

Americorps VISTA and Migrant Education Programs

Volunteers as an integral part of
ID & R and Services in North Carolina

Goals for this workshop

- ▶ Learn about the history and possibilities of the Americorps VISTA program.
- ▶ See examples of how one state has expanded its MEP's capacity with the help of Americorps VISTAs.
- ▶ Discuss how your program might work with volunteers, either through VISTA or other programs.

What is Americorps VISTA?

- ▶ VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) was founded in 1965 as a national service program to fight poverty in America. In 1993, VISTA was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs.
- ▶ In 2015, more than 43 million people were living in poverty in the United States (around 13.5% of the population). In North Carolina, that percentage was 15.9%.
- ▶ Nationwide, there are more than 8,000 Americorps VISTA volunteers who join VISTA to combat poverty.

Two Types of Services

Indirect--VISTA

- ▶ Volunteers join for one year.
- ▶ They live at poverty level.
- ▶ Their work must be directed toward capacity building.

Direct—VISTA Summer Associates

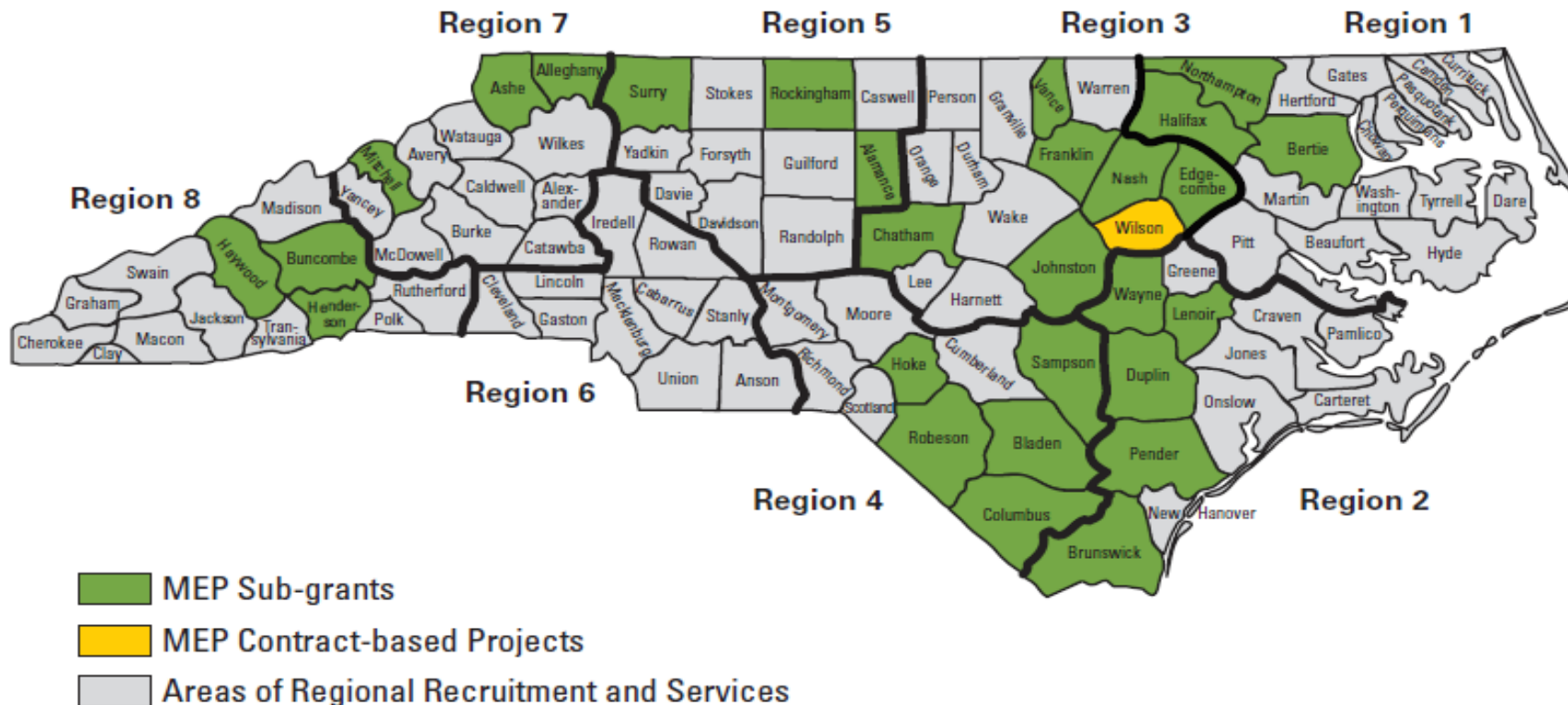
- ▶ Volunteers work for 2-3 months.
- ▶ They are allowed to directly serve children and families.

