

PROJECT NARRATIVE

Executive Summary

1. Provide a brief summary of your proposed AmeriCorps*VISTA project, including population to be served, issue areas, history of your organization's activities in these issue areas, and the type of service activities you expect the AmeriCorps*VISTA member to accomplish.

The North Coast is a naturally beautiful region in which high environmental awareness coexists uncomfortably with a number of backward environmental practices. In late 2006, an organization called Plan-It Green came together to energize the region around key environmental management and sustainability that would benefit residents at all income levels. The North Coast Small Business Resource Center (NCSBRC) has joined in a partnership with Plan-It Green to promote environmental economic development. Together, we believe our region is ready to become a model of environmental practices. Environmental building standards, enhanced recycling, new businesses to provide environmental products, cleaner jobs with better wages, raising people out of poverty through green/sustainable business ownership and a well-informed community are the hallmarks of that higher-level model. Further, we believe that a Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) member to assist in building our capacity is a key ingredient to our moving forward in our plans to improve environmental practices on the north coast of California. Doing these things will alleviate poverty in two important ways.

First, there will be specific deliverables in the overall project that will prepare people in targeted income groups to make a better life for themselves and their families by starting green businesses. These deliverables are detailed below. The North Coast Small Business Resource Center, one of the key partners in the project, has a 20-year history of helping low-income people prepare to succeed in their own businesses. The VISTA project will extend that effort to founding green businesses. Second, we strongly believe that building a more sustainable future is not only good for everyone in the region, but is disproportionately good in raising the health and quality of life for those in and near the poverty level because environmental problems affect the poor disproportionately.

Plan-It Green is a project of the Center for Environmental Economic Development (CEED), a 501c3 non-profit California Corporation formed in 1993. Plan-It Green's mission is to encourage the adoption of economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable practices in Humboldt County and to facilitate their implementation through education, collaborative partnerships, and technical assistance. Plan-It Green members envision a future of prosperous communities, green business practices, healthy living, and innovation. Plan-It Green has eight "satellite" areas of focus: Energy, Transportation, Water Management, Site Development, Recycling and Waste, Economics, Built Environment, and Government Ordinances. Each of these satellites is an area of interest in which Plan-It Green attempts to encourage the local region to implement green, sustainable, and socially positive alternatives. A major focus of Plan-It Green is to create local job markets for small business expanding into the "green" market.

The **North Coast Small Business Resource Center** is also a 501c3 nonprofit corporation whose mission for over 20 years has been to cultivate small business success in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties by providing quality, innovative technical support and education to start-up and existing companies. Among other things, this means that we promote business ownership as a way for individuals to attain financial independence as a central focus of our mission. NCSBRC specifically aims 45% of its funding at helping low-income people start and succeed in owning businesses.

Needs and Activities

1. State in measurable and quantifiable terms the specific poverty-related need(s) identified by the community(ies) that the AmeriCorps*VISTA project will address, including the number of low-income people directly affected by the problem(s).

Humboldt County has 19.5% of its population that lives below the poverty line. Large employers are few and some of the traditional large employers are continuing to lay off workers. In this context, small business and government have provided job growth over the past 15 years. At the same time, the County has a relatively high level of environmental awareness with a low level of widespread practice by industry and government. It is at the connection of these two facts, poverty and a need for improved environmental practices, where the VISTA project will effect change.

A. The VISTA will design a curriculum that will educate 30 targeted income group people in how to start, finance and run their own green business. Half of those people will begin during the first year of the project, completing early in Year 2, and half are planned to start and finish in Year 3. We expect 80% or more of the people to actually launch a business and 60% or more of those to be in business for at least 5 years.

B. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poor. The VISTA will be the linchpin in structuring, launching and providing initial resources for a new nonprofit organization to substantially advance environmental practices in Humboldt County and the surrounding region.

In addition, the VISTA member will organize and facilitate conferences around each of the satellite areas, three in Year 1, which will be aimed at the community-at-large, government planners, and industry leaders in the specified satellite area to encourage persons in the local region to implement and sustain green, sustainable and socially positive environmental alternatives.

Strengthening Communities

1. Describe how the new infrastructure or organizational capacity created by your project will bring individuals and ultimately, the community out of poverty.

