As part of this obligation, PSP will assist VISTA Members in implementing sustainable practices at their sites that will build capacity and last beyond the member's term.
- **VISTA Member.** PSP's VISTA Members are also beneficiaries of the PSP mission. PSP views VISTA service as a unique development opportunity

that builds collaborative, confident, and capable individuals who will be able to better serve their communities following service. As part of this investment, PSP is committed to helping VISTA Members set and meet their own professional and personal development goals.

PSP recognizes five guiding principles, inspired by Stephen Covey's 7 *Habits for Highly Effective People*, to help accomplish its mission. VISTA Members should aim to exemplify these principles during their service term and beyond. Training and professional development activities will directly and indirectly focus on these principles.

- **Feel Empowered, Be Proactive!** *Advocate for yourself and your ideas. Don't hesitate to use your unique skills and knowledge.*
- **Begin with the End in Mind!** *Plan ahead for sustainability. Know where you are going and have a map to follow so you get there efficiently.*
- **Think Win-Win-Win!** *Structure tasks and assignments so that you are learning and growing as a person as well as benefiting your site and PSP.*
- **Communication is Key!** *Two-way communication between you and PSP, Site Supervisors, peers, and beneficiaries is critical to success. Seek feedback for continuous improvement and to communicate success!*
- **Balance, Don't Juggle!** *Learn to balance your own wants and needs along with those of PSP and Site Supervisors, peers, and beneficiaries. When you have too many balls in the air you can't focus on any one of them.*

Each of these principles helps remind VISTA Members to see how the daily details contribute to the bigger picture of increasing the capacity of their sites and themselves and of ensuring sustainability of their sites and their sites' programs.

About AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA

VISTA stands for "Volunteers In Service To America" and is the oldest of AmeriCorps and Senior Corps branches. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy envisioned a national service corps "to help provide urgently needed services in urban and rural poverty areas." President Lyndon B. Johnson realized Kennedy's dream by launching the "War on Poverty" and founding The AmeriCorps VISTA

program in 1964. The first VISTA Members took the oath of service in January, 1965. By the end of the year, more than 2,000 VISTA Members were working in the Appalachian region, California migrant worker camps, and impoverished neighborhoods in Hartford, Connecticut.

Through the decades, VISTA has evolved to respond to local problems and the changing faces of poverty. In the 1990s all AmeriCorps programs were combined under the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency with the goal of helping Americans help others. In 2021, CNCS formally became known as AmeriCorps. Over the past couple of years, VISTA has become larger, stronger, and more vital than ever before. Its 8,000+ VISTA Members —serving at more than 3,000 sites nationwide—continue to address the root causes of poverty.

PSP's VISTA program was designed to place volunteers with organizations that support historically marginalized populations to develop programs, generate resources, recruit volunteers, and strengthen organizational capacity. These efforts help placement sites become better equipped to work with and for community members. Through sustainability efforts, they also ensure future success at the site once the VISTA Member has completed their service term.

PSP's VISTA program is focused on education, whether that be school-based education, community-based education, skills acquisition, or simply education as knowledge and awareness. The connection between poverty and education is very strong. The more education and knowledge of resources and opportunities a person has, the more likely it is that they will be able to identify avenues to meet and advocate for their needs – and in turn, share knowledge of those avenues with others. This is one way to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and ensure a better future for communities.

Public & School Partnership: A Unique AmeriCorps VISTA Project

There are a few key differences between VISTA Members serving with PSP and VISTA Members at other projects. For this reason, it is important that PSP VISTA Members ask questions for clarification when needed. Some of these differences include:

1. PSP is an *intermediary project* that runs on a support grant from the AmeriCorps federal agency. This means that PSP acts as a link between placement sites and the AmeriCorps regional office. In many cases the PSP office performs some of the same functions for our VISTA Members that the regional office does for other projects. Because it acts as an intermediary, the PSP VISTA project has been around longer than the typical 1-3 years of most VISTA projects.
2. Since PSP VISTA Members serve at different sites that run independently, they do not all follow the exact same work schedule or have the same work-site goals. Each site is considered an independent agency and across-site comparisons are not reasonable and should not be made.
3. PSP is a cost-share project, meaning that the financial obligation of the VISTA Member living allowance is shared between the PSP grant and the placement site. There exists an agreement between PSP and the placement site that VISTA Members will dedicate service hours to both organizations, which means that PSP VISTA Members have a responsibility to meet the expectations of both organizations. Sites agree to allow VISTA Members to attend mandatory VISTA events (e.g., training and service projects), complete PSP's monthly reporting, and participate in monthly site visits. PSP agrees to allow VISTA Members to focus a majority of their service time and efforts on engaging in site-specific activities. This cost-share agreement also means that PSP VISTA Members have multiple individuals supporting their service work, including their Site Supervisor(s), VISTA Leader(s), and PSP/VISTA Supervisors.

Organizational Structure

As mentioned previously, VISTA Members on the PSP team have multiple supervisors they work with. Here is a brief explanation of their relation and responsibilities:

AmeriCorps/AmeriCorps VISTA – The AmeriCorps federal agency (formerly the Corporation for National & Community Service) oversees our project. Our project falls under the AmeriCorps VISTA branch of AmeriCorps. The federal and regional AmeriCorps offices work closely with PSP administration to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps mandates.

Utah State University – USU houses the PSP grant and project staff at the Institute for Disability Research, Policy, & Practice (formerly the Center for Persons with Disabilities). Various USU departments work closely with PSP administration to ensure the grant and project are carried out smoothly and in compliance with USU and AmeriCorps mandates.