The North Carolina Experience with Americorps

- ▶ We have had an Americorps VISTA project since 2012-2013.
- ▶ We have had eight full time, year-long VISTAs—two each year.
- ▶ We have had three VISTA Summer Associates.
- ▶ Next year, we will have six full-time, year-long VISTAs.

The Context for our VISTA Projects

- ▶ NC has 28 local programs who receive MEP sub-grants.



More on Context....

- ▶ We also have five Regional Recruiters, who each serve 15-19 counties.
- ▶ These counties make up about 8% of our MEP student population.
- ▶ We determined that the primary role of the VISTA project would be to increase services in these 72 non-sub-grant counties.

VISTA's Roles in ID and R and Service Delivery

- ▶ Our Regional Recruiters have to cover large parts of the state.
- ▶ VISTA volunteers are trained as recruiters to assist them.



VISTA's Roles in ID and R

- ▶ VISTAs have received the same training as regular recruiters.
- ▶ VISTAs shadow the Regional Recruiters.
- ▶ VISTAs go to areas the Regional Recruiters can't get to, and are able to extend the recruitment capability of each Regional Recruiter.
- ▶ VISTAs have been instrumental in gathering and compiling needs assessment information in parts of the state without sub-grants.

VISTA's Role in Service Delivery

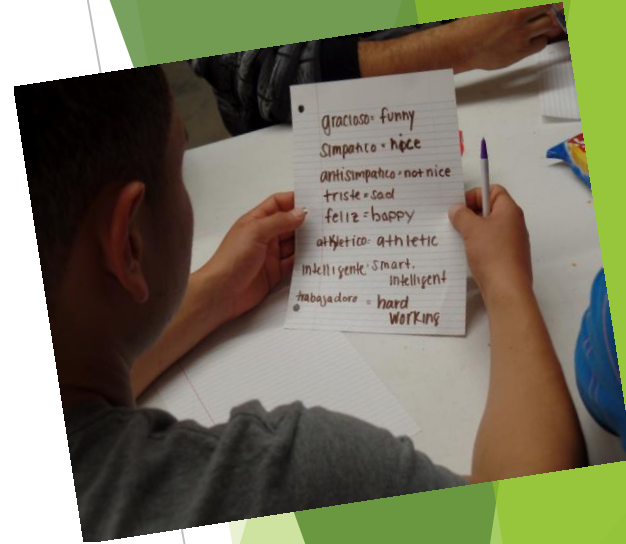
- ▶ The challenge: VISTAs are not supposed to perform regular, direct services, such as tutoring and advocacy.
- ▶ Instead, they are expected to build program capacity.
- ▶ Our design for this aspect of the VISTA project has been to have the VISTAs recruit and train volunteers, who will work directly as mentors and English tutors/teachers.
- ▶ In addition, the VISTAs have developed curriculum materials ranging from pre-K through adult education.

Examples of VISTA work

- ▶ Volunteer Recruitment and Training
 - ▶ Since 2012, NCMEP VISTAs have trained approximately 70 volunteers who have served more than 200 MEP students.
 - ▶ Most volunteers have come from universities and community colleges; a few have come from faith-based organizations or the communities-at-large.
 - ▶ VISTAs attend college volunteer fairs and work with college volunteer centers to find volunteers.
 - ▶ The primary role of volunteers has been to work with OSY; however, some have served as mentors for high school students and as co-facilitators in family literacy classes.

Two Volunteer Training Experiences...

While attending a volunteer fair, we came across a woman named Emily. She was moved by our presentation and reached out to us to help in any way possible. After training, Emily began teaching ESL to some of our students. There was a brief language barrier at first, but she was tenacious. There were a few days when our students couldn't meet due to their work schedules. However, Emily fully understood the time challenges of migrant families and stuck with MEP throughout the summer. By the end of the class, she could see the progress students made and was thankful for the opportunity to make a positive change in their lives.



