

*Corporation for National and Community Service*

# **Beginning With the End in Mind**

*A Performance Measurement Toolkit for  
AmeriCorps VISTA Project Applicants*



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This Toolkit is intended to help orient you to the kind of thinking you will have to do to complete the Performance Measurement portion of your VISTA Project Application. This Toolkit is intended to provide you with helpful background information. Relying on this information cannot guarantee an award, however, and this Toolkit should not be referred to in your application.

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To download additional material referenced in this toolkit, go to  
<http://nationalservicerresources.org/star/VISTA-toolkit>

Additional material available to download:

- Sample Project Plan Narrative, Logic Model, and Project Plan
- Logic Model Form
- VISTA Project Plan
- Entering Your Project Plan into eGrants

# 1. About AmeriCorps VISTA

AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) provides full-time volunteers to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to strengthen programs that bring individuals and communities out of poverty. VISTAs support anti-poverty programs by building the capacity of local organizations that serve low-income communities; encouraging volunteer service; and generating the commitment of private sector resources. The program has been addressing the needs of impoverished communities since 1965, when it was established as Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA).

## ***Key Program Principles***

VISTA embraces the following *key principles*:

- ***Anti-poverty Focus*** — The purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, tribal or public agency with a program that is poverty-related in scope can apply to sponsor a VISTA project. The project's goal should address helping individuals and communities out of poverty rather than focusing on making poverty more tolerable. The project should strengthen long term solutions, not merely provide short term services.
- ***Community Empowerment*** — Sponsors must ensure that the project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, and implementing the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community strengths and resources.
- ***Capacity-Building*** — VISTAs do not provide direct services to low-income individuals, but rather increase the capacity of organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, volunteer recruitment and management, community outreach, and collaborative development, VISTAs mobilize local resources to achieve lasting solutions.
- ***Sustainable Solutions*** — VISTAs are short-term resources who help organizations address a new or existing program area related to their mission. All VISTA projects should develop a long-term sustainability plan beginning in year one of the project's existence, showing the eventual phase-out of VISTAs. VISTAs are assigned in order to build the capacity of an organization to implement its anti-poverty program on its own after a period of time (typically three years).

## 2. Toolkit Overview

This toolkit is designed to provide you, the VISTA project sponsor applicant, with a useful framework for project planning as you develop your project plan and meet the performance measurement requirements.

This toolkit will:

- Familiarize you with the basic concepts of performance measurement
- Explain performance measurement requirements for VISTA
- Demonstrate how tools like the logic model can be used for project planning and for measuring project performance
- Guide you through the steps to complete the project plan component of the VISTA Project Application with tips for working in eGrants
- Refer you to training and technical assistance resources

Beyond the performance measurement requirements, the recommendations introduced within this toolkit were designed to:

- Empower organizations to determine their own priorities and measure their achievement.
- Increase the capacity of community-based organizations to conduct better analyses of the impact of their work and use the results to improve projects.
- Generate new and better information to inform the policies, training, and technical assistance provided by VISTA.
- Demonstrate the value and impact of community-based projects and national service to a broad range of stakeholders, including local communities, the media, funders, and public officials

This toolkit is not meant to be the only resource for preparing your VISTA project application. It should be used along with the VISTA Project Application Instructions, VISTA Program Guidance (published annually), and other training and technical assistance resources provided by the Corporation. Used together, these resources will help you think holistically about what they hope to achieve and to understand and describe important performance milestones.

### 3. Performance Measurement and VISTA

*How will you know that you achieved what you set out to achieve?*

This question is central to performance measurement for VISTA. Performance measurement responds to the need of both project managers and funding agencies to measure systematically the effectiveness of project activities. Maximizing project effectiveness is critical in light of the limited resources available to meet the needs of the people and communities served.

#### ***Important Uses of Performance Measurement Results***

Once an approved project begins tracking its performance milestones, the information it reports will be used by both sponsoring organizations and the Corporation in the following ways.

- ***Internal Program Assessment and Improvement*** – Performance measurement enables sponsoring organizations to clarify the purpose of their projects and the ways specific services contribute to achieving their intended goals and results while also identifying projects' successes as well as areas for improvement.
- ***Fundraising*** – The sponsoring organization is able to document the actual results of their project activities and successfully communicate a strong case for funding from both the public and private sectors.
- ***Communicating to Stakeholders*** – Performance measurement helps sponsoring organizations tell their story and build support for their efforts among community partners: project personnel, board members, community residents, and public officials. As a key stakeholder, the Corporation utilizes project performance data when compiling budget requests, annual reports, evaluation reports, and newsletters. The Corporation also utilizes project results data when responding to media inquiries, congressional requests, and other public requests for information.
- ***Project Monitoring, Renewal, and Technical Assistance*** – Corporation State Offices and VISTA personnel utilize performance measurement data incorporated into Progress Reports to make decisions regarding project site visits, the type of technical assistance offered to projects, and the renewal of VISTA projects.
- ***Government Performance Results Act (GPRA)*** – The Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) is intended to improve government effectiveness and public accountability. As required by GPRA, the Corporation's programs report publicly on progress toward achieving their goals.

