



**STATEWIDE
AMERICORPS VISTA
PROJECT**



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Table of contents

Table of contents	2
About Engage NJ	3
About ENGAGECorps VISTA Project	3
A. Changebuilders: Developing Students’ 21st Century Skills for Life and Work	4
One-Year Model	4
Multi-Year Cohort Model	4
Key Elements of the Changebuilders Program	4
Place the Highest Value on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	4
Project Goal Accomplishment	4
Tying Experiences to a Career Pathway	5
Recognition	5
Recognition Pins for Projects and Hours Completed Annually	5
B. Community Centers: Supporting Students’ Health and Food Security by Joining the Network of Community Resource Centers	6
Overview of Community Centers	6
Key Elements of the Community Centers Program	6
Welcoming	6
Comprehensive	6
Cost-Effective	6
Network Development	7
C. Tutoring and Mentoring: Increasing High School Completion and College Access	7
Key Elements of the Tutoring and Mentoring Program	7
D. Supporting new High School Climate Change Education Standards	7
Key Elements of This Climate Change Education Cohort	8
20 ENGAGECorps Current Partners (and Number of VISTAs Nominated)	8
Timeline: Application, Onboarding, Reporting, & ‘23 Recruiting	9
VISTA Supervision and Program Compliance	9
Sustainability	9
Supervision	10
VISTA Enrichment	10
Data Collection	10
Our Partnership Policies	11
Application Instructions	12
PART A: Complete the Applicant Form (one Form Per VISTA)	12
PART B: Complete Description of Project and VISTA Position(s) Descriptions	12
Resources for VISTA support	11

About Engage NJ

Engage NJ is the only higher education presidents' coalition focused on civic engagement across all higher ed sectors. We equip and empower campuses to foster competencies that advance democracy and enable students to thrive in 21st century life and work. We have a 10-year history of successfully managing multimillion dollar AmeriCorps grants and, in early 2022, were awarded one of the largest AmeriCorps VISTA grants in New Jersey, focused on getting students to college, then through college, ready to thrive in their lives.

About ENGAGECorps VISTA Project

At the federal level, AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program under the Federal Agency, the **Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS)**, that works to eliminate poverty. Since 1965, over 220,000 VISTAs have joined the fight against poverty by helping local organizations expand their capacity to make change.

Each VISTA makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on their specific project during their term of service. In return for their service, ENGAGECorps VISTAs receive [a modest bi-weekly living allowance](#) fixed at the poverty level in the county which they serve and receive health benefits during their service. VISTAs can choose between a Segal Education Award (valued at \$6,495) to pay for a range of education expenses or a \$1,800 cash stipend once they have successfully completed their service year. In addition, VISTA is the only AmeriCorps program that allows members to earn federal non-competitive eligibility, giving members an edge in the federal hiring process. VISTAs must be 18 years or older (no upper age limit), and hold one of the following citizenship or legal residency statuses: US citizen, US National, Lawful Permanent Resident (i.e. Green Card status), and persons legally residing within a state. Examples of persons legally residing within a state may include those holding the following classifications: refugee, asylee, temporary protected status throughout VISTA service, and holding Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. Visit [here](#) to learn more about the Federal VISTA program.

With the ENGAGECorps project here in New Jersey, VISTAs serve in an office setting and gain experience and leadership skills through capacity building activities such as fundraising, grant writing, research, marketing, program development and volunteer recruitment. As a function of the grant with CNCS, these capacity building activities are laid out in a detailed **Vista Activity Description (VAD)** that is equivalent to a position description developed by our partner sites in close collaboration with our team at Engage NJ. It is a step-by-step depiction of the activities the VISTA will need to perform within the partner site's project to successfully complete their service year. This opportunity prepares ENGAGECorps VISTAs with the skills and experiences to advance along their career journeys, while also developing an invaluable professional network of allies.

