

## AmeriCorps\*VISTA Progress Report

**Legal Applicant:** Iowa Civil Rights Commission  
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**Project Name:** Iowa's Human and Civil Rights VISTA Project  
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**Grant Number:** 06VSNIA002

**Period Covered by this Report:**  
**From: 09/14/2008 to 03/14/2009**

### Data Updates

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| # of VISTA Members on board at end of reporting period        | 14    |
| # of Community Volunteers serving who are Baby Boomers        | 205   |
| Dollar value of cash resources developed by VISTA Members     | 10485 |
| # of Service Hours performed by Community Volunteers          | 1254  |
| Dollar value of non-cash resources developed by VISTA Members | 4270  |
| # of VISTA Members supported by cost share                    | 4     |
| # of Community Volunteers serving                             | 341   |

### Member and Sponsor Development

|  | Americorps<br>*VISTA<br>Members | Supervisors | CNCS<br>Funded | Funded by<br>Other Source | Comments   |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------------------|--|
| On-Site Orientation                                      | 11                              | 8           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Community Outreach                                       | 7                               | 1           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Community Volunteer<br>Generation/Recruitment            | 5                               | 1           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Effective Volunteer<br>Management                        | 5                               | 1           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Resource Mapping   | 1                               | 0           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Resource<br>Development/Fundraising                      | 7                               | 0           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Grant Writing  | 8                               | 0           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Organizational<br>Development                            | 1                               | 4           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Performance Measures                                     | 1                               | 0           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Tracking Systems   | 1                               | 0           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Information Technology                                   | 4                               | 4           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Developing On-Site<br>Orientations and Training<br>Plans | 0                               | 4           | N              | Y                         |  |
| Other (Please Specify)                                   | 13                              | 5           | Y              | Y                         | Disabilities, ADA, Race, Poverty,<br>Housing, Leadership, Diversity,<br>Discrimination |

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### Project Plan

**Service Category:** Training and Technical Assistance

#### Goals

The goal of this expanded project is to strengthen local linkages, increase networks statewide and more effectively meet the needs of target communities.

#### Service Activities

The goal of this expanded project is to strengthen local linkages, increase networks statewide and more effectively meet the needs of target communities.

Members will participate in the following activities:

Establish an ongoing, web-based template at both the state and local levels.

Conduct initial surveys of individual civil rights projects and programs across Iowa and surveys of local civil rights projects.

Serve as a capacity builder for up to 20 local human or civil rights organizations and the League of Human Rights Agencies.

Test, Evaluate, publish and distribute best practices for ending discrimination and promoting diversity for use by human and civil rights agencies.

Grant research and writing for both local and state projects

Translation of documents

Survey, publish and disseminate national trends.

**Result Type** **Output** **Performance Measure : X**

#### Results

N/A

#### Planned Period of Accomplishment

Quarter 1 - 4

#### Actual Period of Accomplishment

Sept to March

#### Indicator

Indicator: A compendium of best practices on ending discrimination and promoting diversity will be published and then disseminated to local human and civil rights agencies/organizations

#### Target # (number) or % (percent)

1 #

#### Actual # or % to date

1

#### How Measured

Activity log

#### Description of Data Collection

The project director will document the compilation and publication of the compendium. Copies will be made available on the VISTA and ICRC websites.

#### Progress this Reporting Period

We added two best practices to the League and ICRC websites. On the Civil Rights Issues page on the League website, we added 6 employment items, 4 housing items, 2 GLBT items, 1 human and civil rights item, 11 immigration items, 8 Iowa demographics items, 1 neighborhood safety item, and 5 women's issues items. These 30 links bring the total items on the Civil Rights Issues page to 70 items.

**Result Type** **Intermediate Outcome** **Performance Measure : X**

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### Results

The Iowa Communications Network will be utilized to forge partnerships and foster ongoing communication regarding leveraging of resources and sharing of best practices among local civil and human rights organizations. The organizations which participate in the ICN meetings will indicate that due to their participation in the meetings, they feel they have increased their capacity to end discrimination and promote diversity in their local communities.

#### Planned Period of Accomplishment

Quarter 1 - 4

#### Actual Period of Accomplishment

Oct and Jan

#### Indicator

70% of the organizations which participate in the ICN meetings will indicate that due to their participation in the meetings, state that they feel they have increased their capacity to end discrimination and promote diversity in their local community

#### Target # (number) or % (percent)

70 #

#### Actual # or % to date

82

#### How Measured

Survey

#### Description of Data Collection

The survey will be distributed to the organizations who have been the beneficiary of the VISTA members' services. The VISTA supervisor will collect, analyze and report out on the data at year's end.