## 4. VISTA Sustainability and Performance Measurement Requirements

### *Develop a Project Plan with Action Plan(s)*

Most VISTA projects have a lifespan of three years. At the end of this three-year period, the project should leave in place a “final product” that is sustainable and supports efforts to eliminate poverty at the local level. The VISTA **Project Plan** provides a snapshot of what the VISTA project will achieve over its lifespan. You are required to complete a project plan as a part of the VISTA application and update the performance milestones each program year. (The format and instructions for the project plan are discussed in Chapter 7.)

The complete Project Plan consists of one or more **Action Plans**. Each Action Plan includes the community need statement and goal statement which are multi-year, and performance milestones which are identified for a single program year and set up the performance measurement process.

Each VISTA applicant determines how many Action Plans are necessary to convey the scope of the project. Each Action Plan identifies desired results that serve to gauge the progress of the VISTA project. The Action Plan includes:

- The **Issue Area** identifies the general service area to be addressed (e.g. education).
- The **Service Category** describes more specifically the type of service the VISTA project will address (e.g. adult literacy).
- The **Community Need Statement** describes a specific need that will be addressed by the VISTA project (see Chapter 6).
- The **Goal Statement** describes the impact that the VISTA project will have on the community need during the term of the project, which is typically three years (see Chapter 6).



**The community need and goal statements should cover a multi-year period (the length of the entire proposed project). The Performance Milestone focuses on a single year.**

- One or more **Performance Milestones**. A performance milestone is an anticipated result you hope to achieve over the course of one year. (See Chapter 5 for definitions and examples of performance milestones). For each performance milestone, you will need to identify the following elements:
  - **Planned Period of Accomplishment**. The anticipated date performance milestones will be completed for that program year.
  - **Indicator/Evidence of Progress**. The information you will collect to determine if performance milestones have been achieved.
  - **Target**. The level or amount of change you expect to achieve as measured by the indicator.
  - **How Measured**. The method you will use to collect data.

- **Description of Data Collection or Measurement Process.** A description of the data collection process including who will collect the data, from whom, using which instrument, when and how often.

Each year, you will change or modify performance milestones for the following project year. However, the community need statement and goal statement developed during the first year cover the entire project period; therefore, they do not change. The goal statement describes a self-sustaining product realized at the end of the project to meet the need. Any unforeseen need for modifications of the goal or need statement should be discussed with your state office.

Chapter 7 describes the terms above: *indicator/evidence of progress, target, how measured and description of data collection or measurement process.*

## 5. Performance Measurement and VISTA Performance Milestones

**Performance Measurement** is the process of regularly measuring the progress of a VISTA project with respect to identified performance milestones. A **performance milestone** is an important, anticipated **result** that you hope to achieve for your VISTA project over the course of each program year.

Each performance milestone includes information about *what* you will measure (indicators), *how* you will measure it (data collection instruments), and the *level of success* you will try to achieve (targets). Performance milestones enable you to track the accomplishments of your VISTA project toward meeting your goal, and the impact of this work on individuals, organizations and the community.

Performance milestones demonstrate progress toward meeting your goal. They can be thought of as key accomplishments or changes that result from your VISTA project efforts. For example:

- Some performance milestones measure the *completion of activities* and document the fact that products were created, programs developed, or number of individuals who participated in services or programs. They answer the question, “How much service did we do?” or “What products did we develop?” They do not answer the question, “What changed as a result of the service provided or product developed?”

For example, a sponsoring organization’s VISTA project might develop a new system to recruit, train, and support volunteers for a mentoring program. This may produce a variety of performance milestones, including:

- One procedures manual finalized for screening volunteer mentors;
  - One tracking database developed and piloted
  - One training curriculum for new volunteer mentors that was approved by board;
  - Five staff members trained in new systems and procedures.
- Other performance milestones are *changes* or *benefits* that occur as a result of the service activity. These performance milestones reflect changes in individuals, organizations, or communities. Changes in individuals, for example, can include changes in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or behavior. Changes within an organization can include enhancing an existing system or developing a new system to better serve community members. These performance milestones answer the question, “What difference did our service make for beneficiaries?” or “How did the new system or product enhance the capacity of a sponsoring organization to serve individuals and/or the community?”

For example, a VISTA project that implements a new system to recruit, train, place, and support volunteer mentors may expect to achieve the following performance milestones:

- Three staff members acquire new knowledge and skills on how to use the new system.
- One new volunteer recruitment and training system becomes institutionalized within the sponsoring organization; staff members start using the new system routinely to recruit, train, place and support volunteer mentors.
- 25% increase in the number of youth served by volunteer mentors.

Performance milestones that measure the *completion of activities* are more likely to happen early in the project, while milestones that measure *changes or benefits* may happen later. VISTA projects should be able to begin measuring performance milestones that measure *changes or benefits* by the second or third year.