Public & School Partnership – Project Director Shonna Hemmis, PSP’s Program Coordinators, and PSP office staff monitor and support the activities of VISTA Members at all sites and oversee the project on an organizational level. Personnel at this level are considered PSP/VISTA Supervisors.

VISTA Leader – In conjunction with the Project Director and PSP administrative team, VISTA Leaders assist in supporting PSP placement sites and VISTA Members. VISTA Leaders communicate with Site and PSP Supervisors and support VISTA Members by addressing their concerns, advocating on their behalf, and building meaningful relationships.

Site Supervisors – Site Supervisors may include administrative school and organization staff. They are the direct/daily supervisors for VISTA Members at their sites and are responsible for VISTA assignments and schedules on a day-to-day basis. They collaborate with PSP Supervisors to ensure effective VISTA Member oversight.

Administrative Protocols

VISTA Members are not typical employees - they are exemplary service providers. It is important for VISTA Members to remember that the commitment to VISTA service is the same (if not greater) as if they were working in any other position at their site. Courtesy, communication, and professional practice are expected of VISTA Members at all times. The following section will outline PSP VISTA Member policies in a variety of categories. PSP's VISTA Members should read over them carefully and be prepared to follow them.

Balancing VISTA, PSP, and Site Expectations

During service, VISTA Members create professional objectives to help meet site needs and PSP project performance measures. These objectives and performance measures are a part of PSP's project-wide commitment to fulfilling AmeriCorps grant requirements. PSP's VISTA Members report monthly on the progress of objectives and performance measures by completing online reporting forms and discussing data and impacts at site visits. VISTA Members will also have projects and tasks assigned by the Site Supervisors that have been previously approved by PSP Supervisors. It is the VISTA Member's responsibility to collaborate with the Site Supervisor to incorporate service objectives and performance measures into a cohesive work plan. VISTA Members will be supported in this process.

If a problem arises, or if VISTA Members have a concern while serving at site, PSP Supervisors and VISTA Leader(s) are happy to help.

- VISTA Members should always attempt to handle concerns at the site level first through open discussion with the Site Supervisor. Everyone communicates differently, and Site Supervisors may not realize there is a problem unless VISTA Members express concerns.
- If VISTA Members feel like they need support to address concerns, they can talk to the VISTA Leader or PSP Supervisor to discuss the best course of action to solve the issue. In some cases, a PSP Supervisor may offer to reach out to the Site Supervisor or colleague.
- If an issue arises with health benefits, monthly living stipend, end of service award, or other VISTA provided benefits, VISTA Members can talk

to the VISTA Leader or call the VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU). The phone number for **VMSU** is: 1-800-942-2677.

Remember that VISTA service focuses on indirect service activities that increase capacity and ensure sustainability of programs, as required by AmeriCorps grant mandates. Participation in direct service activities – activities that do not contribute to the overall capacity or sustainability of a program – may be appropriate in order to gain an understanding of a site’s clientele or programs. Direct service should never make up the majority of a VISTA Member’s site activities. VISTA Members should respectfully advocate for this VISTA policy when communicating with Site Supervisors and are welcome to consult with PSP Supervisors or VISTA Leader(s) for additional guidance.

Appropriate VISTA Terminology

As an AmeriCorps VISTA Member, it is important to use and encourage others to use appropriate VISTA terminology. This includes encouraging Site Supervisors to refer to AmeriCorps VISTA Members as such and not as interns or volunteers, as well as utilizing appropriate terminology in email signatures and social media correspondences. Guidance from the AmeriCorps federal agency is as follows:

DO SAY: AmeriCorps VISTA Member, serving as, a year of AmeriCorps VISTA service, AmeriCorps VISTA member serving with [organization name]

DO NOT SAY: AmeriCorps worker, VISTA volunteer, intern

Attire

Generally speaking, PSP highly encourages self-expression through attire. VISTA Members are also highly encouraged to wear AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA, and/or PSP buttons, pins, and T-shirts on site to help other staff members identify them as VISTA Members and to increase awareness of AmeriCorps. PSP will try to provide VISTA Members with several pieces of AmeriCorps/AmeriCorps VISTA swag.

At site, VISTA Members should plan to dress in accordance with their site’s expectations. If a VISTA Member is unsure what the expectation for attire is at their site, they should ask their Site Supervisor directly. For PSP-hosted events,

VISTA Members will be made aware of any attire expectations in advance. VISTA Members must remember that they serve in highly professional environments and that all sites have different expectations.

Communication

- **Email:** Email is the most utilized communication method during a PSP VISTA Member's service term. It is the primary method of contact between VISTA Members and the PSP Office, and it is the VISTA Member's responsibility to provide PSP office staff with their preferred email address for receiving correspondences from PSP. *VISTA Members are expected to check their work email at least once each working day, read all correspondences thoroughly and completely, and respond to emails and other correspondences within 1 business day of having received a message,* as per the PSP Memorandum of Agreement (at the end of this document). VISTA Members are also strongly encouraged to communicate with each other directly via email or phone when needed.
- **Checking in at site:** VISTA Members should always check in briefly with a site staff member, preferably the Site Supervisor, when arriving and leaving their site. This helps build relationships with staff and lets the Site Supervisor know when VISTA Members are present and available.
- **PSP website and social media:** PSP also uses the PSP website, Facebook page, and Facebook group to communicate announcements and upcoming events. VISTA Members should become familiar with these platforms, as they will greatly assist them throughout their term. PSP VISTA Members are not able to post on PSP's official Facebook business page, but they are highly encouraged to post in the PSP VISTA Group.