As a key component of our new 5-year plan, ENGAGECorps VISTAs in New Jersey will focus on:

- A. Changebuilders:** Developing college students' 21st century skills for life and work
- B. Community Centers:** Supporting Students' Health and Food Security by Joining the Network of Community Resource Centers
- C. Tutoring & Mentoring:** Increasing high school completion and college access
- D. Climate Change:** Educating high school students about the human impacts on climate change in our most marginalized communities

A.Changebuilders: Developing Students' 21st Century Skills for Life and Work

Continuing in Fall of 2022, Engage NJ and our partners are striving to dramatically increase opportunities for college-going students of all backgrounds to demonstrate excellence while engaging with issue-driven projects in communities, thereby enabling them to make a measurable difference in their local communities as *Changebuilders*. This will see a surge in the number of young socially responsible graduates with the skills required to be successful – both in achieving their own work-life goals and in their efforts to be a part of change for the better.

Partner campuses aim for **50 students minimum** recruited and to intentionally recruit students that mirror the diversity of communities in which projects will take place, and to design partnerships and sequences of experiences that are guided by the following principles at minimum.

The AY'23 network of 8 Changebuilder campuses includes William Paterson, NJCU, Stockton, Rutgers-University Newark, Rowan, Kean, and Hudson County.

One-Year Model

In this model, students are required to commit to the community engagement experience for a period of one year minimum. Campuses must ensure completion of an average of **40 hours** community engagement per student for a minimum of one academic year. The cohort's experience will include working together and learning from one another's experiences. Of those 40 hours annually, approximately 1/5 will be devoted to cohort-based reflection.

Multi-Year Cohort Model

This cohort-based model is also an option for participating campuses. The differences between the one-year model and the multi-year cohort model is that these students must commit to **100 hours** of community engagement per year for the entire duration of their undergraduate education. The cohort's experience will include working together and learning from one another's experiences. Of those 100 hours annually, approximately 1/5 will be devoted to cohort-based reflection.

Key Elements of the Changebuilders Program

- **Place the Highest Value on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Connecting civic engagement to education leads to greater commitment to completing your education, to committing to local communities, to enhancing academic attainment, and to being a better co-worker. The more variation in race, culture and lived experiences among our civically engaged college graduates, the better for everyone. This is because success in the 21st century comes from being adaptable to different experiences, from understanding differing perspectives, and from being innovative..

- **Project Goal Accomplishment**

A focus on achieving project goals, both individually and in teams, is essential in developing students' abilities to deliver during their undergraduate education and in the workplace. By committing to an end point or product within a relatively small timeframe such as a semester, each contributor to the partnership can track to success, including faculty, community partners, mentors, and students themselves. This is especially important for students learning in real life contexts because their growth as *changebuilders* will necessarily be informed by significant struggles, recalibrations, changing contexts, and even by significant failures along the way. Once

students plan a practice or behavior – and then witness the associated results – they can more quickly gain critical self-awareness and competence.

- Tying Experiences to a Career Pathway

Engage NJ trains the VISTAs to work with student changebuilders to understand the skills they are developing through their volunteer efforts and how these skills apply directly to the 21st century workplace. We also bring in professionals to mentor students through our annual THRIVE conference and opportunity fair.

The very skills that students develop through community engagement are the same skills that enable employees to thrive in the workplace; and are the same workplace habits that boost employee morale. This investment of time is *not* just about staying in school - it's not just about giving back to communities and serving others - it's about getting ahead in the job search and standing out to employers by being engaged - it's about increasing employee morale and building a thriving workplace. However, college students and professionals need to work together in order to help uncover and then translate these experiences into marketable workplace skills. Many of the student *changebuilders* need the guidance of local professionals in the form of mentoring and networking in order to fully capitalize on their investment in changing society for the better.

- Recognition

Recognition Pins for Projects and Hours Completed Annually

One-Year <i>Individual</i> Model	Require 40 hrs.+ 1 project minimum	80 hrs / + 2 projects (optional)	120 hrs / + 3 projects (optional)	160 hrs / + 4 projects (optional)		
Recognition Pins & Certs	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Indigo
Multi-Year Cohort Model	Required 100 hrs / +2 projects minimum		200 hrs / +4 projects min.		300 hrs / +6 projects min.	400 hrs / +8 projects min.