### ***Establishing the Scope of Performance Milestones for Your VISTA Project***

Choose performance milestones for one year at a time. Before beginning each year, choose the performance milestones you hope to achieve and plan to measure for that year. A VISTA project, for instance, could support the sponsoring organization's effort to increase homeownership among low-income families. To support this goal, VISTAs may develop systems to enhance volunteer recruitment and fundraising.

In this example, during the first year the performance milestones might be the following:

- One new volunteer recruitment system and one fundraising database developed and implemented.
- Two staff members beginning to use volunteer recruitment systems and databases.
- 10% increase in volunteers and donations.

During the second year the performance milestones might be the following:

- One volunteer recruitment system and one database becoming fully operational.
- 20% increase in volunteers recruited.
- 20% increase in donations collected.

During the third year the performance milestones might be the following:

- Two more low-income families placed in homes each year.
- Donations support 50% of the costs for the building/remodeling homes program.

## Capacity-Building Efforts and Direct Service Activities

VISTA projects generally build the capacity of the sponsoring organization in ways that enhance the services they provide to the community. The capacity-building efforts of the VISTA project can include performance milestones to:

- Increase the number of beneficiaries served by the sponsor organization;
- Improve service utilization by beneficiaries (e.g., more of them stay in a program long enough to experience significant benefits);
- Assist sponsoring organizations develop new programs and services or expand existing programs and services;
- Help to improve organizational infrastructure (e.g., by developing volunteer recruitment and training systems or developing and revising policies and procedures);
- Establish or expand a pool of volunteers to assist with programs and services;
- Increase financial resources by building sustainable funding streams for organizations;
- Implement a public outreach system to increase participation in programs and services.

VISTA projects that develop or expand direct service activities may want to measure the impact that the services have on the beneficiaries. Performance milestones that focus on direct service activities might include:

- Increasing the number of training participants who are able to achieve their goal (get a job, receive a GED, etc).
- Increasing the number of mentees who can set realistic academic or career track goals.
- Increasing the number of community volunteers who report a positive experience and who say they plan to volunteer again.

As you determine the suitability of each performance milestone, consider:

- The scope of your project;
- The activities of VISTAs;
- The community need; and
- How the performance milestone supports your goal.

## 6. Project Planning and the Logic Model

*A Logic Model is a planning tool that diagrams how you intend to achieve your VISTA project goals by combining resources (inputs) and service activities to produce specific results (performance milestones) that address a poverty-related community need. The logic model is not a required part of the VISTA application.*

VISTA projects engage in multi-year planning designed to show how the activities of VISTAs will lead to sustainable results. Planning for a multi-year project means ensuring that the work of VISTAs builds upon the efforts of previous years. Project activities may vary from one year to the next. Three years is the typical life span for a VISTA project. Therefore, projects should typically plan activities along a three-year timeline.

A logic model can assist you in multi-year planning and it is for that reason that you are encouraged to develop a logic model to plan your VISTA project.

The logic model illustrates how the performance milestone(s) from one year will support the performance milestone(s) for subsequent years. The logic model also can guide you in selecting performance milestones that relate most directly to the efforts of the VISTAs.



**Logic models are not submitted as part of the VISTA Project Application. However, the logic model is a tool that can assist you in planning the VISTA project and completing the Project Plan. Develop a logic model as an early planning tool prior to submitting the Concept Paper.**

### ***Basic VISTA Logic Model Structure***

There are a variety of ways to construct a logic model. One basic approach, illustrated in Figure 1 below, shows the continuum of components starting with the community need and finishing with the performance milestone(s).

Figure 1. VISTA Logic Model



Figure 2 below shows how the logic model progresses from project planning to performance milestones, employing an “if A, then B” sequence. Reading this logic model from left to right, you can see how the anticipated changes move in a *logical* continuum through inputs and activities, culminating with performance milestones.

Figure 2. Project Planning, Intended Results, and “If-Then” Sequence of Logic Model

Community Need →	Goal →	Inputs →	Activities →	Performance Milestone(s)
You have identified an unmet need existing in your community.	You have identified the broad purpose toward which your project is directed, and stated your intent to meet an identified community need	Certain resources are needed to operate your project to address unmet needs.	If you have access to resources, then you can use them to carry out your planned activities.	If you carry out your planned activities, then you will deliver the amount of product and/or service that you intended and achieve your desired changes.
<i>Program Planning</i>			<i>Intended Results</i>	

### Components of the VISTA Logic Model

For each goal, the logic model helps you understand key assumptions about your program design, including what inputs and activities are needed to achieve results that address basic needs in the community.



**Many of the logic model components can be transferred to the VISTA project plan.**

Begin to clarify the purpose of your VISTA project by formulating clear community need and goal statements. The community need statement should be adapted from the “Need” found in the narrative section in the VISTA application.