Creation of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)-funded business skills program (“flight”) will enroll low-income people in a series of workshops, one-to-one business counseling and other technical assistance that will help them found and succeed in their own businesses. This program will be offered to 15 or more low-income residents every other year for the foreseeable future. The NCSBRC has demonstrated success in this format for the working poor in occupations/businesses that range from artists to building contractors, and this proven model will be utilized in the trainings and support of potential green business owners in this project, thus bringing both individuals and the community out of poverty.

2. How will you involve the community to ensure the sustainability of the proposed project?

The contribution of the VISTA volunteer is envisioned to be sustainable in two ways: 1) by structuring and providing resources for a new 501c3 nonprofit organization that will continue a large amount of the work of the project and engage growing numbers of residents in knowledge and support of green issues; and 2) by creating a program and curriculum to enable poor people to start and grow sustainable or green businesses. Fundraising and grantwriting to sustain the first is part of the proposed VISTA project. CDBG funds are already secured for the delivery and sustainability for the second.

3. How, if at all, will you collaborate with other national service programs (AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, RSVP, NCC) in order to support the proposed project?

The NCBSRC, which will house and supervise this VISTA position, shares space with the County Of Humboldt’s Economic Development Division and, as such, shares time, space and ideas with the VISTA member assigned to the County’s Industry Cluster VISTA project.

VISTA Assignment Description

1. List the recommended skills and qualifications that an AmeriCorps*VISTA member or Leader should have to successfully complete the project plan.

List of tasks:

1. Develop curriculum
2. Develop community partnerships
3. Recruit targeted-income participants
4. Plan and implement conferences
5. Participate in fundraising, including grantwriting
6. Develop website

Recommended skills and qualifications:

1. **Administrative Skills:** Organized, efficient, self-motivated (and self-directed when necessary), task-oriented with minimal oversight, creative, imaginative, innovative, adaptable, and resourceful.
2. **Writing Skills:** Grant writing, technical writing, publication-oriented writing (e.g. Public Service Announcements, drafts of small articles for local newspapers, etc) business plans.
3. **Communication Skills:** Team player, with strong interpersonal communication skills, skilled at organizing, preparing for and facilitating meetings, skills in making professional quality presentations, skills in communication with media (experience with media a bonus).
4. **Computer Skills:** Microsoft Word, a Web-design Program, Adobe Package, Microsoft Outlook.
5. **Other desirable traits:** Flexible, enthusiastic, ability to work with diverse people, ability to meet deadlines, Bachelor's Degree, valid driver's license.

Project Management

1. Describe plans for daily supervision of AmeriCorps*VISTA members. Specify if supervision will be a full-time or part-time responsibility.

The NCSBRC's Executive Director will supervise the VISTA Member and others will support the project. An important ingredient in the direction of the project will be guidance and input given by the core group of Plan-It Green leaders. The VISTA Member will join this team and, while formal supervision will be provided by Mr. Kraft, much of the practical direction will be the product of collaboration in the team.

2. Are 51 percent or more of the persons on your board of directors' members of the low-income community? If not, please describe how your agency has developed, or will develop, an advisory council for the AmeriCorps*VISTA project that consists of members or representatives of the low-income community served by the proposed project.

The NCSBRC board of directors is not representative of members of the low-income community. We will recruit an advisory board that is representative by targeting primarily low-income clients of the agency as well as low-income environmentally aware younger people, probably students or recent graduates of Humboldt State University.

Organizational Capacity

1. What in-kind resources will you provide to ensure the success of the proposed project?

The North Coast Small Business Resource Center (NCSBRC) will provide space, phone, a computer and broadband access, reimburse any work-related mileage incurred by the VISTA and cover other overhead associated with the proposed project.

2. Describe current activities your organization and other organizations are undertaking to address the problems identified in your need statement. Describe how the proposed project will complement this work.

The NCSBRC is one of California's most innovative and successful organizations in its use of Community Development (CDBG) Block Grant Micro Enterprise funds, which exist to raise targeted income groups into economic self-sufficiency through business ownership. The VISTA project will expand this opportunity to include the founding of green/sustainable businesses. In addition, two members of the NCSBRC serve on the Plan-It Green planning group. Plan-It Green exists to create and increase the demand for green buildings and green businesses.

3. Describe the accessibility of services provided to members of the community with disabilities. Is your organization able to accommodate AmeriCorps*VISTA members with disabilities?

The NCSBRC will make reasonable accommodations to meet the needs of qualified persons with disabilities wishing to serve as members.