www.publicschoolpartnership.com

www.facebook.com/PublicandSchoolPartnership (page)

[PSP VISTA Group](#) (group)

Work Day and Week

Daily schedules differ across sites, but all VISTA Members are required to work a minimum of 40 hours per week, as mandated by the AmeriCorps federal agency. In any case, VISTA Members should be aware and respectful of what time they have agreed to arrive at and leave site each day. VISTA Members are expected to arrive on site at the agreed upon time and to stay the entire

scheduled shift. Aside from unforeseen circumstances, VISTA Members may not adjust their own schedules without prior approval from their Site Supervisor.

To be in compliance with AmeriCorps federal mandates, VISTA Members must work **at least 40 hours per week**. There is no cap on the number of hours VISTA Members can work at their sites and **VISTA Members do not earn compensatory/comp time (i.e., time accrued to be used later)**. Every effort will be made to be respectful of VISTA Member time, and the work week should not greatly exceed 40 hours on a consistent basis. However, VISTA Members who work more than 40 hours in a work week should not expect to come late or leave early because they have reached 40 hours per week. This arrangement is occasionally acceptable only when it is pre-arranged as part of a temporary work plan with the Site Supervisor.

- **Lunch break:** Lunch arrangements should be determined by agreement between the Site Supervisor and the VISTA Member. Sites are not required to provide a lunch period, but they are strongly encouraged to do so. There are two options for VISTA Member lunch time: a working lunch or a non-working lunch.
 - Working lunch: During a working lunch, the VISTA Member actively continues to engage in site activities and assignments. Time dedicated to a “working lunch” is counted in the normal, total working hours for that day (do not “clock out” on time card).
 - Non-working lunch: A “non-working lunch” is when a VISTA Member chooses to take a break from site-related assignments and is primarily focused on personal engagements during the lunch time. Time dedicated to a “non-working lunch” is not counted into the normal, total working (must “clock out/in” on time card). VISTA Members must take non-working lunches into account when planning workdays and meeting the required minimum of 40 work hours per week, as non-working lunch time *does not* count into the weekly 40 hours per week minimum. Agreements to take non-working lunches should be arranged with the Site Supervisor.

VISTA Members may use brief breaks or non-working lunch time for personal engagements (e.g., personal correspondences, schedule appointments, etc.).

- **Professional Development Activities and College Courses:** In some cases, professional development activities or college courses may be counted toward work hours. These activities are considered “alternate service” hours, described below. **For college courses specifically, a maximum of 2 hours per week of class time may be counted towards the 40 hours per week minimum requirement, as alternate service hours.** In all cases, this arrangement requires coordination with and pre-approval by both Site and PSP Supervisors. Supervisors are not required to allow these activities to count for work hours.
- **Alternate/Alt-service hours:** Alt-service hours include *service*-related activities that may not necessarily be *site*-related activities. Alt-service hours may be used in certain circumstances, and in all cases, a brief explanation of these activities must be indicated in the “Notes” section of the monthly time card.

Alt-service hours must adhere to the following guidelines:

- Alt-service hours should be directly related to or supporting site, PSP, or VISTA goals.
- VISTA Members are permitted to count up to 2 hours per week as alt-service hours for attending class, at the discretion of Site and PSP Supervisors. Time spent completing homework will not be granted as alt-service hours, except in extenuating circumstances.
- PSP’s mandatory and optional events as well as required VISTA orientation or training activities *always* count as alt-service hours. A brief explanation of these activities must be indicated in the “Notes” section of the monthly time card. These events will always be communicated to VISTA Members in advance, though it is the VISTA Member’s responsibility to communicate attendance at these activities to the Site Supervisor. All PSP-hosted activities can be found on the PSP website at www.publicschoolpartnership.com/calendar-of-events.
- In the event a VISTA Member is short on the 40 hours per week minimum requirement in a given week, they should arrange to

participate in alt-service activities to make up the time. In other words, alt-service hours activities can help the VISTA Member reach the weekly hours requirement if circumstances at site did not allow the VISTA Member to work on site-related activities for 40 hours in a week. For example, a VISTA Member may count a professional development webinar, class time, or volunteering at another PSP site's event as alt-service hours because their site closed early one day that same week, if that will bring the VISTA Member to the 40 hours per week minimum requirement.

- Alt-service hours should 1.) never take the place of regularly scheduled site-based hours or activities, 2.) should not be used consistently, and 3.) should not make up more than 20% of a VISTA Member's hours on a single monthly time card. If alt-service hours exceed 20% of the total hours served in one month, the VISTA Member will be required to meet with PSP and Site Supervisors to discuss work activities and schedule.

If a VISTA Member consistently runs short on weekly hours or site-related projects to complete, they should first let the Site Supervisor know they are ready for additional site-related assignments. If such activities are not available, the VISTA Member should get in touch with a PSP Supervisor or VISTA Leader(s) for ideas on alt-service activities.

