

## **Instructions for AmeriCorps\*VISTA members applying for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).**

### **Special Considerations for AmeriCorps VISTA members**

- Check out the <sup>1</sup> [VISTA Handbook](#) and Read Chapter 14 “Basic Laws & Federal Regulations.” This is an overview of the laws that determine a VISTA’s eligibility for public assistance.
- Department of Agriculture regulations state that AmeriCorps\*VISTA members who were receiving foods stamps before joining AmeriCorps\*VISTA will not have their SNAP benefits allotment reduced or eliminated as a result of their allowances. Members not receiving SNAP Benefits before joining AmeriCorps\*VISTA will have their allowances counted as income for purposes of determining their level of SNAP benefits eligibility. Members may be held responsible for SNAP benefits overpayments. Carefully check your allotments to ensure that you are not given SNAP Benefits for which you are not eligible. If you apply for SNAP Benefits after you become an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member, you will have a decreased allotment. Department of Agriculture SNAP benefits Regulations pertaining to AmeriCorps\*VISTA income exclusion are contained in the 7 CFR § 273.9.

#### **So what does this mean?**

- If you are applying during VISTA service, your VISTA income will be counted when determining SNAP benefits.
- If you receive SNAP benefits prior to your term of service, your VISTA income will not reduce the benefits that you already receive.
- Individual circumstances determine eligibility. You will only get benefits prior to VISTA if you are unemployed and/or qualify for them at that time.
- To maximize assistance, most VISTAs apply for SNAP prior to Pre Service Orientation (PSO). It is incumbent upon you to plan for and apply accordingly.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nationalservice.gov/help/vistahandbook/chapter14.html>

**If you are applying for SNAP benefits PRIOR to your term of service as an AmeriCorps VISTA, please read the following instructions.**

**Step 1- APPLY, whether or not you believe you are eligible**

- There are enough SNAP benefits for everyone. If you apply and are eligible, you will not be taking benefits from others in need.
- Many potential applicants don't apply, believing that they are ineligible because of assets. For most applicants, there is no asset limit on SNAP benefits, meaning that retirement accounts, cars, or houses, for example, will not be counted against you.
- The Office of Public Assistance (OPA) is EXTREMELY busy and takes applicants on a first come first serve basis. Apply at least 30 days in advance of PSO if you plan to get assistance before your start of service.

**Step 2- Find out where you should be applying.**

- Check out <sup>2</sup> [this list](#) to find a Department of Public Health & Human Services (DPHHS) OPA near your service site.

**Step 3- Get an application**

- Applications are <sup>3</sup> [available online](#), or you can pick up an application at your county of service's OPA.

**Step 4- Filling out application**

- Be sure to follow the application instructions closely, this will expedite the process.
- Some application forms combine SNAP, WIC and TANF on one form, so unless you want to apply for those programs too, make sure that you are filling out the portion of your application for SNAP only. Or fill out the SNAP only application <sup>4</sup> [provided online](#)
- The application will ask you information regarding your finances. **Have** documents on hand, such as:

**Bank statements** (checking, savings)  
**Investment statements** (stocks, bonds)  
**Retirement statements** (401K, IRA, CD)  
**Rental leases**  
**Utility expenses**  
**ID**  
**Paystub**  
**Social security number**

This will make your application much faster and easier for caseworkers to handle.

- Turn in application (in person, by mail, or by fax) to your <sup>5</sup> [county of service's OPA](#).
- Benefits are pro-rated from the time that you turn in your application (or signed front page), so apply earlier in the month if you want more benefits for that month. For example if you are eligible for \$200/month and you turned in your application on June 15<sup>th</sup>, then for the month of June you will receive the pro-rated amount of \$100.

**Step 5- Interview**

- An interview is required for enrollment in SNAP. You may request a phone interview (for example if you are applying from out of state prior to your term of service).
- Bring in (or fax in) all documentation listed in Step 4 to your interview.
- Have the documentation listed Step 4 ready. You may have to fax in paperwork that you missed, thereby slowing down your process.

- If you have just recently become unemployed (prior to your term of VISTA service) you must provide an “Employer Statement” which verifies your last day of work and payment, as well as your last two paystubs.

#### **How to conduct yourself in the interview**

- Because the process may take some time, it is incumbent upon you to plan ahead and set up your SNAP appointment. Apply 3-4 wks, at least, in advance of your PSO.
- Being well prepared with your supporting documentation in hand and completing the application ahead of your interview will go a long way in your relationship with a SNAP case worker.
- As an individual entering a national service program, it is essential that you conduct yourself in a professional manner.
- Do not schedule your SNAP Interview during PSO, or you will miss important trainings and jeopardize your VISTA position.

#### **Additional Information**

- SNAP benefits roll over to the next month if you don't use them up within the current month.
- SNAP helps local economies ( every \$1 dollars of SNAP generates \$1.84 in local economic growth)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/contactus/humancommunityservices.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/snap/index.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/snap/index.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/contactus/humancommunityservices.shtml>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.americorps.gov/>