Pins & Certs: Engage NJ will co-sponsor the annual process of recognizing student changebuilders with pins and certificates for the projects completed and hours dedicated to a local community. As can be seen above, these are color-coded and reflect the number of projects and community engagement hours accomplished. Campuses usually incorporate these into existing events to recognize student civic leaders, and adapt the criteria based on your own student cohort.

Changebuilders Scholars Award: Each *changebuilder* campus will nominate up to three student finalists annually from which a single winner from each campus will be selected by Engage NJ. The winner will receive a \$1,000 grant to complete a community engagement project or to use toward future studies.

B. Community Centers: Supporting Students' Health and Food Security by Joining the Network of Community Resource Centers

Overview of Community Centers

Since 2018 here in New Jersey, we have piloted and then witnessed a growing number of community resource centers designed to link students with resources that empower and enhance self-determined success. Centers such as these include, but go beyond, building a food pantry. Each center caters to its own distinct campus community but, overall, they strive to increase awareness of, and provide equal access to, resources such as those that address food and housing insecurity, nutrition and hygiene, access to professional clothing, mental health counseling, financial literacy tools, opportunities to volunteer on community projects with peers, and more. By working within the Engage NJ network of community resource centers and with the capacity-building support of a full-time VISTA, partners can expect to build the scale of your community center over several years and with important features.

The AY'23 network of 5 Community Center campuses includes William Paterson, NJCU, Rutgers-University Newark, Rowan, and Hudson County.

Key Elements of the Community Centers Program

It is important to develop your distinctive version of a community center where myriad supports and resources are available in a stigma-free and welcoming environment for all.

- Welcoming

A welcoming community feel is crucial to all community center spaces. This means a conscious removal of stigmatizing and labeling in the center's design, marketing, and programs. Indeed, as opposed to students only accessing the center for things they need, we encourage a design and expectation that students in the Community Center are needed and active on campus and in neighboring communities in other volunteer and community engagement activities.

- Comprehensive

Center staff should work to establish a comprehensive approach to student resource provision. These areas of comprehensive resource availability may include the following examples:

- Food and housing security
- Nutrition & hygiene
- Community engagement
- Financial literacy tools
- Counseling and mental health
- Access to professional clothing

- Cost-Effective

There are numerous strategies for compiling resources without needing to raise significant funds. By building bridges to offices across campus and to services brought in from neighboring businesses and services, the community center can provide robust programming and resources at a fraction of those required for centers outside of higher education. Partners in this network can learn about different ways of engaging students and faculty in community resource center spaces through various volunteer, community engaged learning, or research projects. For example, students in a social work master's program can run informal group counseling for students, perhaps as a pizza lunch event, and gain valuable practicum hours in the process. This was rolled out at minimal cost (for pizzas only) over the past few years at partner campus, NJCU, with great success.

- Network Development

VISTAs can work across the network to share replicable ideas and successes such as using community engaged learning (service learning) to tackle specific community center projects. NJCU, for example, utilized two faculty working together on a CEL project to design and develop a KIOSK for students.

VISTAs can act on opportunities and challenges raised by the network at regular events, such as creating weekend backpacks of food to bring home to family members. VISTAs in this cohort will gain from collaboration, sharing best practices, and proactive methods of avoiding action that inadvertently stigmatize students and community members.

C. Tutoring and Mentoring: Increasing High School Completion and College Access

ENGAGECorps VISTAs can help to expand or deepen the impact of tutoring and mentoring programs designed to increase high school completion and college access.

The AY'23 network of 4 Tutoring & Mentoring campuses includes Mentor Newark, Stockton, Rutgers University Newark, and Hudson County.

Key Elements of the Tutoring and Mentoring Program

VISTAs in this cohort will support current campus efforts to build those bridges of success from neighboring high schools to your campus. Many high schools that serve systematically excluded students are struggling to get as many of their students as in previous years to graduate and go to college, based on feedback and on enrollment figures especially at minority-serving institutions. Covid, layered on top of pre-existing barriers to successful engagement and completion, are taking their toll on the numbers attending college.

