

## **AmeriCorps Disallows Improperly Charged Salary Costs from a VISTA Program**

Closed 03/26/2025

The AmeriCorps Office of Inspector General (AmeriCorps OIG) investigated potential displacement of paid staff at Hawaii Community Assets (HCA), undisclosed dual employment by a program official at HCA and Aloha United Way (AUW), and improper charging of time by two Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program officials at AUW.

The investigation determined that HCA used a VISTA member to serve as its Information Technology (IT) Coordinator for three years and allowed that member to take multiple college classes during normal business hours. Additionally, the investigation found that a VISTA Program Supervisor at AUW covertly obtained a second full-time job as Operations Manager at HCA and submitted timesheets to both organizations claiming full-time work at each for about five months. Leadership at AUW and HCA were unaware of that employee's dual employment, and HCA stopped charging her salary to its VISTA grant after learning of it. Finally, the investigation found that AUW improperly drew down \$19,800 in salary costs for its two VISTA Program Supervisors that should have been charged to non-VISTA programs. The two supervisors spent 17% and 71%, respectively, on non-VISTA programs when they should have worked 100% time on the VISTA program.

AmeriCorps OIG made eight recommendations to AmeriCorps including recommending that AmeriCorps disallow the living allowance and Segal Education Award paid to the HCA member performing IT Coordinator duties, disallow the \$19,800 in salary costs improperly charged to AUW's VISTA program by its two program supervisors, update the VISTA Sponsor and Member Handbooks and training materials to define what constitutes full-time VISTA service and the number of classes or hours of classes VISTA members can take during the workweek, require VISTA members to obtain written approval from the VISTA Member Support Unit to attend classes that last more than two weeks, update regulations and training materials to provide clear guidance that grant funds should be drawn down based on actual expenses and not by budget estimates, and update monitoring protocols of VISTA programs to determine whether other programs allow members to take an excessive amount of college classes to the extent it appears that members are prioritizing education over performing full-time service.

AmeriCorps concurred with two of OIG's eight recommendations. AmeriCorps disallowed the \$19,800 in staff salaries improperly charged to AUW's VISTA program, and the AmeriCorps Office of Monitoring will plan to work with program staff regarding members enrolled in classes to track what is reasonable to ensure compliance.

AmeriCorps did not disallow the payments to the member performing IT Coordinator duties since, while the member's IT duties did not align with his VISTA Assignment Description, HCA did not have a previously existing IT Coordinator that the member displaced. AmeriCorps declined to define full-time service as it allows VISTA sponsors to define what constitutes full-time. AmeriCorps believed its existing guidance provided sufficient parameters for sponsors and

members regarding the number of educational classes members can take, did not see evidence that the classes the member serving as IT Coordinator took interfered with his ability to serve, and left the decision-making authority to the VISTA sponsor as to the appropriate amount of coursework a member may take. Finally, AmeriCorps believed existing training was sufficient to address how grantees manage the financial aspects of their grants.

Case ID 2021-002