

AmeriCorps Issued Debt to Recover Costs Associated with Violations of non-Displacement Regulations

Closed 09/25/2024

The AmeriCorps Office of Inspector General (AmeriCorps OIG) investigated allegations that AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) members at Heal the City Free Clinic (HTC), located in Amarillo, TX, were engaging in prohibited activities. HTC was a VISTA service site for the Lone Star Association of Charitable Clinics, also known as the Texas Association of Charitable Clinics (TXACC).

The evidence collected through the investigation supported findings that HTC planned for and intentionally allowed VISTA members to perform prohibited activities, including, but not limited to allowing the VISTA members to perform direct service such as serving as medical scribes, patient advocates, medical assistants, a dental assistant, and pharmacy technicians filling and dispensing medication, knowing it was against AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Additionally, the investigation found that five VISTA members displaced paid HTC employees, volunteers, or interns.

AmeriCorps OIG referred its findings to AmeriCorps in a Report of Investigation (ROI) and recommended that AmeriCorps disallow costs associated with living allowances and education awards paid to VISTA members who performed prohibited activities or displaced employees. AmeriCorps OIG also recommended that AmeriCorps require HTC to assume responsibility for paying any outstanding education awards, and for AmeriCorps to provide training and technical assistance to TXACC regarding prohibited activities.

Agency/Administrative Actions

AmeriCorps partially concurred with the ROI recommendations. AmeriCorps did not believe that costs associated with VISTA members who were engaged in direct service should be recouped, as indirect service constitutes a programmatic priority and not a violation of federal regulations. AmeriCorps related that it did not have a legal relationship with HTC, and therefore could not issue a debt to HTC to recover the living allowances and disbursed education awards as recommended in the ROI. However, AmeriCorps initiated recoupment actions against TXACC to collect \$80,561.32, reflecting \$61,435.50 in living allowance payments and \$19,125.82 in education awards paid to VISTA members who were found to have violated non-displacement regulations. AmeriCorps also provided the recommended training and technical assistance to TXACC.

Case ID 2022-118