Breaks, Tardiness/Leaving Early, and Make-Up Hours

- **Breaks:** Short breaks of 5-10 minutes may be offered at the discretion of the Site Supervisor. When approved, breaks should be considered part of the regular work day (do not "clock out" on time card).
- **Arriving Late or Leaving Early:** If a VISTA Member is going to be late or needs to leave early due to *unforeseen* circumstances, the VISTA Member must let the Site Supervisor know as soon as possible via phone or text message. This expectation is the same for situations when a VISTA Member will be late or needs to leave early from a mandatory PSP-hosted activity, and the VISTA Member should communicate these circumstances to a PSP Supervisor or VISTA Leader(s).

- For *foreseen* circumstances (e.g., personal meetings or appointments), VISTA Members should *request* approval to arrive late or leave early at least one week in advance, if possible. Requests should be made to the Site Supervisor, if missing scheduled site-related work, or a PSP Supervisor, if missing mandatory PSP-hosted activities.
- E-mail is the preferred method of communication for all approval requests so there is a written record of the agreement. If a verbal agreement is made, it is best practice to send a follow-up email outlining the approved arrangement. The VISTA Leader(s) should be CCed on these correspondences.
- **Make-Up Hours:** As per guidance from the AmeriCorps federal agency, if a VISTA Member needs to take brief amounts of time off – 3 hours or less – for personal reasons, the Site Supervisor may allow time to be made up *within that work week* if ALL of the following conditions are met:
 1. All procedures and protocols for notification and approval have been followed (i.e., advance notice in writing).
 2. The total time to be made up does not exceed 3 hours (over 3 hours would be .5 of a personal or sick day).
 3. The schedule adjustment is convenient for the Site Supervisor or PSP Supervisor.
 4. The time is made up within the same calendar week that it is taken (the same week as indicated on the monthly time card).
 5. Make-up time requests have not been received more than once per month.
 6. The VISTA Member does not have a history of absenteeism or tardiness.

These arrangements are completely at the discretion of the Site Supervisor. All hours missed and corresponding make-up hours must be accurately logged on the time card. Frequent failure to comply with these procedures may result in disciplinary action or removal from the project.

Leave Details and Expectations

Leave

All VISTA Members receive 10 days of personal leave and 10 days of sick leave to take as needed throughout their service term. There are additional types of leave available to VISTA Members. In all cases, leave hours count as hours towards the 40 hours per week minimum requirement and should be recorded accurately on the monthly time card. Types of leave and other leave details are described below:

- **Types of leave**
 - **Personal leave** can be used for vacation, non-work events and activities, graduate school interviews, personal emergencies, etc. Personal leave can also be used for medical circumstances. VISTA Members have 10 days of available personal leave.
 - **Medical/sick leave** can be taken as needed for personal illness, immediate family illness, mental wellness/self-care. Medical leave does NOT function as personal leave. Medical leave is appropriate to use when VISTA Members are sick, have a doctor or dentist appointment, have a scheduled surgery, are recuperating from an illness or surgery, have an immediate family member who is ill, or require self-care. Self-care, also referred to as mental wellness, is time that is taken for a VISTA Member to be at their best, physically or emotionally. This time can range from needing to cope with personal issues to recuperating after stressful work-related or personal events. VISTA Members have 10 days of available medical leave.
 - **Bereavement leave** is designed for VISTA Members who experience the death of an immediate family member. Bereavement leave can be requested for more than one incident during a VISTA Member's service term. VISTA Members must follow these steps to request bereavement leave for each incident:
 - VISTA Members may request **up to 5 bereavement days, per incident**, through an **emailed request**.
 - The request must **list the number of bereavement days** requested.

- The request **must be approved before the bereavement days are taken.**
- Approved bereavement days **must be taken consecutively for each incident.**

As defined by USU policy, immediate family includes: a spouse or domestic partner, son, daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, foster child, parents, parents-in-law, brother, sister, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, grandparent, grandparent-in-law, grandchildren, and step-relative.

- **Additional leave** options are available to VISTA Members, including parental leave, emergency medical leave, and others, in order to accommodate VISTA Members in finishing their service term successfully. Please visit this link to review details regarding AmeriCorps-approved leave benefits:
<https://americorps.gov/members-volunteers/vista/benefits>.
- **Leave approval for foreseen leave:** While personal and medical leave are available for VISTA Members to use as needed, they must receive approval in advance and cannot schedule leave during mandatory PSP events.
 - **Personal leave approval:** VISTA Members should **request all foreseen personal leave via email** from Site and PSP Supervisors at least one week in advance. All requests must include the dates and number and type of leave days requested, and VISTA Members should not plan to take leave until the request is approved. It is at the discretion of the Site and PSP Supervisors to approve or deny all leave requests. Approval for personal leave that would require the VISTA Member to miss mandatory PSP-hosted events will **NOT** be granted.
 - **Medical leave approval:** VISTA Members should **request all foreseen medical leave via email** from Site and PSP Supervisors at least one week in advance. All requests must include the dates and number and type of leave days requested, and VISTA Members should not plan to take leave until the request is approved. It is at the discretion of the Site and PSP Supervisors to approve or deny all leave requests. Approval for medical leave that would require a VISTA Member to miss mandatory PSP-hosted events may be

granted. If granted, the VISTA Member must make up the activity, at the discretion of PSP Supervisors.