#### Progress this Reporting Period

At the January 2009 ICN League meeting, 38% of the participants completed a evaluation survey. They stated that the listed components of the meeting were either good or excellent in terms of helping better them better commissioners or staff:

- \* 60% Keeping up with the Jones
- \* 100% Legislative Priorities
- \* 75% VISTA Update
- \* 78.33% average

For the ADA training in January 2009, 86% of participants (including League members, ICRC staff, and the disability community) though the training made them better commissioners, staff, or service providers.

During the October 2008 League meeting, the percentages of participants that stated the different components were either excellent or good in terms of building their capacity as staff or commissions are:

- \* 80% Immigration 102
- \* 100% Employment and Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity Laws
- \* 70% Paradigm of Civil Rights
- \* 80% Building Relationships with City Government
- \* 82.5% average

| Result Type | End Outcome | Performance Measure : X |
|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|
|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|

### Results

Local civil and human rights agencies which are recipients of VISTA service will indicate that due to the efforts of the VISTA, their agency has been able to increase public awareness of civil rights and diversity in their local communities.

#### Planned Period of Accomplishment

Quarter 1 - 4

#### Actual Period of Accomplishment

Oct and Jan

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### Indicator

50% of the agencies which are recipients of VISTA service will indicate that due to the efforts of the VISTA, their agency has been able to increase public awareness of civil rights and diversity in their local communities.

### Target # (number) or % (percent)

50 %

### Actual # or % to date

100

### How Measured

Survey

### Description of Data Collection

The survey will be distributed to the organizations who have been the beneficiary of the VISTA members' services. The VISTA supervisor will collect, analyze and report out on the data at year's end.

### Progress this Reporting Period

In the evaluations distributed at the October 2008 and January 2009 League meetings, all the representatives of local commissions who received the services of VISTA members during this reporting period stated that the work of the VISTA members increased public awareness of civil rights and diversity in their local communities.

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### Challenges

Overall challenges include supervisors who do not provide sufficient guidance or a lack of vision for the work of their VISTA members. Also, funding for the cost-shares is a challenge as all public agencies experience budget cuts.

In Postville, VISTA members are in the midst of ongoing controversy among government, the faith community, Agri-Processors, the general community, and uncertainty and distrust. While they are not doing advocacy of any sort, the lack of community leadership causes a vacuum of clear direction or consensus. In addition, there remains not only constant efforts to identify the necessary resources to adequately relieve the different humanitarian needs, but also the overhanging shadow of a possible total plant shutdown and escalated community crisis.

For the partnership with the Iowa Immigration Education, the VISTA overcame initial issues with the technological aspect of website management. This has been resolved through continued use of the computer applications in question, as well as the use of available internet resources.

In Ames, challenges deal with volunteer retention and community involvement. With the help of a training provided by Everyday Democracy (a national nonprofit devoted to training communities about study circles) and our local VISTA, new life has been breathed into the volunteers.

The VISTA member in Dubuque experienced challenges relating to resident engagement, cross-cultural interaction, and leveraging of resources. The process of engaging residents was difficult in terms of sustaining their input and attendance at community meetings and events. A constant struggle experienced by the VISTA was discovering new and innovative ways to attract residents and soliciting their opinions. While cross-cultural interaction was at times achieved with minimal or no contention, from time-to-time cultures (race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status) clashed. Garnering sufficient or new resources was, and will continue to be, a constant struggle. Thankfully, the stimulus plan has presented an inimitable set of opportunities which will benefit the Multicultural Family Center, a local non-profit and major partner of the Human Rights Commission.

### Recruitment

With each round of recruitment, we find more places to post the VISTA opportunities, with a current list of over 90 organizations and 200 people. Additional sites desiring summer or full-time VISTA members then recruit within their local communities.

One of the challenges that we have faced is when local sites neglect the recruitment process and offer positions without explaining what VISTA is or assessing if the candidates would be good fits. As a result, we have had one person choose to leave the program at PSO before taking the oath of service and another person leaving a little more than a month after beginning service. Since then, we have been more intentional in walking local sites through the recruitment process and holding them accountable for the decisions they make regarding positions.

The second challenge, which only appeared at the end of this reporting period, is having more agencies wanting to be part of our VISTA Project than we have positions. To handle the growing number of requests as more people learn about us, we have created a priority system that gives preference to those who offer financial contributions toward offsetting our cost share and overhead expenses.