- Increase Persistence, Graduation, and College Access

The goal of this VISTA cohort is to build the capacity of your tutoring and mentoring programs in neighboring high schools that, ultimately, will contribute to the size of graduating cohorts and number of high school graduates who are ready for and believe in the value of a college education. VISTAs can, for example:

- Work on designing elements of your program such as curriculum and events
- Work heavily on volunteer recruitment and management
- Help with fundraising campaigns and drives as needed for such things as transportation, materials, and events
- Get together regularly for professional development and to learn from one another.

Ultimately, the aim for VISTAs is to increase the capacity of your mentoring and tutoring to work with as many high school students as possible to persist, graduate, and go to college.

D. Supporting new High School Climate Change Education Standards

New Jersey is the first state to adopt climate change education standards across the K12 curriculum. This is brand new, and society's youth have not yet had the experiences to think about and critique how climate change is narrowing their life choices. Coupled with the challenging choices many students are facing as Covid pushes many highschoolers out of school and into poorly paid work, we must act with urgency to provide knowledge, experience, and hope to the next generation of public servants, executives and influencers, many of whom will take their new high school degree and look for postsecondary pathways to becoming an informed citizen and to considering various "green" careers.

The AY'23 network of 3 Climate Change Education campuses includes Kean, Rutgers University Newark, and Mentor Newark

Key Elements of This Climate Change Education Cohort

- Expanding the Capacity of Existing Higher Ed-High School Partnerships

ENGAGECorps members’ work with faculty, staff, and students, to enhance partnerships with local high schools aimed at helping teachers and high school students learn about standards-focused curriculum on climate change.

For college students, these partnerships will provide meaningful civic and climate experiences in the process. This will be done in several ways:

- Working within existing campus-high school partnerships, such as through sustainability and education majors, to bring college students into high school classrooms and field-trips to deliver project-based supports to teachers in adopting the new standards
- Provide, as needed, best practices to faculty to adapt their courses into CEL so as to connect their course objectives to high school classes, bringing their students into high school classrooms for mutually beneficial experiences

- Provide Training, Licenses and Curriculum to VISTAs and Teachers on Climate Education

PLEASE NOTE: The following resource for this cohort with SEInc is contingent on being awarded additional funding due to added costs incurred.

Engage NJ is building a partnership with nationally recognized leader, SEInc., to train ENGAGECorps members to support high school teachers with proven methods and with standards-aligned sustainability curricula to meet the new standards – how to access project-based curricula, and how to bring them into different high school grades and subjects. With the additional funding, both SEI and ENGAGECorps members will provide ongoing hands-on time and support to teachers.

20 ENGAGECorps Current Partners (and Number of VISTAs Nominated)

Engage NJ - Program Administration & Grant Management (2 - VISTA Leaders)	Rowan University (2)	Rutgers University Newark (4)
	Kean University (2)	Stockton University (2)
	Mentor Newark (2)	William Paterson University (1)
Hudson County Community College (3)	New Jersey City University (2)	

Timeline: Application, Onboarding, Reporting, & '23 Recruiting

May 12, 2022	Applications submitted; Recruitment Begins - Engage NJ and Partners Advertise Positions (pending final approval of position descriptions by funder)
May 17, 2022	Detailed VADs completed - important step for interviewing and required by funder
May & June	Screening, interviewing, and selecting candidates; Partner fee invoices released upon selection of candidate(s)
July 1, 2022	Deadline for sites to select candidates and candidates to accept positions
July TBD	Orientation for Supervisors of ENGAGECorps VISTAs; Supervisors sign MoU
August	Sites prepare office and project timelines for VISTA
August TBA	VISTA members attend virtual federal pre-service orientation (PSO) and Engage NJ on site orientation (OSOT)
August 29, 2022	Tentative Start Date at Partner Site
Reporting	Quarterly, beginning December '22
Training	Bi-monthly in person; plus on Linked In Learning (licensed with Engage NJ)
2023 Recruitment	Beginning Feb. '23

VISTA Supervision and Program Compliance

Sustainability

AmeriCorps VISTA resources are usually provided based on a multi-year grant cycle. From year to year, the Corporation for National and Community Services expects that the objectives and activities of the VISTA will evolve. Applicants should have a sound concept of how the resources and progress furnished by the VISTA will be sustained by the organization. VISTAs are viewed as an extension of an organization's efforts to support and empower a community.

