



Request for Proposals

Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program

Update 11/18: Deadline Extended to December 1

In order to accommodate the number of inquiries we have recently received regarding the Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program, we are extending the deadline for the application to **Monday, December 1**. Please note that you must complete a [brief eligibility survey](#) to begin the application process. If you have questions, please feel free to contact us via email at info@citiesofservice.org or by phone at 646-324-8405.

WHO WE ARE

Cities of Service is a national nonprofit that supports mayors to design and implement high-impact service strategies that can be replicated in cities worldwide. We provide technical assistance, programmatic support, planning resources, and funding opportunities. Founded by Michael R. Bloomberg, Cities of Service supports a coalition of approximately 200 cities whose mayors are committed to using citizen volunteers to solve local pressing challenges, from increasing high school graduation rates to improving energy efficiency in buildings.

Cities of Service knows that good intentions don't always guarantee the best outcomes. Occasional days of service can be helpful and are important, but they rarely move the needle for children who struggle with grade-level reading, families who lack easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables, or middle and high school students trying to navigate the difficult pathway to graduation and college or careers. Every day, Cities of Service sees what is possible when innovative local government leaders leverage and support the "people power" of local nonprofits and communities. Cities of Service works with coalition members to facilitate innovation; convene local leaders, organizations, and citizen volunteers across impact areas and geographies; and foster the exchange of ideas and practices to expand the impact of service in cities and increase the collective impact.

SUMMARY

Cities of Service is pleased to announce its *Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program* ("City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program"), a competitive grant opportunity to support the planning and implementation of neighborhood revitalization initiatives based on [Love Your Block](#), one of Cities of Service's most tested blueprints. To date, 19 cities across the country have successfully implemented *Love Your Block*. In this impact volunteering initiative, cities provide mini-grants to local neighborhood groups, block associations, and community-based organizations to carry out revitalization projects in target areas.

With this new grant opportunity, Cities of Service is taking *Love Your Block* to the next level, with the goals of achieving even deeper impact in cities and finding out what it really means to "love your block."

The *City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program* will provide both financial and human capital support to six cities for three years, pending the availability of federal funds. For the term of the grant, each of the six cities will receive two or three City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA members along with a \$30,000 planning and implementation grant to carry out *Love Your Block* in low-income neighborhoods. The planning portion of the grant will support a six-month planning process that engages key community stakeholders to identify (1) the health and safety needs of the community, (2) best practices and



strategies for improving the health and safety of low-income neighborhoods using the *Love Your Block* blueprint, and (3) impact metrics to measure the success of the initiative. The implementation portion of the grant will provide the resources necessary to carry out *Love Your Block*, including (1) the funding of mini-grants to support volunteer activities, (2) application of the strategies and metrics developed during the planning process, and (3) development of plans to sustain and scale best practices.

Integral to the *City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program* are the AmeriCorps VISTA members themselves (for general information about AmeriCorps VISTA, please see this [overview](#) from the Corporation for National and Community Service). They will build capacity for *Love Your Block* by coordinating the planning process and stakeholder engagement, developing the infrastructure for the initiative, expanding partnerships with local neighborhood associations and community-based organizations, coordinating training and workshops for mini-grant applicants, and ensuring the sustainability of the initiative.

Throughout this program, Cities of Service will continue to provide significant hands-on support and technical assistance to the six winning cities. Together, the winning cities and Cities of Service will showcase the significant impact that engaged community residents who “love their blocks” can have.

BACKGROUND

“A clean city is a safe city!” from Natalie, a *Love Your Block* volunteer in Fall River, MA

Cities of Service created the *Love Your Block* blueprint because so many American cities struggle with neighborhood blight, including abandoned buildings and lots, graffiti, and litter-strewn spaces, all of which serve as a disincentive for community investment and engagement. In many cases, neighborhoods facing these challenges have limited access to city resources or find that their city does not have the resources to address their needs. As a result, community members may feel powerless to make real changes in their communities.