**Community Need:** The problem or issue in the community that your project will address.

- What is the poverty-related condition in the community that needs to be changed or improved?
- What are the key factors or issues that contribute to these problems?
- Which community assets are currently being underutilized?
- What are the barriers to fully utilizing these community assets?
- What opportunities exist to address these contributing factors?
- Which of these opportunities can be addressed with the VISTA resources?
- What research or data source is available that provides evidence of this need?

In summary, the community need statement should:

- Identify the **specific poverty-related community need** to be addressed by the project component included in this action plan.
- Be described in **measurable** terms.
- Include the **number of low-income people** in the community directly affected by the problem.
- Cite a **reliable source** to establish the compelling nature of the need locally.
- Note the VISTA project sponsor's **capacity** need to be able to address the problem.



**The need and goal statement are multi-year. Typically a VISTA project runs for three years.**

**Goal:** The broad purpose toward which your project is directed; a statement of intent to meet an identified community need through building upon community assets. Your goal describes the impact your project will have in addressing your community need and is central to the mission of your project. The goal statement should describe a self-sustaining product that will be realized at the end of the project.

- How can the VISTA project build your organization's capacity to promote change in this area?
- What will your project do to meet these goals? Who will benefit?
- Ultimately, what results do you want to achieve?
- What goals can be attained within a three-year project term?



***Tip: Choosing Your Goal***

**Consider the following questions in identifying goals.**

- **Does the goal reflect the primary purpose of your project?**
- **Will you be able to obtain data that provides evidence of progress toward this goal?**

In summary, the goal statement should:

- State what the VISTAs will do to meet the identified community need. This statement describes the **overall outcome** of the VISTA project over the life of the three year project.
- Be focused and brief.

The goal statement should not:

- List individual VISTA activities.
- Focus on a single year.
- Describe the continuation of existing activities, services or processes.



Although inputs and activities are not included in the VISTA Application project plan, they are essential to your project and are the means to achieving performance milestones. The logic model provides a place to put all the components together in one place, to make sure “all the pieces fit together”.

The following questions will help you think through the development of the inputs, activities and performance milestones for the logic model.

**Inputs:** Resources you will use to produce performance milestones

- What resources, human and financial, are necessary to achieve your goals?
- What resources are currently available to help you achieve your goals?

**Activities:** What your program will do with the inputs to achieve performance milestones

- What activities will VISTAs engage in to implement your strategies?
- What research, theory, or past experience supports your choice of strategies?
- What kind of skills and qualifications will VISTAs need to implement these activities?

**Performance Milestone(s):** Results your project hopes to achieve through the efforts of your VISTAs. (See Chapter 5 for a discussion of performance milestones.)

- What are your intended performance milestones?
- What other changes (benchmarks) can you look at along the way to help determine if you are on track to achieve these longer-term impacts?
- Are your intended performance milestones SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-sensitive)?
- How will you assess your work along the way to ensure that you are achieving what you set out to do?

In summary, your performance milestone(s) should:

- Reflect the main accomplishments you hope to achieve over the course of a single 12-month period.
- Directly relate to the goal statement.

## ***How to Develop a Logic Model***

Developing a logic model often works best as a group exercise for staff and community partners rather than as an “armchair exercise” for one individual. When putting together your logic model:

- **Visualize how each component supports the next** as you move from left to right through the logic model toward performance milestones.
- **Start with the performance milestones.** Try identifying the anticipated positive changes (performance milestones) you hope will occur by the end of the project or a particular year, and work backwards. Whatever order you choose to complete the logic model, thinking through the components will be useful for both project planning and for determining what you hope to accomplish.
- **Consider developing a multi-year logic model.** A logic model developed for the life of the VISTA project provides a “big picture” view of what you hope to achieve. The multi-year logic model allows you to:
  - Identify a variety of performance milestone covering the anticipated lifespan of your VISTA project and identify performance milestones for the yearly project plan.
  - Incorporate activities and results that relate to the development of organizational capacity (e.g., creating or expanding new programs and services) and identify later changes you anticipate beneficiaries (when appropriate) will make after participating in new or expanded programs and services.
  - Plan for project implementation as you keep performance milestone(s) in sight.

Of course, you can also develop separate logic models for individual program years. Figure 3 on the next page shows an example of a multi-year logic model for a mentoring project.

## ***The Logic Model as a Check-Up Tool***

Revisit your logic model at least annually to see if your assumptions have withstood the test of time and actual project experience.

- Has your original goal and performance milestone(s) proven realistic?
- How does your actual progress compare to your anticipated timeline for achieving performance milestone(s)?

You may need to revise your logic model based on actual project experience.

