

AmeriCorps VISTA Site Violated Program Requirements by Employing a VISTA Member

Closed 03/28/2024

The AmeriCorps Office of Inspector General (AmeriCorps OIG) investigated allegations that AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) members were paid as employees of the Mississippi Center for Re-Entry (MSCRE) while simultaneously receiving an AmeriCorps living allowance for service at the organization, and that MSCRE's founder instructed VISTA members to not disclose their employment relationship to AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps OIG's investigation confirmed that one VISTA member was required to perform duties both within and outside their VISTA Assignment Description (VAD), while simultaneously receiving living allowance payments from AmeriCorps and paychecks from MSCRE. AmeriCorps OIG also confirmed that MSCRE's founder directed VISTA members to not disclose their employment relationships with the organization to AmeriCorps. The AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook states that members are allowed to seek and secure outside part-time employment, but such employment must not conflict with the member's service or service hours as assigned by the sponsor, and members cannot be employees or contractors for the sponsor or sub-site to which they are assigned to serve.

AmeriCorps OIG provided a Report of Investigation (ROI) to AmeriCorps recommending that AmeriCorps provide remedial training to MSCRE on the rules and regulations governing VISTA service and impose special conditions should AmeriCorps award MSCRE funds or serve as a VISTA sponsor again in the future.

Agency/Administrative Actions

AmeriCorps responded to the ROI and stated that MSCRE was no longer a VISTA project, and as such, providing special conditions or training beyond what every VISTA project receives was not necessary and would not result in better support for members. MSCRE appropriately detailed member roles and responsibilities in its VADs and those VADs did not include any unallowable activities. Finally, member terms and conditions clearly prohibit a member from being employed as a staff member or contractor for the sponsor or sub-site to which they are assigned to serve, and this prohibition is made clear in the member and sponsor handbooks and included in the review of terms and conditions that must be agreed to prior to service.

Case ID 2023-039