- **Recording leave:** All leave must be recorded in full (8 hour) or half (4 hour) increments on the monthly time card. If a VISTA Member needs a shorter leave time, the VISTA Member should see if the leave qualifies under the *Breaks, Tardiness/Leaving Early/Make-Up Hours* policies described previously. Leave must be recorded accurately and in the appropriate section of the monthly time card.
- **Expectation for mandatory events:** Personal leave cannot be taken during mandatory PSP-hosted events and will only be approved in very rare, extenuating circumstances. Medical leave may be taken and approved, and if granted, the VISTA Member must make up the activity, at the discretion of PSP Supervisors. In all cases, absences from mandatory PSP-hosted activities can put members at risk for not completing their service terms and may result in loss of end-of-service benefits. If a make-up project is needed, PSP Supervisors will determine the appropriate time and activity. VISTA Member participation in mandatory PSP activities is crucial to the success of PSP projects, and it affects the entire team when a VISTA Member is absent. All mandatory PSP-hosted activities can be found on the PSP website at www.publicschoolpartnership.com/calendar-of-events.
- **Leave totals:** Please contact a PSP Program Coordinator for updated leave totals. It is also recommended that VISTA Members keep track of their own remaining personal and medical leave.

If VISTA Members exceed the allotment for days off before the end of their service term, a remedial plan must be made with PSP and Site Supervisors. Failure to fulfill service commitment requirements may result in failure to complete the service term or loss of end-of-service benefits.

Closed Site

VISTA Members have several federal- and state-recognized holidays off. According to the guidance from the AmeriCorps federal agency: *"AmeriCorps VISTA Members enjoy the national holidays that are recognized by their sponsoring organization and are given as time off to the rest of the organization's*

personnel. Members do not get federal holidays that are not recognized by their sponsoring organization. For example, if your organization does not give its staff a holiday for Veterans Day, you are also expected to work unless you request and receive approval for one day of personal leave. Additionally, if you want the day off for a religious observance, you should request a day of personal leave."

Many sites may have additional days off, which can lead to some confusion across sites. In general, PSP allows VISTA Members to take the time off if their site is officially closed. A site is considered closed if ALL staff receive the time off. If any other staff are working, the VISTA Member is expected to be working also. The following example illustrates this rule - a school district scheduled a professional development day for teachers giving the students the day off. A VISTA Member working at the school will be required to work because the teachers, administration, and other school personnel are required to work that day even though the students are not in school. If VISTA Members are unsure about a specific scenario, they should check with a PSP Supervisor to determine the best way to account for hours. Remember that all PSP sites are different and calendars will vary. This means that not all PSP VISTA Members will have the same days off. This is expected and should be considered appropriate as each site functions as an individual organization.

In the case of **inclement weather** (e.g., snow days), the *Closed Site* policy applies. VISTA Members should observe the "snow day" with the site and participate in any resulting make-up days required by the site.

Time off that falls under this "Closed Site" policy should be counted as "holiday" hours on the monthly time card.

Mandatory Days of Service

Several days throughout the year are designated by the AmeriCorps federal agency as mandated days of service, and the PSP office team is often required to plan appropriate projects for these days of service. Therefore, participation is required by all PSP VISTA Members on these days, as mandated by the AmeriCorps federal agency. Service project participation and outcomes are reported to AmeriCorps.

January	Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service
March	AmeriCorps Week to celebrate & raise awareness of AmeriCorps in the community
April	National (& Volunteer) Service Recognition Day

In addition to the above AmeriCorps-mandated days of service, PSP has planned the following times of the year for PSP VISTA Members and office staff to complete additional service projects.

June/July	Summer Service Project
December	Winter Service Project

To reiterate, **participation in the above days of service are mandatory**, and it is the VISTA Member's responsibility to remind the Site Supervisor of upcoming days when they will be away from site due to participation in these activities.

VISTA Members should not plan to use personal leave, arrive late, or leave early to mandatory service events. Time missed at mandatory service activities must be made up by the VISTA Member, at the discretion of PSP Supervisors. Make-up service projects will be scheduled on an hour-to-hour basis, depending on the amount of time missed. All mandatory events can be found on the PSP website at www.publicschoolpartnership.com/calendar-of-events.

Mandatory Training Conferences

PSP's status as a support-grant AmeriCorps VISTA project ensures that VISTA Members will receive consistent training throughout their service term. Mandatory training conferences include 1.) VISTA-coordinated Virtual Member Orientation (VMO) as well as 2.) PSP-coordinated On-site Orientation & Training (OSOT) and 3.) Quarterly Training Conferences. *Full attendance at ALL of these training conferences is mandatory.* These training conferences are separate from any additional, optional professional development activities that VISTA Members choose to pursue. The expectation is that VISTA Members attend and actively participate in all training sessions.

PSP-coordinated OSOT typically takes two-hours, and PSP's coordinated quarterly training conferences are usually all-day events. OSOT is provided for all new VISTA Members at the beginning of their service term and covers PSP-specific information, policies, reporting. Quarterly training conferences are a time when all PSP VISTA Members come together to work on building professional skills and receive important information that can help them throughout their service term and beyond. In all cases, it is up to each VISTA Member to apply the information they receive to their own VISTA service experience. If VISTA Members have suggestions for topics, they should let the VISTA Leader(s) know so these ideas can be incorporated into future training events.

If a VISTA Member is urgently needed at their site for a pre-scheduled activity that conflicts with a PSP-coordinated training conference, the Site Supervisor must send an email directly to the PSP Project Director requesting approval for any amount a time the VISTA Member will be absent from the training. An agreement will then be made between the two parties. Hours the VISTA Member does not attend PSP-coordinated mandatory training conferences due to illness will need to be made up on an hour-to-hour basis, depending on the amount of time missed. Training recovery activities will be determined by PSP Supervisors.

