



Sponsor Responsibilities

Criminal History Checks for Members and Leaders

Below is an overview of sponsor responsibilities regarding the AmeriCorps Criminal History Check policy for members and leaders in the VISTA program. If you have questions about this criminal history check policy, please contact your AmeriCorps Regional Office.

1. Inform all applicants of the Criminal History Check Policy

The AmeriCorps application process for VISTA service requires a criminal history check to ensure community members with whom we work are secure; particularly children, individuals with disabilities, and adults aged 60 and above.

AmeriCorps investigates for past sexual offenses, violent crimes, and crimes that would have a direct bearing on an individual's service. This background check entails a search of the National Sex Offenders Website (NSOPW) and an FBI criminal history check.

2. Review an application for disclosure of a criminal history and discuss the history with the applicant during the interview.

In determining whether to allow the applicant to serve, consider, where applicable, the following:

- Number of offenses in the history;
- Nature of the offense(s);
- Conditions or circumstances that led to the offense(s);
- How long ago the offenses were committed and applicant's age at the time of the offense(s), if pertinent;
- Evidence of rehabilitation or change in behavior (e.g., courses completed, community service, life achievements, motivational statements);
- Whether the applicant is currently on probation or parole.

Note that if a person is on parole or probation, AmeriCorps will accept the individual only under rare, extenuating circumstances. A compelling argument must be made on behalf of the applicant.

- Your organization's capacity to effectively supervise and support the applicant in order to mitigate risk to the program given their criminal history.
- Nature of the VISTA assignment and the value the applicant's experience brings to the assignment.

3. Ensure the applicant's criminal history has been accurately reported on the application.

Misrepresentation or omission of a criminal history by an applicant may result in disqualification for service.

Please ask the applicant whether they disclosed their complete criminal history on the application. If an applicant's criminal history has not been fully disclosed, notify the AmeriCorps Regional Office.

Applicants who disclose a criminal history at the time of application or interview will be asked to provide any relevant court documentation to the AmeriCorps Regional Office.

4. Make recommendation to the AmeriCorps Regional Office

Any criminal history disclosed on an individual's application must be accompanied by a Criminal History Justification Form (CHJF). The AmeriCorps Regional Office is responsible for communicating with both the sponsor and applicant in drafting the CHJF to ensure all supporting details and/or required documentation are provided to the Criminal History Check team at AmeriCorps headquarters.

If the Criminal History Check team supports the CHJF, the AmeriCorps Regional Office may accept the applicant for service. Approval to serve is contingent on the candidate having fully disclosed their history as verified by an FBI Criminal History Check.