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Staff Report

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Recommended Citation
Staff Report, "North Mississippi VISTA Project Seeks Applicants to Serve Communities" (2020). University of Mississippi News. 3537.
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/umnews/3537

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North Mississippi VISTA Project Seeks Applicants to Serve Communities

Summer and full-year national service opportunities available to fight poverty in state

OXFORD, Miss. – As physical distancing to reduce transmission of COVID-19 has transformed the way that Mississippians go to school, do business and care for their neighbors, the North Mississippi VISTA Project is seeking applicants to join efforts to fight poverty in Mississippi through national service.

The North Mississippi VISTA Project has positions for full-time service for summer and yearlong terms of service beginning in June 2020. VISTA members join nonprofit organizations and Title I school districts to support educational attainment, economic opportunity and healthy lifestyles.

While the country practices physical distancing, VISTA members are permitted to support the mission of their host sites through teleservice.

"Already we have seen members of the North Mississippi VISTA Project come forward to support relief efforts in the face of COVID-19," said Emily Echols, project manager with the University of Mississippi’s McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement, which leads the North Mississippi VISTA Project.

"From fundraising campaigns to offset the loss of income to working with school districts to deliver school lunches to students living in isolated areas, VISTA members are making a difference for those most at risk of suffering income loss and food insecurity."

Natural disasters and crises throw the most vulnerable members of society into even more precarious situations. Disparities in income, health status and access to healthy food become more pronounced in emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In such unprecedented times, efforts to alleviate poverty, empower communities and create sustainable solutions are more urgent than ever.

"While VISTA members make a difference at their host sites by increasing the reach of the organization, collectively all members of the North Mississippi VISTA Project are building a better Mississippi," said Adriana Cooper, VISTA leader. "My time as a VISTA member has permitted me to develop my professional skills while serving my community."

The North Mississippi VISTA Project needs applicants for summer and full-year terms of service. VISTA summer associates complete 300 hours of direct service to promote literacy and food security over the
summer. VISTA members serving yearlong terms help host site organizations by writing grants, developing programs, conducting outreach, managing volunteers and strengthening partnerships.

All VISTA members receive a living allowance of approximately $950 per month and can select either an end-of-service education award of $6,195 ($1,311 for summer associates) or a cash stipend of $1,800 ($311 for summer associates). Members serving a yearlong term also are eligible for a health benefit, a child care benefit and a housing stipend, if offered by their host sites.

“The North Mississippi VISTA Project is central to the McLean Institute’s mission to fight poverty through education in Mississippi,” said Albert Nylander, McLean Institute director and professor of sociology. “Our work is needed now more than ever.”

For more information about the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement, visit http://mclean.olemiss.edu/. For more information about the North Mississippi VISTA Project, visit http://vista.olemiss.edu/ or email vista@olemiss.edu.