Figure 3. Logic Model to Build the Capacity and Sustainability of a Mentoring Program  
(NOT part of VISTA Application)

COMMUNITY NEED →	GOAL →		INPUTS →	ACTIVITIES →	MILESTONES
<p>The ABC State Prison Fellowship Office Report (2007) found that more than 500 children and youth in Waketa County have at least one parent incarcerated in the state or federal penitentiary. About two-thirds of these children and youth (61%) live in households with incomes below the Federal poverty line. Murray and Farrington (2007) studied results from research and representative samples on children of incarcerated parents and found that they are more inclined to suffer anti-social and delinquent behavior, mental health problems, drug use, school failure and unemployment. Those who were present when the parent was arrested may also be traumatized in addition to enduring the pain of separation.</p> <p>Waketa Community Services (WCS) currently provides mentoring services to children and youth of incarcerated parents in Waketa County who often suffer social, emotional, and cognitive delays, have difficulty in school, and feel stigmatized. However, WCS has had difficulty finding enough volunteers to meet the demand for mentors and most volunteer mentors do not stay with the program for more than three or four months. Mentors ensure that children and youth of incarcerated parents receive social and emotional support.</p>	<p>To help ensure that children and youth of incarcerated parents receive the social and emotional support they need to help them escape the cycle of poverty, the WCS VISTA project will build the capacity of the organization through the development of a sustainable Volunteer Recruitment and Management system for the mentoring program.</p>	YEAR 1	2 VISTAs Program staff Board of Directors Advisory Board Financial and material resources	Develop, enhance, implement volunteer recruitment and management (R&M) system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review existing volunteer R&amp;M system.</li> <li>Develop improvement plan.</li> <li>Submit plan to Board of Directors for review and approval.</li> <li>Implement changes to volunteer R&amp;M system.</li> <li>Orient/train staff to use revised volunteer R&amp;M system.</li> </ul>	R&M plan approved by Board. R&M system components created/revise (screening procedures, training curricula, recruitment database, support resources, etc.). Staff orientation and training completed. New/revise R&M systems are operational: Volunteers are recruited using new systems. New/revise volunteer R&M systems are effective: Volunteers serve at least 3 months.
		YEAR 2	2 VISTAs Program staff Board of Directors Advisory Board Financial and material resources	Fine-tune volunteer R&M systems based on staff and volunteer feedback. Integrate changes into mentoring program. Develop fundraising plan.	R&M system components further refined. Volunteer mentors recruited. Youth are mentored. Increased staff use of volunteer R&M systems. More volunteers complete mentor training. More volunteers use support systems. Increased retention of volunteers. More youth matched with volunteer mentors. Mentoring relationships last longer. Youth and mentors form closer bonds.
		YEAR 3	2 VISTAs Program staff Board of Directors Advisory Board Financial and material resources	Implement fundraising plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host fundraising events.</li> <li>Apply for grants.</li> <li>Identify volunteer coordinators.</li> <li>Implement annual fundraising campaigns.</li> </ul> Institutionalize mentoring program changes and sustainability systems.	Fundraising plan approved by Board of Directors. Fundraising events held. Grant applications submitted. Long-term system for fundraising is instituted. Long-term commitment for volunteer coordinators established. Increased financial and personnel resources to support mentoring program. Staff and Board institutionalize changes/enhancements of mentoring program through policy and on-going staff training.

Note: See additional material (posted online) for a more complete set of material associated with this example.

## 7. Building the Project Plan

The primary purpose of the project plan is to provide a snapshot of the VISTA project. The project plan consists of one or more action plans. Each action plan includes the community need statement and goal statement which are multi-year, and performance milestones which are identified for a single program year and set up the performance measurement process. If you developed a logic model, you can use much of the content in your action plan. Remember that action plans should state in measurable and quantifiable terms:

- The community need being addressed by the project (*multi-year*);
- The goal of the project over the life of the project (*multi-year*);
- The performance milestones for the program year being measured (*single year*); and
- The dates by which you expect to achieve your performance milestones during that project year (*single year*).

**Note:** After your VISTA project is approved, use the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) for each of your VISTAs to describe their day-to-day activities.



**As you develop your performance milestones, remember that you will need to report on these results at least twice a year (first year projects may be asked to report quarterly). Consider developing performance milestones that provide an opportunity to report each reporting period. The report includes a discussion of how you measured each performance milestone, the instruments you used, the results you obtained, and whether or not you met the target identified in your action plan.**

**The more specific you can be in your action plan now, the easier and clearer your report will be later.**

### ***Creating an Action Plan***

Following are instructions for creating an action plan in eGrants. It is recommended that you compose text in a word processor document and then copy-and-paste into eGrants.

#### **A. Select Issue Area and Service Category**

When entering your action plan in eGrants, you will be required to identify an Issue Area and Service Category (see Figure 4). Review the list of Issue Areas and Service Categories and identify those that best describe your project. There are nine Issue Areas: *Community and Economic Development, Disaster Recovery/Relief, Education, Environment, Health/Nutrition, Homeland Security, Human Needs, Housing, and Public Safety*. Service Category options will differ depending on the Issue Area chosen.