Neighborhood cleanups, adopt-a-block programs, and community gardens are not new ideas – they have occurred in cities for years. What has been missing is the innovative approach offered by Cities of Service – leveraging the mayor’s bully pulpit to bring attention to the issue, gather stakeholders together, and target city services to support the “people power” of local nonprofits, community organizations, and citizens. Under this approach, cities work in partnership with key stakeholders, focus on impact metrics to ensure that measurable, meaningful change is taking place, and plan for long-term sustainability.

THE CITIES OF SERVICE CITY HALL AMERICORPS VISTA PROGRAM

Through the *City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program*, a participating mayor’s office will be asked to identify an overarching neighborhood revitalization challenge in low-income communities that he or she hopes to solve through this program. Such challenges might include, but are not limited to: a large number of abandoned properties that have become havens for illegal activity; abandoned lots that have become illegal dumping grounds and environmental hazards; too few safe spaces for children to play; graffiti that mars property and signals a sense of gang-related activity; and a lack of green spaces, community gardens, parks, and trees.

Cities of Service believes that by supporting active citizen volunteers and cultivating robust and inclusive community engagement, neighborhoods become healthier and more livable, loveable places. Once the neighborhood revitalization challenge has been identified, the mayor will use his or her convening power to bring together a team that includes citizen volunteers, neighborhood leaders, community-based organizations, local government agencies, colleges and universities, and businesses to begin planning how best to meet the challenge.

Throughout this grant opportunity, the City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA members will continually identify and remove barriers to engagement with the goal of enabling all community members to connect to city government agencies and others as true partners, learning from one another and working collaboratively toward common goals. To ensure broader participation by traditionally underrepresented groups, the City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA members will conduct specific outreach to local neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations, and community leaders to ensure their voices are at the table.

During the planning phase, community members will be asked to focus on what they can do as volunteers working in partnership with the city to help solve the challenge. City agencies will share information about the resources they can bring to the effort and about the costs and benefits of certain activities. Community-based organizations will offer ways that they can help. Higher education and business partners should be active team participants in this beginning stage as well to ensure the long-term impact and sustainability of the program.

The team will design the actual impact volunteering initiatives that can move the needle on these issues – for example, volunteers may decide to adopt abandoned lots, keeping them clean and mowed, with the city’s Department of Public Works providing equipment for the volunteer days and extra trash removal services. Or volunteers may implement a graffiti removal campaign, working alongside the City’s Community Policing unit and local businesses to improve the neighborhood’s sense of safety. The initiatives should include a prominent role for the mayor and be connected to the city’s overall service plan. If a city does not have a service plan or its service plan is not up-to-date, the city must create or update its service plan within the first year of the grant. In this planning phase, the team members should also develop the additional health and safety metrics specific to their city’s neighborhood revitalization challenge. Team members should also discuss strategies for sustainability of the program.

During the implementation phase, the team will be charged with tracking impact metrics to measure progress, and guarantee accountability of participants. In addition to the required metrics set out in the *Love Your Block* blueprint, grantee cities will be required to track other metrics related to health and safety. Cities of Service is excited to learn more from cities about what works, and innovative metrics design and tracking are key.

ELIGIBILITY

Applications must be submitted by the city’s Office of the Mayor. All Cities of Service coalition cities in the United States with a population over 50,000 are eligible to apply for the *Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program* (provided that they also meet the additional requirements listed). Any city not yet a part of the coalition but interested in applying for this program can join the coalition by having their mayor sign the [Declaration of Service](#) (through this, mayors pledge to develop a service plan and strategy, work with other mayors to advance best practices, and encourage other mayors to join this national effort). The Cities of Service [Recruit Your Mayor](#) guide provides step-by-step instructions for making a compelling case to a mayor to join the coalition.

A city will only be eligible to apply if their mayor’s term of office and/or their mayor’s eligibility to run for re-election extends through the duration of the program (end date anticipated to be June 2018). It is important to note that if the mayor is eligible for additional terms of office but has publicly declared that they will not be running for re-election, the city will not be eligible to apply for this program.

Cities must have an up-to-date citywide service plan or commit to creating or updating its service plan within the first year of the grant.

Cities will only be eligible to host VISTA members if they are in good standing with the Corporation for National and Community Service. The VISTA project also must focus on a poverty-related need.

