

## Homes for Service

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in choosing to serve as an Americorps\*VISTA Member is dealing with the high cost of housing. The rent of a one bedroom apartment in Vancouver, WA (\$549 – lowest quartile in 2005) represents nearly two-thirds of the 2007 VISTA stipend of \$865. Add the cost of utilities, costs related to maintaining a vehicle, and recent changes to the way that DSHS counts the stipend as income that may limit eligibility for food assistance (especially for those applying for assistance after they begin service), one can easily see how challenging VISTA service becomes. Even if a VISTA Member is willing and able to share housing, this scenario can prove challenging and equally frustrating to VISTA Members, asking them to locate a compatible roommate or housemate. Over 50% of our current VISTA Members serving needed to relocate in order to do so. Nearly all of these members cited housing costs as a significant concern, and a concern that could limit their ability to complete their term of service. At least one member made the decision **not** to relocate after considering the cost of housing.

Illustrated below is a sample budget, and one can see how housing costs will typically represent over 50% of a Member’s total and very modest income.

### Sample VISTA Budget\*

Housing + Utilities	\$450
Car Insurance	\$100
Fuel for Car	\$100
Other Costs (phone, etc.)	\$50
Cash (\$15/week * 4)	\$60
Food	\$100
<b>Total Estimated Budget</b>	<b>\$860</b>
VISTA Living Allowance**	\$890
<b>Balance Remaining (Credit to VISTA)</b>	<b>\$30</b>

- Budget will vary depending upon living situation, personal needs, and other expenses. Whether a VISTA Member chooses or is required to have a car can impact the budget greatly as well. This is an example for illustrative purposes only.
- \*890 is estimated allowance increase as of September, 2007. VISTA Members will receive 26 equal payments of approximately \$410 per 2 weeks of service (gross pay). This means that most months (10 months) VISTA Members will receive 2 stipend allowances. There will be two months where VISTA Members will receive three stipend allowances. VISTA Members should plan accordingly.

Homes for Service offers an opportunity to connect VISTA Members with no cost or low cost housing in the Vancouver area, extending beyond to some of the rural communities that we serve, particularly in Cowlitz and Klickitat Counties. Community members who want to support national service and community building may have homes or apartments they can share, or even private rentals at a reduced cost. While some Homes for Service are private rentals, many involve sharing a home with one other adult. Some host homes

may have two adults already living there; a few also have children and/or pets in the household. Some host homes request that members assist with minor chores around the house, such as shoveling snow or caring for pets when the homeowner is away. Each host home is unique; interested individuals are encouraged to contact hosts directly for details.

We ask that those with knowledge of available and affordable housing send notice to [vistaleader@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:vistaleader@dshs.wa.gov) or call 360-624-9099. We will make this information available to our members and potential members through this website. Final living arrangements should be a negotiation between the VISTA Member and the housing provider and/or homeowner. We provide this information as a service so that our members may have knowledge of affordable housing opportunities, but are not responsible for the accuracy of this information, nor for the suitability of individual housing arrangements.