In all cases, VISTA Members are responsible for reminding their Site Supervisor of days when they will be away from site for mandatory *and* optional PSP-hosted activities.

Disciplinary Action

In the unlikely event that a VISTA Member fails to meet the commitments made to their placement site or PSP team, disciplinary measures will take place. Disciplinary measures are designed to help VISTA Members finish their term of service successfully. In general, the disciplinary measures the following basic format.

1. Meeting with a site supervisor to talk about performance and set goals. PSP administration will likely not be present but instead will be informed via email from site supervisor.
2. If VISTA Member does not improve, a second meeting takes place with the VISTA Member, Site Supervisor, and PSP Supervisor. Clear goals and

expectations will be outlined and a formal plan will be implemented for VISTA Member improvement. Signatures and deadlines will be required, and the VISTA Member will be made aware that he/she has entered the disciplinary process.

3. If the VISTA Member fails to meet the goals and expectations agreed upon in step 2, then a third meeting will take place with PSP supervisor, VISTA Member, and Site Supervisor. The meeting will outline the VISTA Member's behavior and discuss the seriousness of the failure to follow the improvement plan made in step 2. Outcomes will be discussed and the VISTA Member will be warned that a recommendation for termination will follow if no improvement is made by a certain date. The state office will be notified of the disciplinary action at this point.
4. If improvement is still not made PSP will recommend termination from the project. The VISTA Member will be put on administrative leave until a determination can be made.

Reporting

Time Cards

Time cards should be filled out daily and must be turned in monthly during the monthly reporting period. There are *no exceptions* to this policy.

Discrepancies and dishonesty can be considered by the AmeriCorps federal agency as fraud and can result in VISTA termination or forfeiture of the end-of-service award. Hours should be accurately recorded on the time card and reflect the actual times, hours, and types of hours worked by the VISTA Member. Time cards must be signed by the Site Supervisor, the VISTA Member, and a PSP Supervisor.

VISTA Members are expected to work at least 40 hours per week each week. Because VISTA Members are considered 24/7 service volunteers, **they do not accrue compensation/comp time**. VISTA Members are responsible for tracking their own hours and managing their time so that the hours are sufficient and reasonable. If a VISTA Member's time cards consistently show insufficient or excessive hours, PSP Supervisors will work with the Site Supervisor and VISTA Member to reach a more reasonable agreement.

All make-up and alt-service hours must be approved following the criteria listed previously in this handbook.

Monthly Reporting and Site Visits

VISTA Members are responsible for signing up for a site visit each month, and all monthly reporting forms and documents are due by 8 AM, two business days before the scheduled monthly site visit with PSP Supervisors. Monthly reporting covers information about VISTA Member activities from the *previous* month. For example, reports due in May would contain information from the month of April. Reporting forms and supporting documents are provided and available on the PSP website.

Information collected from these monthly reporting documents is used for federal reports that are submitted to the AmeriCorps federal agency. VISTA Members are required to fill out their reports completely and on time. VISTA Members will be asked to revise or re-submit forms lacking sufficient information. After the VISTA Member adjusts to the reporting process, the paperwork should take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour, though it may take longer if the VISTA Member requires information from other site staff members. If the reporting is consistently taking more time VISTA Members should consult with the VISTA Leader(s) on strategies to simplify or better understand the reporting process.

If a VISTA Member encounters questions on the reporting document that they think do not apply to their work, then they are expected to ask the VISTA Leader(s) or PSP Supervisor for clarification. It is PSP's stance that most, if not all, reporting questions apply to a VISTA Member's work in some capacity – sometimes with a little creative thinking.

Site visits are a meeting between a VISTA Member and a PSP Supervisor and are conducted monthly. Visits take place either at the VISTA Member's site or virtually, most often at the discretion of the PSP Supervisor.

How to Prepare for Site Visits

1. Log on to the website at www.publicschoolpartnership.com
2. Click the tab "For VISTAs" then "Reporting" (password: *unguessable*)
3. Click the link to schedule a site visit time
4. Click the appropriate reporting form links to complete reporting

5. Respond to additional requests made by PSP Supervisors before site visit
6. Meet with Site Supervisor to have time card signed. Sign your time card after it has been signed by the Site Supervisor.
7. Upload any additional documents and/or objectives evidences as required

If a VISTA Member needs to reschedule the site visit appointment, they must notify their assigned PSP Supervisor as soon as possible by email or text message. Out of consideration for the PSP Supervisor's time, VISTA Members should not reschedule site visit times unless absolutely necessary, and rescheduled days and times are at the discretion of the PSP Supervisor.

Other Items for Reference

Travel Reimbursement

Travel reimbursement is conducted through the USU Travel System. Therefore, the reimbursement rate is based on the USU rate of reimbursement. Only service-related, non-commute mileage will be reimbursed. Examples of service-related travel include, but are not limited to: picking up donations, off-site meetings when participation is expected, serving at another VISTA site, attending a PSP activity, etc. Commutes to/from home cannot be reimbursed.

When visiting the PSP main office on USU's campus, please know that there is restricted parking and that you will need a temporary parking pass to park in the lot in front of PSP's building on USU's campus. You can obtain this pass from the front office of PSP's building on campus. Parking in the lot in front of the PSP's building on campus is open to the public after 5:00 PM, except during some USU-hosted events, and the campus parking terraces also provide plenty of low-cost parking options.