TIMELINE OVERVIEW

Cities of Service will support *Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program* grantees for three years, pending the availability of federal funds. Since this is a pilot program, we expect cities to work with each other and with Cities of Service to establish best practices in order to scale and replicate the program across the country.

- Cities will receive two or three AmeriCorps VISTA members for each year of the program.
- In **Year One**, winning cities will receive a \$30,000 grant. AmeriCorps VISTA members will support the city-led strategic planning process (which may take up to six months) and help launch the impact volunteering initiatives, including the launch of the city's mini-grant competition. Cities will also begin to report on the metrics designed in the planning phase. If necessary, the AmeriCorps VISTA members will also support the development of an up-to-date citywide service plan.
- In **Year Two**, the cities will focus on collecting data for the required metrics found in the *Love Your Block* blueprint, as well as new health and safety metrics designed through the strategic planning process. The cities should not expect to receive additional implementation funds from Cities of Service, and should begin implementing the ideas for sustainability that were generated during the planning process.. This should not pose a problem because *Love Your Block* has been shown to leverage significant public and private support.
- In the second half of **Year Two**, the cities will reconvene the strategic planning stakeholders to generate new ideas on the focus areas or troubleshoot any implementation issues. The AmeriCorps VISTA members will support the planning and implementation of the program and will continue to cultivate partnerships with city agencies and community organizations that might be able to house the program after the conclusion of the *City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program*.
- In **Year Three**, the cities will build upon the strategic planning and implementation processes in Years One and Two by continuing to aggregate data on the impact that *Love Your Block* has had on the health and safety in low-income neighborhoods in their cities. Cities will be required to produce a sustainability plan outlining the continuation of their initiative beyond their participation in the *Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program*.

USE OF FUNDING

Cities will receive a \$30,000 grant from Cities of Service for the planning and implementation of the program. Cities will be able to allocate up to \$5,000 for the strategic planning process of the grant and must submit a planning budget to Cities of Service as part of the application process. Cities selected to participate in the program must submit another budget after completion of the strategic planning process for the \$25,000 implementation portion of the grant. Cities of Service reserves the right to approve the costs identified in the planning and implementation budgets prior to disbursing grant funds.

Funds may not be used to pay the salary or benefits of a Chief Service Officer or city lead nor may they be used to hire new city staff; however, funds can be used to cover a portion of the salary or benefits of other existing city staff who will support the program.

GRANT TERMS & REQUIREMENTS

- Cities must be members of the [Cities of Service coalition](#). Cities not currently in the coalition must join the coalition as a prerequisite for gaining access to the application.
- The city's Chief Service Officer or a city lead who is a member of the mayor's senior team must act as the primary liaison for this program and hold responsibility for overseeing its successful implementation. As part of the application, applicants will provide an organizational chart that identifies the Chief Service Officer or city lead and his/her direct connection to the mayor.
- Cities of Service anticipates making grant award announcements in January 2015. Cities will be strongly encouraged to have at least one of their VISTAs begin their term of service with the first cohort in April 2015. Given this tight timeline, cities should be prepared to launch the program by initiating the recruitment process immediately upon notification in January.
- As part of the pilot program, cities must agree to take part in regular, intensive technical assistance calls and meetings to discuss best practices to scale and replicate the program.
- Cities must agree to Cities of Service reporting requirements.
- Cities must agree that the mayor will make a public announcement about the grant, with the text approved by Cities of Service.
- Cities must use Cities of Service branding on all materials and communications related to the *Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program* for the duration of the grant. Cities of Service retains the right to approve all usage of our branding on such materials and communications prior to their distribution to the public.
- Per the federal requirements of the AmeriCorps VISTA program, all grant funds must be focused on low-income communities, with the goal of poverty alleviation.
- This program may not displace city employees, functions, or expenses, nor may it duplicate existing services. displace existing city or community resources.
- Cities must be able to provide adequate supervision and resources to the AmeriCorps VISTA members placed in their city.
- If a city has previously received funding from Cities of Service for *Love Your Block* or has implemented a similar neighborhood revitalization initiative, funds received through the *Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program* must be used to deliver additional impact beyond the impact specified in the city's previous grant agreement, and include impact metrics focused on improving the health and safety of the neighborhoods served.