Host Site

The host site is the site that will host the VISTA for the duration of the service year. Each VISTA is guided by the workplace policies of their host sites — requesting leave, hours of operations, ADA compliance, etc.. Each host site is expected to provide a VISTA the necessary office space, equipment and access to all items needed for successful completion of the service term. Our hosts often collaborate with one another to see to the success of the project and to provide the best suitable service experience for the VISTA.

Supervision

Supervision ensures that every VISTA has the right conditions and requirements to perform their service, including a full understanding of the project's mission, goals, and vision, as well as a solid understanding of the community they are serving.

Depending on the capacity of the site, the site may have both a Site Supervisor and a Day to Day supervisor for the VISTA. All sites are required to have a site supervisor. Supervision of the VISTAs require dedication of time and resources aside from the supervision of the project itself. VISTA Site Supervisors are expected to meet with their VISTA on a routine, weekly basis in order to further the VISTA project. VISTA Supervision may require anywhere from 5-10 hours a week depending on the intensity of the program and the point of service. For example, within the first quarter of service during on-boarding and acclimation to the site, the site supervisor would need to dedicate a minimum of at least 10 hours a week to see to it that the VISTA has all the resources needed for the success of the project.

Site Supervisors must ensure that VISTAs have a host site, work space and access to all office materials needed for the service year. Day to Day supervisors may assist to ensure that the VISTA has all necessary resources available to them and also understand HR policies as it relates to the host site. All VISTA supervisors (site supervisors and day to day supervisors) are required to attend site supervisors training. VISTA supervisors are also expected to assist and provide training and enrichment opportunities for their VISTAs. Site Supervisors should be dedicated to the growth of the VISTAs by providing ample context and access to networks and maintaining open, candid, communication with us. Communication with Engage NJ will include email correspondence with reasonable turnaround times as well as bi-monthly conference calls with the supervisory cohort of the ENGAGECorps VISTA project.

Day to Day Supervisor Responsibilities:

- Monitors day to day activity of VISTA
- Assigns VAD related tasks
- Attends site supervisor training
- Monitors attendance/HR related policies
- Communicates with Engage NJ and VISTA member
- Meets with VISTA member on a routine, weekly basis
- May assist with completion of Monthly and Quarterly report

Supervises the general VISTA project

- Monitors VISTA performance
- Completes all data reports (monthly and quarterly reports on schedule)
- Assigns tasks for successful completion of the VAD
- Attend site supervisors training
- Point of contact for Engage NJ and VISTA
- Meet with VISTA routine, weekly basis

VISTA Enrichment

AmeriCorps VISTAs volunteer to live at the poverty level for a full year while serving full time. We aim to provide additional support and development opportunities outside of the VISTA members' routine activities. Applicants are encouraged to list any and all benefits they intend to provide a VISTA. These details further recruitment and retention.

Data Collection

Our funder, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), requires us to submit quarterly reports on the performance of all of the ENGAGECorps VISTA projects as a condition of our grant. Data must be retained by each site to be collected by Engage NJ and submitted to CNCS. Sites may choose how they will retain their

data. However, quantitative data as it relates to the demographics of service, such as volunteer recruitment and resources leveraged by the VISTA member (in kind or cash donations) will be submitted to Engage NJ on a monthly basis through user-friendly technology. In addition, quarterly reports will be collected in our Qualtrics system to obtain qualitative data as it relates to CNCS performance measures and the overall progress of the VISTA project.

