

# **REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL**

## *City of Salinas, California*

DATE: February 21, 2017

FROM: Megan Hunter, Director, CDD

BY: Lisa Brinton, Senior Planner, CDD

SUBJECT: **MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT WITH THE CORPORATION FOR  
NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE AMERICORPS VISTA  
PROGRAM**

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council approve a resolution (1) authorizing the City Manager, or his designee, to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MA) with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to place five (5) AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers with the City of Salinas and (2) appropriating \$25,656 of Community Development General Fund monies to pay the City's VISTA cost-share.

### **DISCUSSION:**

#### Background

AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. Rather than providing cash grants, the VISTA program places individuals with a sponsoring organization to engage in a year of full-time service to create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

Community Development (CDD) and Library and Community Services (LCSD) Departments partnered to submit a VISTA Concept Paper and Application requesting the placement of five (5) VISTA volunteers ("VISTAs") to facilitate programs and projects in support of the preparation and implementation of the Alisal Vibrancy Plan. At the time of this report, CNCS is reviewing the City's VISTA Application.

#### Summary of VISTA Application

The project area for the Salinas VISTA program is the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) designated Alisal Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (ANSRA), which is also the boundary for the Alisal Vibrancy Plan. (See attached map.) The City's program objective is to create an Alisal Support Team to coordinate the implementation of EDE and Alisal Vibrancy Plan (AVP) action items focused on lifting Alisal residents out of poverty. Proposed projects include: assessing housing conditions and connecting low-income individuals and families with housing resources, working with neighborhood businesses and entrepreneurs to facilitate growth and more employment opportunities

through increased access to capital, creating a health-speaker curriculum in local recreation centers, and increasing the capacity of the library's volunteering tutoring and educational programs.

Two VISTAs will be placed in the LCSD to provide additional help with building the framework for greater volunteer, service learning and intern involvement in LCSD's programs that focus on increasing educational outcomes, offering mentoring for at-risk youth and providing programming and services. Program focus will be on Adult Basic Literacy, High School Equivalency, ESL, Homework center for K-3 students, STEAM/youth mentoring opportunities, and First Five Read, Grow, Play programming.

Three VISTAs assigned to CDD will focus on housing, entrepreneurial and small business development, and healthy living. One CDD VISTA will work on affordable housing issues by creating systems that help connect low-income or special needs residents with appropriate housing resources and a housing safety-net tracking system that helps residents avoid displacement due to code enforcement, fire, or economic circumstances such as job loss or a rent increase. Another will focus on entrepreneurial and small business development, and identifying opportunities for technical assistance and increasing access to capital. The third will connect residents with appropriate healthcare, nutritious food resources, as well as physical fitness and recreation opportunities.

VISTAs will also have a role in engagement and training residents to navigate government systems in order to be long-term advocates for the resources necessary to improve their lives and neighborhoods. VISTAs will assist with the AVP preparation by recruiting and training community leaders who will help mobilize neighborhoods, and facilitate community conversations and AVP implementation efforts. In addition, the VISTAs will help the City organize community led data collection activities and establish topic related working groups that feed ideas into the content of the AVP.

### Summary of CNCS MA

VISTA sponsor organizations are required to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MA) with CNCS. The Standard Form MA is attached. The term of the VISTA placement is for one year. The VISTAs are not employees of City (Sponsor). They fall under a service category created under the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973. CNCS provides VISTAs with a small living allowance based on an area's cost of living. The stipend amount for Monterey County is \$12,828 annually. CNCS also provides healthcare coverage and an educational award up to \$5,815 at the end of service. CNCS encourages and gives preference to sponsor organizations that commit to a cost-share of the VISTAs' living allowance expense. In its application, the City states it will cost-share two of the five VISTAs in the amount of \$25,656. Sponsors pay the cost-share through a reimbursement commitment outlined in the MA. The City is invoiced bi-weekly for its portion of the living allowance.