Figure 4. Choose an Issue Area and Service Category from the Drop-down Menus

The screenshot shows a form titled "Action Plan" with a grey header. Below the header is a "Service Category" label above a grey bar. Underneath, there are two rows of input fields. The first row is labeled "Issue Area:" and contains a yellow text box with "Select ..." and a grey dropdown arrow. The second row is labeled "Service Category:" and contains a yellow text box with "Select ..." and a grey dropdown arrow.

## B. Develop the Community Need and Goal Statement (multi-year)

If you developed a logic model, you already have the community need and goal statements outlined. The **community need statement** should identify a specific poverty-related community need to be addressed by the project, citing a reliable source and noting the VISTA project sponsor's capacity to address the need. The suggested length of the community need statement is 3-6 sentences.

As previously noted, the **goal statement** is for the entire life of the project and is usually for three years. The goal statement is an overall description of the intent of a major component of the VISTA project and should address the community need by stating what the VISTAs will do to meet the need. Keep goals brief and focused; suggested length is 1-3 sentences.

Figure 5 shows how this section will appear in eGrants.

Figure 5. Describe the Community Need and Goal Statements in the Text Boxes

The screenshot shows a form section titled "Community Need and Goal Statement" with a grey header. Below the header, there is a paragraph of text: "The **community need statement**: Describe the specific need that will be addressed by the project component included in this Action Plan. The need should be measurable and include a reliable source to establish the compelling nature of the need." This is followed by a yellow text box. Below that is another paragraph: "The **Goal Statement**: Describe the impact your project will have in addressing the community need identified above. This goal statement should cover the three-year project period." This is followed by another yellow text box.

### C. Build the Performance Milestone and Add Elements

Performance milestones should be measured within one year, and typically change from year to year. If you developed a logic model, you should already have some performance milestones from which to choose. Select key performance milestones which reflect the main accomplishments you hope to achieve over the course of a single 12-month period.

In building your performance milestones, decide what measurable evidence will show progress (*indicator*) and how you will know when you have achieved the desired amount of change (*target*). You will also identify the type of instrument you will use (*how measured*) and describe how you will collect the data (*description of data collection*). Figure 6 shows the performance milestone section as it will appear in eGrants.

Figure 6. Identify your Performance Milestone and Add Elements

**Performance Milestone**

**Milestone:** Describe what you hope to achieve in a particular activity area over the course of a 12-month period. These performance milestones should be directly related to the goal statement.

**Planned Period of Accomplishment:** Indicate the project year and month that you expect this PM will be achieved.

**Indicator/Evidence of Progress:** What are you tracking or measuring to determine if this result has been achieved?

Select... ▼

**If other, please describe**

**Target:** Enter the same number (amount) or percentage that is described in the Performance milestone above. If you enter a percentage target here, make sure you include the number (amount) in the Performance milestone (e.g. 75 percent of volunteers (55 of 73) recruited...).

Target		# (number) or % (percent)	
<div style="background-color: yellow; width: 40px; height: 15px;"></div>		<div style="background-color: yellow; width: 40px; height: 15px;"></div> ▼	

**How Measured:** Method by which accomplishment of target milestone will be determined.

Select ... ▼

**Description of data collection process or measurement process** (who collects it from whom and when/how often)

Complete each element of the performance milestone as follows:

### **1. Performance Milestone**

Describe your performance milestone in a brief sentence. Provide enough detail so the reader can clearly understand the result you expect to achieve. The performance milestone should directly support the goal statement in this action plan. Include a quantity or number in the statement.

**Example:** *75% (30 of 40) volunteers recruited, trained and managed using the new/revised Volunteer Recruitment and Management system will serve as mentors for at least 3 months.*

### **2. Planned Period of Accomplishment**

Indicate the date by which the performance milestone will be achieved. This should be within a 12-month period. Make sure that the date includes the month and year.

**Example:** *December 2009*

### **3. Indicator/Evidence of Progress**

The indicator is the concrete, measurable evidence that shows progress toward reaching a performance milestone. To identify evidence of progress, ask yourself questions like:

- How will we know that our organizational capacity has increased?
- What will we look for to determine when a program or service has been developed, implemented, expanded, or enhanced?
- How will we know that the people we served experienced important and measurable changes (attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills)?

Be specific in describing the indicator.

**Example:** *Volunteers recruited and managed using the new/revised Volunteer Recruitment and Management system that serve as mentors for at least 3 months.*



#### **eGrants Tips**

**Do not list multiple performance milestones in the same textbox.**

**“Indicator/evidence of progress” is a drop-down menu with options including “other.” If the options provided do not include the indicator you are measuring, select “other” and describe the indicator in the textbox.**

#### 4. Target

The target describes the amount or level of change you anticipate achieving within the planned period of accomplishment. The target is based on the indicator. Targets that address organizational capacity quantify the anticipated amount of change with respect to increasing an organization's ability to serve the community. Targets that address service delivery quantify the anticipated amount of change for individuals due to services developed or otherwise supported by the VISTA project. Rely on your experience and knowledge of the community to determine how much change it is reasonable to expect within a year. Targets should be "ambitious yet realistic." A first-time target is often an educated guess that can be refined later based on actual experience.