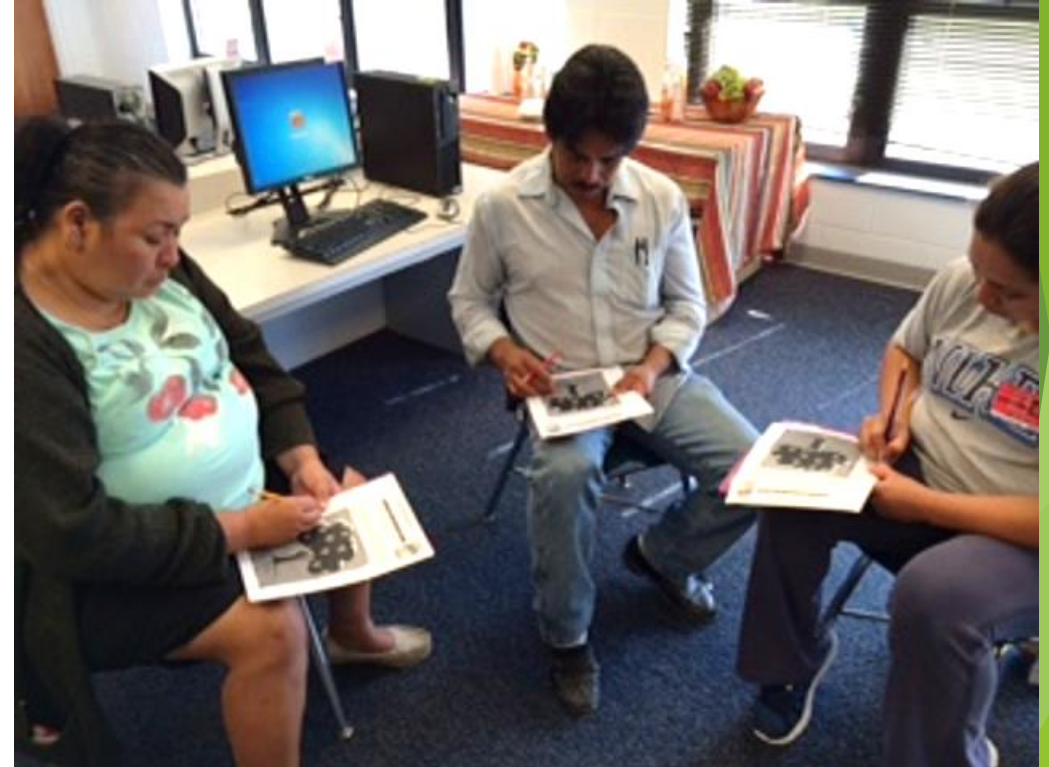
“I worked primarily with one young man who was not able to speak any English at the time we first started the tutoring sessions. His mother, who also did not speak English, would often sit in on the sessions as well. By the end of our last meeting, this young man was able to speak English! Of course, he wasn't fluent, but he had gained the confidence in his ability to speak and learn the English language to the extent that I have no doubt he will continue to learn English when and wherever he has an opportunity. Volunteering with the MEP and helping someone to achieve their goal of learning English has been a very rewarding experience.”

“In April 2016, Anastacio and I went to Appalachian State University to recruit volunteers to teach ESL classes at a camp in Ashe County, NC. We were able to get connected with Dr. Greg McClure, and he mentioned that he and a few of his students would like to take on teaching the ESL classes at the camp. Dr. McClure allowed the students to use their time teaching the classes at the camp towards the required service learning hours for his class. When we arrived at the camp they had set up one of the back bedrooms for the class. Once the class and introductions began more of the workers living in the camp became interested and we moved the class to the dining room. The workers were very interested and dedicated to learning English. The professor and his students went back to the camp for 5 weeks and taught lessons from food to prepositions. When I went back to the camp for the final class, I was amazed by the amount of English that the migrant workers had learned. This is just one example of how impactful it can be when people choose to get involved with their community. ” –Jordan Trivette, 2016 VISTA



Work in Family Literacy

- ▶ North Carolina uses the *Abriendo Puertas* family literacy program, and VISTAs have helped prepare materials for the program meetings.
- ▶ One of the year 4 VISTAs prepared information for the parents on the performance of their children's school, which spurred the parents to a higher degree of involvement in school improvement in that school.



VISTAs in Event Planning



- ▶ For several years, the NCMEP VISTAs have provided assistance in planning the annual OSY Institute—they work providing everything from logistical support to giving presentations on their work.

Assistance to Local Recruiters

- ▶ Many smaller programs find themselves overwhelmed during peak season, and VISTAs or other volunteers can provide needed support to local recruiters.



VISTAs and Resource Development

- ▶ NC VISTAs have put together a website that was initially for the volunteers they recruited.
- ▶ The website has rapidly become the “go-to” place for not only the volunteers, but for regular program staff across the state.
- ▶ Let’s take a minute to visit the site:
- ▶ <https://migranteduesl.wordpress.com/>

VISTAs and Data

- ▶ As part of a VISTA assignment, each VISTA is required to conduct an analysis of the community she/he serves.
- ▶ This works well with the MEP's role is assessing needs of our population and creating programs to serve those needs.