Additional Income and School Enrollment

- **Additional income:** As part of the AmeriCorps VISTA service and contract, VISTA Members may be allowed to hold a second job during their service term upon approval of Site Supervisor, PSP Supervisor, and the AmeriCorps federal agency. A VISTA Member requesting secondary

employment is required to complete and submit an official AmeriCorps Outside Employment Application form to provide information about the position and agreeing to prioritize VISTA obligations. If a VISTA Member would like to keep employment held prior to beginning their VISTA term, the VISTA Member must complete the same request form. As per AmeriCorps federal policy, secondary employment cannot be held through the sponsoring agency (USU and PSP) or a VISTA Member's site. This means that secondary employment must meet two conditions to be considered eligible:

1. The W2 cannot come from USU, PSP, or the school/district/site in which the VISTA is working.
2. The employment may not be held at the VISTA member's site.

The purpose for the low living allowance is to help VISTA Members better understand poverty and relate to the people they serve. However, if VISTA Members receive child support, social security, or disability payments, they can absolutely continue to do so as a VISTA Member. These types of payments do not count as secondary income since they will never potentially conflict with VISTA service obligations to be earned. If VISTA Members have a question about whether a particular situation is allowed, ask PSP Supervisors.

- **School enrollment:** VISTA Members are encouraged to enroll in and complete degree programs while serving in a VISTA term of service, as long as the VISTA Member is able to meet the 40 hours per week minimum requirement. VISTA Members who are enrolled in school or another educational program, full or part time, during their service term will be asked to complete a School Enrollment Request Form documenting the enrollment. Obtaining this form is part of AmeriCorps federal policy, is primarily for documentation purposes, and has no impact on the VISTA Member's eligibility to serve.

State and Federal Benefits

During their term of service, VISTA Members may seek assistance from various state and federal benefit programs. These include, but are not limited to assistance with food access, health care, child care, and income-based loan

repayment options. *Some programs will only disregard a VISTA Member's income if they apply to a benefit program prior to their first day of VISTA service.* While it is the VISTA Member's responsibility to work with the state and federal benefits programs, PSP Supervisors and VISTA Leader(s) will offer support where possible. Please contact the VISTA Leader(s) for support on a more case-by-case basis.

Many of the service letters that the benefits programs need for verification purposes can be found online in your MyAmeriCorps Portal at my.americorps.gov.

Summer Hours

For some PSP sites, summers are a slower time since schools are no longer in session. Despite smaller workloads, VISTA Members must still complete the 40 hours per week minimum requirement.

To maintain the weekly hours requirement, VISTA Members should ask the Site Supervisor for additional projects. If there aren't any available, they should look for ways to develop new skills that will help during VISTA service. Other options include temporarily serving at other PSP VISTA placement sites that need support, watching VISTA Campus webinars and learning modules, or participating in other pre-approved professional development or volunteer activities. Prior approval from the Site and PSP Supervisors is needed for these accommodations. Talk with PSP Supervisors for guidance if needed.

Remote Work

Under normal circumstances, the AmeriCorps federal office has a "No Teleservice" policy. However, as workplace dynamics and environments shift and adapt, arrangements for VISTA Members to temporarily work *some* of their hours remotely may be made. These arrangements are always at the discretion of the Site Supervisor, and Site Supervisors are not required to approve a VISTA Member's request for remote work.

Pay Stubs and Tax Information

VISTA Members can review paystubs in their MyAmeriCorps Portal at my.americorps.gov. Remember, only federal taxes are taken out of VISTA Member paychecks, per AmeriCorps mandates. VISTA Members should be aware

that this may have unexpected repercussions when filing taxes, and they may owe state taxes at the end of the year, depending on their filing status and household income. Please consult with a tax professional if you have questions. VISTA Members should review pay stubs regularly to ensure they are receiving the correct amount.

Pay Days and Unforeseen Pay Issues

VISTA Members must have information for an active bank account on file in their MyAmeriCorps Portal. The bank account information in the MyAmeriCorps Portal must be for the bank account in which the VISTA Member wishes all pay be directly deposited.

VISTA Member paychecks are calculated and disbursed by the AmeriCorps federal agency. VISTA Member pay covers a 14-day pay period, based on a fixed daily rate of pay set by the AmeriCorps federal agency *by county*. The pay date for corresponding pay period is set by the AmeriCorps federal agency and can be viewed and downloaded online. If a set pay date falls on a weekend, paychecks may be direct deposited on the previous or next business day, depending on the schedules and policies followed by a VISTA Member's bank.

If a VISTA member does not receive a paycheck on the expected date or pay is not what is expected, the VISTA Member should contact a PSP Supervisor immediately. It is important to know that PSP does not directly manage VISTA Member pay – that process is fully managed by the AmeriCorps federal agency. Although, PSP Supervisors may serve as a liaison between the VISTA Member and AmeriCorps regarding pay. PSP Supervisors will work quickly and diligently to communicate important pay information and troubleshooting to VISTA Members.

Branding and Promotion

VISTA Members are expected to represent both PSP, AmeriCorps, and AmeriCorps VISTA while serving at site and in the community. The AmeriCorps Regional Office, PSP, and placement sites may provide VISTA Members with branding materials such as shirts, posters, buttons, pins, and flyers. Additionally, **VISTA Members must mention AmeriCorps VISTA and the Public & School Partnership in email signatures**, and they may include logos of those entities in email signatures, which can be provided by PSP. Logos and written mentions of

these entities may also be included in materials produced by VISTA Members during their service term.