In eGrants, enter a target number and indicate whether this number is an integer or a percentage.

**Example:**

Target	# (number) or % (percent)
75	% ▼

#### 5. How Measured

In addition to identifying the indicator and target, describe how you will get the data, including who will provide the data (*data source*) and how you will track it (*instrument*).

The data source is the place, individual(s), group(s), or organization(s) that will provide the information you collect to measure performance milestones. The instrument you use to record data will depend on your data source. The data source and instrument are closely connected; the *instrument* is the specific document or form used to collect information from the *data source*. Examples of data sources include: volunteers, agency records, and project participants. Examples of instruments include: tracking logs, attendance sheets, attitude questionnaires, and interview procedures.

If you receive data from VISTA monthly reports, ensure that information reported has been systematically collected and that the instruments used to collect data (e.g. attendance sheets, surveys) are saved and stored on site.

As you consider how you will collect the data:

- Verify that the data you want to collect actually exist, and in a format that you can use.
- Determine if the data to be collected are accessible to you.
- Determine when the data will be available.
- Determine who will be responsible for collecting the data and how the process will be organized.

In eGrants, there are two items that ask you to describe how you will measure the performance milestone. The first is a drop-down menu labeled “How Measured” that lists data collection methods. Select the method that best fits how you plan to collect the data.

<p><b>“How Measured” menu includes...</b></p>	<p><b>Activity Log</b>  <b>Community Partner Survey</b>  <b>Focus Group</b>  <b>Interview</b>  <b>Phone</b>  <b>Pre/Post Test</b>  <b>Recipient satisfaction survey</b>  <b>Self assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Sign-in sheet</b>  <b>Student grades</b>  <b>Survey</b>  <b>Sustainability checklist</b>  <b>Teacher Observation form and Log</b>  <b>Timesheet</b>  <b>Volunteer Record and Log</b></p>
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**6. Description of Data Collection Process or Measurement Process**

The second item is a textbox that asks you to describe how you will measure the performance milestone. Give the reader a clear picture of the data collection process; include the name of the instrument, who will administer it, when it will be administered, and how often.

**Example:** *Mentors will complete Mentoring Logs on a weekly basis, beginning with their assignment to a mentee. The Mentoring Logs will be collected by the VISTA supervisor.*



**eGrants Tips**

**Once you have finished entering information for the performance milestone, you may continue by clicking “Add a Milestone” if you wish to add another performance milestone to the same action plan.**

**In addition, once you have finished entering information for an action plan, you can save and close it. If you wish to create an additional action plan, simply click “Create a New Action Plan”.**

On the following page, Figure 7 shows a completed performance milestone as it would appear in eGrants.

Figure 7. Performance Milestone Example

**Performance Milestone**

**Milestone:** Describe what you hope to achieve in a particular activity area over the course of a 12-month period. These performance milestones should be directly related to the goal statement.

*75% (30 of 40) volunteers recruited, trained and managed using the new/revised Volunteer Recruitment and Management system will serve as mentors for at least 3 months*

**Planned Period of Accomplishment:** Indicate the project year and month that you expect this PM will be achieved.

*December 2009*

**Indicator/Evidence of Progress:** What are you tracking or measuring to determine if this result has been achieved?

Other ▼

**If other, please describe**

*Percent of volunteers recruited and managed using the new/revised Volunteer Recruitment and Management system that serve as mentors for at least 3 months.*

**Target:** Enter the same number (amount) or percentage that is described in the Performance milestone above. If you enter a percentage target here, make sure you include the number (amount) in the Performance milestone (e.g. 75 percent of volunteers (55 of 73) recruited...).

Target            # (number) or % (percent)

75            % ▼

**How Measured:** Method by which accomplishment of target milestone will be determined.

Activity Log ▼

**Description of data collection process or measurement process** (who collects it from whom and when/how often)

*Mentors will complete Mentoring Logs on a weekly basis, beginning with their assignment to a mentee. The Mentoring Logs will be collected by the VISTA supervisor.*



The data you collect for performance measurement serve as the foundation for reporting VISTA project performance milestones. You report these regularly to the Corporation. You may also want to include this information in reports to other stakeholders.

For more information on collecting and analyzing data, see the Project STAR material at: <http://nationalserviceresources.org/star/vista>.

## Glossary of VISTA Performance Measurement Terms

**Action Plan:** The action plan describes the community need, goal, and performance milestones of the VISTA project. The action plan identifies key performance milestones which the VISTA project will measure to assess performance. The action plan does not itemize the tasks of VISTAs. This information goes into the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD). The VISTA Project Plan consists of one or more action plans.

**Beneficiaries:** The individuals, groups, and organizations that benefit from services supported by the efforts of VISTAs. Although VISTAs do not engage in direct provision of services to people in need, the capacity-building efforts of VISTAs provide indirect support to service delivery.