Our Partnership Policies on Recruitment and Retention

Engage NJ aims to maintain a cohort that will function as one. We will work with each site to do our due diligence in retaining all of our VISTA members. Please note the following retention policies:

- Recruitment deadlines must be strictly adhered to. Sites that have not chosen a VISTA member to assign to their project by the July 1 deadline may have to reapply for a VISTA in the next service year
- VISTA members will not be permitted to serve on location at their host site until the Partner Site Fee has been paid in full
- If a member voluntarily ends their service or is terminated within the first 30 days from the first day or On Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) in August, we will look to replace the member immediately so they can remain on track with the cohort. Following the first 30 days, we will not be in a position to recruit a replacement VISTA
- In the case of the VISTA no longer serving at the site during the first six months of service - whether due to resignation or termination - the \$9,000 partner fee is 50% refundable. Following six months of service, should the VISTA no longer serve at the site for any reason, the \$9,000 fee is nonrefundable
- We are implementing stringent guidelines for accountability of sites and site supervisors. Guidelines include:
 - Interventions for non-compliance by sites, for example, sites requiring VISTA members to perform service outside of the VAD, and late submission of reporting data
 - These will be reviewed in full during Supervisors orientation in July

Additional Resource for VISTA Programs

[Key VISTA Facts](#)

[VISTA Benefits](#)

[VISTA & Covid 19](#)

Application Instructions

PART A: Complete the Applicant Form (one Form Per VISTA)

Instructions and Deadline: Please complete the following forms by **May 12, 2022**.

- [EngageCorps VISTA Program Site Logistics and Supervisors Form](#) which collects the following information:

VISTA Service Site (Entity Hosting VISTA),

- Organization's Address,
- Website
- Hours of Operation
- Workplace Calendar
- Checklist of Workplace Items to be Provided to VISTA(s)
- Proof of nonprofit/public entity status
- Additional benefits your program will provide to the VISTA (optional)

VISTA Site Supervisor(s) and Day to Day Supervisor(s) (if applicable) Information

- Name, Title, Contact Information
- 1 Paragraph Professional Bio(s)
- Projected Time Allocated to Supervise/Support VISTA(s)
- Statement of Supervisor(s)' Previous Experience with AmeriCorps and/or VISTA

Purpose: The form submitted by applicants provides the information needed for Engage NJ to jointly develop a VISTA Project that will be approved by the AmeriCorps federal funders. Additionally, these documents reflect the records CNCS requires Intermediary Agents (Engage NJ) to maintain.

Incomplete Submission: Upon receipt and review of the documents, and following a request for missing documents, Engage NJ may have to remove the applicant from consideration for the 2022-23 Grant Cycle for incomplete submissions. Applicants will be notified of incomplete submissions within three business days of their submission date and will have 72 hours to submit missing materials prior to being removed from consideration.

PART B: Complete Description of Project and VISTA Position(s) Description(s)

Instructions and Deadline: Please submit all necessary documents to info@engagenj.org

- VISTA Internal Capacity Building Form. Please submit to info@engagenj.org by **May 12, 2022**
 - [Download Link for Fillable PDF](#) - one per VISTA
- Position Description: Please complete form by **May 12, 2022**
 - Position Description Form: <https://forms.gle/HzCW2szppXCN5Gi39> - one per VISTA
 - [Sample Position Description as it will appear in AmeriCorps Portal:](#)
<https://my.americorps.gov/mp/listing/viewListing.do?fromSearch=true&id=111193>

PLEASE NOTE: Following your submission of this application by May 12th, you will use the VISTA Internal Capacity Building form as a reference to create the federally required VISTA Activity Description (VAD) for each VISTA member at your site. The VAD serves as a detailed description of activities the federal government will approve as the performance measures the VISTA and program will meet over the year. You will have between **May 12- May 17, 2022 to complete the VAD for each VISTA**. The VAD must be submitted by May 17, 2022 to info@engagenj.org We will then review and submit the VAD to our federal funders for approval. Engage NJ will provide templates and assistance throughout this process.