APPLICATION

Cities must complete the [Eligibility Survey](#) as a prerequisite for gaining access to the application for this grant. Once a city's eligibility has been confirmed, Cities of Service will notify the applicant and provide instructions for accessing the application.

In the application, cities will describe a comprehensive proposal based on the *Love Your Block* blueprint that details:

- The type and scope of the neighborhood revitalization challenges identified by the mayor;

- How those challenges impact the health and safety of the city's low-income neighborhoods;
- How the proposal advances a priority of the mayor and the role the mayor will play in advancing the program;
- The design of the strategic planning process, including identification of community partners and thought leaders who will be asked to participate and key topics that may be addressed through the process;
- How the initiative is part of a more comprehensive citywide service plan if one exists, or plans for creating a robust service plan if one does not exist or is out-of-date;
- How City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA members will be used to support the work; and
- How the city plans to support City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA members, including plans for integrating them into the mayor's office and programmatic and office support for their work.

In addition to completing the application questions, cities will be asked to upload the following information as separate attachments:

1. Strategic planning process six-month timeline
2. Strategic planning process budget
3. Staffing/organizational chart identifying the Chief Service Officer or city lead and his/her direct connection to the mayor
4. City service plan (if one exists)

SELECTION CRITERIA

- Initiative plan (e.g., the planning and implementation of the *Love Your Block* initiative, including the role of the AmeriCorps VISTA members) (40%)
- City's plan to support the AmeriCorps VISTA members, including clearly defining roles and responsibilities for the VISTAs and city lead, describing staff supervision and support, and opportunities for training and professional development (15%)
- Degree of potential scale and impact (e.g., number of beneficiaries, share of need met, and depth of impact) (15%)
- Partnerships and resources (15%)
- Role of mayor (15%)

PREFERENCES

- Cities putting significant local city resources (e.g., financial or in-kind) toward the initiative.
- Cities planning to engage multiple city agencies in support of the initiative.
- Cities with resources and networks to effectively recruit and support AmeriCorps VISTA members.
- Cities with university or research and academic institution partnerships identified; these groups can be helpful resources in many aspects of the planning process such as identifying the neighborhood revitalization challenge.

DEADLINE

The full application is due no later than **Monday, December 1, 2014**. The full application must be submitted online through the Cities of Service application portal.



QUESTIONS

Check our website frequently for updates. We will hold two informational webinars for interested applicants. Please [pre-register](#) for the time that works best for you; it is not necessary to attend both webinars as similar information will be presented on both dates.

Wednesday, October 22
12:00 – 1:00pm EST

Wednesday, November 5
2:00 – 3:00pm EST

All questions regarding the *Cities of Service City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Program* should be directed to info@citiesofservice.org.

GLOSSARY

Chief Service Officer: A senior city official responsible for developing and implementing a high-impact, citywide service plan to increase volunteerism and target volunteers to address their city's greatest needs. If this position exists in the city, the Chief Service Officer must be the liaison for this program.

City Lead: A city lead is a senior city official who reports to the Mayor or has the authority to carry out the Mayor's priorities, but they do not hold the title of Chief Service Officer. The city lead's role includes serving as a liaison to Cities of Service and overseeing the grant.

Cities of Service Declaration principles:

- Develop a comprehensive service plan and a coordinated strategy focused on matching volunteers and established community partners to the areas of greatest local need;
- Work with other mayors and elected officials to advance strategies and best practices that accelerate the service movement and produce measurable results;
- Encourage other mayors to join this national effort to engage our citizens; and
- Ensure that the voice of cities is heard in federal legislative, policy, and program discussions related to service, which will help the country achieve the ambitious goals of the Serve America Act.

Impact Volunteering: Volunteer strategies that target community needs, use best practices, and set clear outcomes and measures to gauge progress.

Mayoral Priority: A local problem or concern that is among the mayor's top issues for action.

Service Plan: A comprehensive and coordinated plan that describes the city's strategy for matching volunteers and established community partners to the areas of greatest local need. Examples of service plans can be found on our [website](#).