**Capacity Building:** Refers to the effort by VISTA projects to increase the ability of the sponsoring organization to provide services to the community. Capacity-building efforts within or between organizations may be intended to expand resources, increase the number of beneficiaries served, improve service utilization, develop new programs and services, expand existing programs and services and/or improve service coordination among organizations.

**Community Need:** The problem or issue in the community that the VISTA project will address.

**Community Volunteer:** An individual from the community who offers their time and talents to assist community-based organizations. Community volunteers differ from VISTAs in that they are under no formal obligation to provide a specified amount of assistance (e.g., as measured by service hours), and do not receive a stipend, education award or health benefits.

**Data:** The numbers and other raw factual information systematically collected to measure results.

**Data Source:** Identifies the origin (place, organization, or group of individuals) of the information collected to measure results.

**eGrants:** The Corporation's online grant application and management system, located at: [www.cns.gov/e-grants](http://www.cns.gov/e-grants). For more information about eGrants, contact your State Office.

**Goal:** The broad purpose toward which your project is directed. Goals address what you expect the VISTA project to achieve over the life of the project in relation to community needs identified in the application narrative.

**Indicator or Evidence of Progress:** A concrete, measurable item of information that specifies progress toward reaching a performance milestone. It answers the question, "What is my *evidence* that the performance milestone has been reached?"

**Input:** A resource the program will use to achieve performance milestones. Examples include staff, VISTAs, community volunteers, facilities, equipment, curricula, and money.

**Instrument:** The specific document or form used to collect information from the *data source*. Examples include behavior checklist, sign-in sheet, and community activity log.

**Logic Model:** A diagram or chart that outlines how a project will address a community need by establishing a “big picture” goal, identifying the inputs and activities needed to address goal and determining the performance milestones that will be used to assess results. The logic model reveals the basic thinking behind the project and how resources will be used to help solve a problem in the community.

**Performance Measurement:** The process of regularly measuring the performance milestones reached by a VISTA project.

**Performance Milestone:** An anticipated result of a VISTA project. Performance milestones are to be measured within a 12-month period and should be updated each year. A performance milestone may measure the amount of work completed or the impact of this work on individuals, groups, or organizations. In the eGrants application, the performance milestone includes the performance milestone statement, indicator/evidence of progress, target, how measured, and description of data collection or measurement process.

**Project Plan:** Submitted as part of the VISTA application, the project plan consists of one or more Action Plans (see action plan above). The project plan identifies poverty-related community needs that the VISTA project will address and key results that will be measured along the way.

**Service Activity:** The activities engaged in by members of a VISTA project to achieve the project’s performance milestones and goals.

**Stakeholder:** An individual, group, or organization with an interest in the success of the VISTA project. Stakeholders may include VISTAs, project staff, partner agencies, boards, funders, community partners and program beneficiaries.

**Sustainability:** The ability of programs, services, and other program infrastructure developed by a VISTA project to endure beyond the completion of the VISTA project.

**Target:** A statement that quantifies the amount and/or level of change you anticipate achieving within a 12-month period due to the efforts of your VISTA project. The target is derived from the indicator/evidence of progress.

**VISTA Assignment Description (VAD):** Identifies key activities of VISTAs and the major steps needed to accomplish these activities. Projects develop a VAD for each VISTA. For more information on the VAD, see <http://nationalservicerresources.org/star/vista-vad-samples>.

## Additional Performance Measurement Resources

### Web Sites

Evaluation Toolkit: A User's Guide to Evaluation for National Service Programs  
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/star/user-guide>

Harvard Family Research Project—After School Resources and Publications  
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources.html>

Measuring Volunteering: A Practical Toolkit  
<http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/toolkit/default.html>

The Results & Performance Accountability Implementation Guide  
<http://www.raguide.org/>

United Way of America, Outcome Measurement Resource Network—Resource Library  
<http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/library/pgmomres.cfm>

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook  
<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf>

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide  
<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>

StatPac: Designing Surveys and Questionnaires  
<http://www.statpac.com/surveys/index.htm#toc>

Free Management Library: General Guidelines for Conducting Interviews  
<http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/interview.htm>

Free Management Library: Basics of Conducting Focus Groups  
<http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/focusgrp.htm>

### Books

The following books can be borrowed from the Lending Library of the National Service Resource Center. The Lending Library can be found at  
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/library> .

Hatry, Harry P. 1999. Performance Measurement: Getting Results. Urban Institute Press.

United Way of America. 1996. Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach. United Way of America. (To order, call 1-800-772-0008.)

Juvenile Mentoring Program . 2000. Evaluating Your Program: A Beginner's Self-Evaluation Workbook for Mentoring Programs. Information Technology International.

Ellis, Diana, et al. 1990. Keeping On Track: An Evaluation Guide for Community Groups. Women's Research Centre.

Patton, Michael Quinn, et al., eds. 1997. Measuring the Difference Volunteers Make: A Guide to Outcome Evaluation for Volunteer Program Managers. Minnesota Department of Human Services.