VISTA Summer Associates

- ▶ Able to do direct service.
- ▶ Short term, only 2-3 months.
- ▶ NC experience—We were given the opportunity to have three VISTA Summer Associates during 2016. They worked to support the Summer Food Service Program, and focused on making sure that MEP students and families were able to participate in the program. They also designed and implemented nutrition education programs in three LEAs.

A Summer Associate's Experience....

- ▶ *“It was so nice seeing you and being apart of something so worthwhile and beautiful. We are all here to serve and to help one another. I know a little Spanish, but after participating in this program I want to learn to speak fluent Spanish so I can help the Migrant workers and children even more. My short term goal is to enroll at Wilson Community College in order to achieve my long term goal of being a Migrant Worker advocate. Thank you for including me and allowing me to see first hand the need in our communities. You guys are doing a fantastic job, it was an honor for me to serve alongside Pedro, Jose and the rest of the team. I just wish I could have done more.”*

----Marie



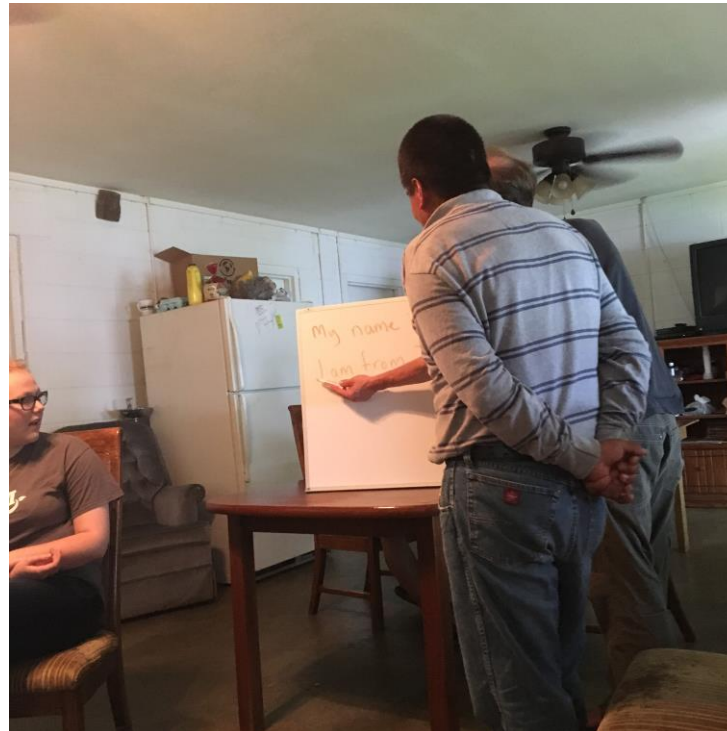
Activity!

- ▶ Volunteers through VISTA or other programs can expand your program's capacity and create visibility.

- ▶ At your table group, discuss your program structure and brainstorm at least three ways your program could use volunteers, either through VISTA or other programs.

Discussing your brainstorm

- ▶ Each table can share three ideas that came out of their brainstorm.....



Don't be daunted by the application process!

- ▶ The process of application and management of a VISTA grant is not for the faint of heart, but the effort will pay off for you in so many ways.
- ▶ For information on how to apply and design a program, call or contact Sonja Williams at Sonja.Williams@dpi.nc.gov or 919-807-3958.
- ▶ Look for a detailed presentation on the nuts and bolts of applying to the Corporation for National Service at this spring's NASDME meeting!

Beyond the actual work...

- ▶ In North Carolina, we have found that VISTAs have done an incredible amount of work that is part of their assignment—training volunteers and serving many students who otherwise might not have been served.
- ▶ However, one of the lasting legacies of the VISTAs has been that they have increased community awareness of the situation of farmworker families. Seventy people who had never thought about farmworkers before have now become vocal advocates.

A few final points...

- ▶ While having VISTAs may be a boon to your program, and definitely will build program capacity, it's important to remember that VISTAs are also there to learn, not just to be a low-cost source of labor.
- ▶ Any program should work with its VISTAs to make sure that they are growing in the ways they wish to grow.

The legacy of VISTAs....

- ▶ One of the tutors remarked that she had lived in the area all of her life, and never knew the farmworkers were there. She brought her son to class, and the workers were able to teach him Spanish. Change happens through relationships.