Under the MA sponsors are to:

- operate their VISTA project in accordance with the approved Application;
- promote, recruit and select VISTAs for each member position;
- provide on-site orientation, training, resources and supervision; and
- comply with CNCS program administration and record retention requirements.

CNCS primary responsibilities include

- posting assignment openings on AmeriCorps VISTA website;
- assisting with application screening and processing to ensure applicants meet VISTA program criteria; and
- providing selected volunteers with pre-service orientation focused on the goals and objectives of the VISTA program.

**ISSUE:**

Shall the City Council authorize the City Manager, or his designee, to execute the MA with the CNCS to provide five (5) VISTAs?

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The City's cost share for two of the five VISTAs is \$25,656. However, our contribution leverages a grant worth over \$80,000 toward support of the five VISTAs. The 2016-2017 Budget does not appropriate funds for the VISTA program. It is requested that unencumbered Community Development Plan and Project Implementation Division General Fund monies budgeted for Outside Services be re-appropriated to pay the City's VISTA cost share. This is a minimal cost for the benefit of receiving five-full time staff to assist with EDE and AVP programs and projects to benefit the Alisal.

**TIME CONSIDERATIONS:**

CNCS has been working closely with City staff throughout the VISTA Application process. There is a February 26, 2017 deadline for both Application and MA approval for this round of VISTA placements. This date is the last day to register for a mandatory VISTA supervisor training in April that must be completed prior to initiating VISTA recruitment. If the City does not meet this deadline, it will have to wait until the next round in May, thus delaying recruitment. In order to have VISTAs selected and training to commence July 1, 2017, it is important that the City obtain the required approvals by February 26, 2017.

**ALTERNATIVES/IMPLICATIONS:**

The City Council could take no action regarding this resolution. However, without an executed MA the City is ineligible to be a VISTA sponsor organization. Current staffing is not adequate to implement EDE action items targeting the Alisal and the preparation of the AVP without the support of the VISTAs. As a result, these action items and planning efforts, which are resource intensive, would either be delayed or modified.

**CITY COUNCIL GOALS:**

The overarching goal of the Salinas VISTA program is to build the capacity of residents and organizations to be active in the development of the Alisal Vibrancy Plan, to implement EDE actions at the neighborhood level ahead of the plan's completion, and to lay the foundation for future collective action to transform the Alisal. East Salinas is one of the areas identified as a Focused Growth Area in the City's accepted draft Economic Development Element (EDE). The preparation of the Alisal Vibrancy Plan is key to the implementation of several EDE goals, policies, and actions items related to promoting economic development and vibrancy in East Salinas. The EDE, as a strategy document, as well as its implementation, aligns closely with the City Council's goals (2016-2019) of:

- I. Economic Diversity and Prosperity
- II. Safe, Livable Community
- III. Effective, Sustainable Government
- IV. Well Planned City and Excellent Infrastructure
- V. Quality of Life

The proposed resolution and Salinas VISTA application is consistent with:

1. 2016-2019 Salinas City Council Strategic Plan Goal I: Economic Diversity and Prosperity; and
2. 2016-2017 Key Strategy: Develop and Implement the Alisal Vibrancy Plan

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

The City of Salinas' mission is to create a safe, healthy, vibrant, and equitable Salinas through targeted revitalization, sustainable policies, well-designed land uses, and an entitlement process that facilitates a high quality of life and encourages community growth and partnerships. The proposed VISTA project includes a multifaceted strategy to alleviate poverty in Salinas' Alisal neighborhood by focusing on the CNCS Priority Focus Areas of Economic Opportunity, Education, and Healthy Futures. This comprehensive proposal aligns with the City of Salinas' citizen-driven Economic Development Element, which acts as a strategic planning document targeting long disregarded economic disparities in the City.

Attachments:  
Resolution  
Standard Form CNCS MA  
ANSRA Map  
VISTA Application Narrative