This aspect of VISTA service is important in order to increase awareness of the AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps programs and the invaluable service VISTA Members provide. Site Supervisors are made aware of this commitment when they request partnership with PSP.

VISTA Campus

The VISTA Campus resource provided by the AmeriCorps federal agency offers a wide variety of training and professional development opportunities. VISTA Members should have a VISTA Campus account and are encouraged to use the VISTA Campus resources to enhance their VISTA experience. The VISTA Campus website is:

<http://www.vistacampus.gov/>

VISTA Member Handbook

The VISTA Member Handbook, which can be downloaded by visiting <https://americorps.gov/members-volunteers/vista>, provides additional resources and guidance for VISTA Members concerning VISTA-specific policies.

Ending Your Term of Service

AmeriCorps places term limits on members who serve in AmeriCorps programs. For AmeriCorps VISTA, the current limit is five terms, and VISTA Members can receive up to two full education awards.

As a VISTA Member's service term comes to a close, VISTA Members are required to fill out a Future Plans Form in their MyAmeriCorps Portal at my.americorps.gov as well as other end-of-service paperwork required by PSP. VISTA Members are given the opportunity to evaluate their term of service and to request one of three options:

Re-enroll for a full term

See final paragraph of this section

Extend for a shorter term	Maximum extension is 6 months. VISTA Member is eligible for most benefits for time served - living allowance, cash stipend, health coverage, and leave. Education Awards are not granted for an extension.
Terminate service as planned	VISTA member will need to: complete all objectives and performance measures, provide evidence of completed objectives, complete forms in MyAmeriCorps Portal, schedule an exit interview with PSP Supervisors, and complete any other required end-of-service paperwork.

All PSP VISTA positions are considered open at the end of a service term. If a VISTA Member wishes to re-enroll for a full term or temporarily extend their service at site, continuation of service either at their current site or at another PSP placement site is NOT guaranteed. Availability of VISTA slots within PSP is always subject to change as are the cost-share partnerships. If space is available for a VISTA Member to re-enroll or extend at their current site, the VISTA Member must receive a positive evaluation and approval from both the PSP Supervisor and the Site Supervisor who has been overseeing their service at site. If all conditions are met, the VISTA Member will be offered reenrollment/extension at their current site.

A VISTA Member is also able to select the re-enroll option and attend interviews at other PSP placement sites if the VISTA Member wishes to serve again but at a different PSP placement site. Again, reenrollment is never guaranteed and is contingent on a successful interview and offer.

PSP VISTA Placement Sites

PSP has placement sites across northern Utah, and those sites range from schools to nonprofit organizations based in the community and on university campuses. PSP's partnerships with these sites allows the sites to receive valuable

resources and support that may otherwise not be available or accessible. PSP's partnerships with these sites also often provides financial respite for sites that are in need of support but may not be able to acquire that support due to financial limitations. Although PSP has one unified work plan that all VISTA Members contribute to through performance measures, there are a vast range of projects VISTA Members work on that are specific to their sites.

For a list of PSP's current placement sites and the VISTA Members currently serving at each site, please visit PSP's website at:

<http://www.publicschoolpartnership.com/our-team.html>.

Conclusion

This handbook was created to clarify the expectations for PSP's VISTA Members as they work through their year of service. **Remember that this handbook is specific to PSP, though it is in alignment with policies and expectations mandated by the AmeriCorps federal agency.** If a VISTA Member has a question about a policy and cannot find an answer in this handbook, the VISTA Member should refer to the VISTA Handbook that can be downloaded at <https://americorps.gov/members-volunteers/vista>. VISTA Members should refer to both handbooks before consulting PSP or Site Supervisors.

On the following page is the PSP Memorandum of Agreement, which outlines the policies which have been set forth in this handbook. All PSP VISTA Members are required to sign this MOA. In doing so, PSP VISTA Members indicate they understand and agree to commit to the policies outlined on the MOA. A copy of the signed agreement will be kept on file for each PSP VISTA Member.

PSP Memorandum of Agreement

As a VISTA Member with the Public & School Partnership, I have read and understand the following terms of my AmeriCorps VISTA service:

- Work a minimum of 40 hours per week.
- Accurately report my time on the official time card (failure to do so is considered time card fraud).
- Fulfill site, PSP, and AmeriCorps commitments, and attend all PSP mandatory activities.
- Complete monthly reporting and respond to reporting-related requests on time.
- Check e-mail daily, fully read correspondences from the PSP office and Site Supervisors, and respond within 1 business day of receiving correspondence.
- Accurately request and report personal and sick leave on the time card.
- Make sure accurate branding (PSP/AmeriCorps/USU logos and info) exists in email signatures, in the workspace, and on produced materials.
- Remain focused on capacity building activities that benefit the longevity and increased effectiveness of the site, instead of on direct service activities that do not contribute to the overall capacity and sustainability of the site and PSP.
- Proactively seek the opportunity to work on programs that directly or indirectly impact community members who are at risk of experiencing poverty.
- Proactively seek the opportunity to work with volunteers (recruiting, training, coordinating, and/or recognizing).
- Complete the full one-year service commitment.
- Not apply for or accept any employment that would interfere with the completion of the one-year service term.

Printed Name

Signature

Date



AmeriCorps



PUBLIC & SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

6505 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322-6505

Phone: 435-797-0633

E-mail: pspvista.ut@gmail.com

Web: publicschoolpartnership.com

Facebook: facebook.com/PublicandSchoolPartnership

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