With the rapid expansion of our project, we have more overlap between incoming and outgoing VISTA members. This allows us to have the outgoing members train and mentor the incoming members. We are also making available, in electronic form, samples of successful practices and projects. Some sites have created manuals so that new people can be easily integrated into current initiatives.

In an effort to recruit for a summer and a year-long VISTA, the current VISTA member in Ames has been featured in the city's monthly utility bill newsletter, local newspaper, and local radio stations' morning broadcasts. Advertisements were posted on an organization Facebook and sent to a couple hundred Iowa State University students connected through this online community. The current VISTA member will be facilitating a transitional training for the year-long VISTA starting late in the summer. The summer VISTA will be directly mentored by the current VISTA member.

The present VISTA in Dubuque has recorded and clearly organized his work products. The VISTA is also considering ways to

## Narratives

ensure a smooth transition between stakeholders who have a close working relationship with the VISTA, and a new VISTA. The VISTA member is working in a team environment, particularly with respect to the Multicultural Family Center; because the new member will be able to join a team with a united focus, there will be better consistency. Recruitment announcements have been forwarded to a large, local e-mail network, including local colleges and local volunteer networks that assist with human rights related work in the community.

### Training/Technical Assistance Needs

The two types of trainings we would like to see offered by CNCS include: 1) quality and advanced grant writing and 2) website development and management.

### Partnership/Collaboration Development

Ames: City of Ames (provide shared supervision and office space for all Ames VISTA members); ISU Extension Services (provide supervision and shared coordination of Community Conversation); Ames Community Conversation (are coordinated by the VISTA members); Iowa Civil Rights Commission (provide supervision and lend VISTA members to the Ames community)

Davenport: local school districts for fair housing poster contest

Des Moines: Des Moines Public Library and Dahls' for International Human Rights Day celebration; local businesses and human rights commissions for the Fair Housing Symposium

Dubuque: The Dubuque Human Rights VISTA Project is unique. The local office and Commission seeks partnerships with a variety of community projects and entities in an effort to build capacity through addressing issues of poverty and discrimination for groups protected under civil rights law. The Human Rights Department has established relations with the following organizations: The Multicultural Family Center, Every Child, Every Promise Initiative, Project H.O.P.E., and the Washington Neighborhood Revitalization Project. The Multicultural Family Center is a local nonprofit organization that empowers neighbors, families, and individuals by promoting personal growth and participation in the community. The Multicultural Family Center seeks innovative ways to build cross-cultural collaboration and civic engagement, as well as, provide meeting, recreational and instructional facilities for families, youth and downtown neighborhood residents. The VISTA Human Rights Project--in partnership with the Multicultural Family Center (MFC)--constructs connections between the Center and groups protected under civil rights law, primarily the Latino and African-American populations. The VISTA helped organize and facilitate the strategic planning process for the MFC culminating in the production of a 15-page strategic plan that will be used to garner funds and recruit board members. The VISTA also reestablished a connection to the Latino community through the creation of the Cafecito, a coffee hour hosted for Spanish speakers. The VISTA partnered with the local community college NICC in order to have ELL classes offered at the MFC when it moves to its new location. The VISTA is in the process of creating a logic model to assess one of the MFC's most successful programs.

The Human Rights VISTA Project collaborates with the "Every Child, Every Promise" initiative through its partnership with the Multicultural Family Center. The Center adopted the Five Promises outlined by the initiative to re-focus its service to the youth and families of Dubuque. Programming or projects structured under the Human Rights VISTA Project in accordance with the Multicultural Family Center follows the Five Promises of "Every Child, Every Promise." Project H.O.P.E. and the Human Rights VISTA Project partnered to aid in the alleviation of poverty and the working poor through helping to construct connections between social service agencies, job training programs, and local businesses. The building of connections to better the economic status of individuals, as carried out under project H.O.P.E., aligns directly with the mission of VISTA. The hope of the Human Rights VISTA Project is to also make sure that those who find employment under project H.O.P.E. (who may come from a position of poverty) understand the middle-class work environment they are entering. The same idea of understating will also need to be established among middle-class managers who take on employees from Project H.O.P.E. The VISTA helped translate and interpret surveys distributed to the Latino Community. He also helped translate material and recorded a PSA for the earned income tax credit initiative.

The Human Rights VISTA Project collaborates with the Washington Neighborhood Revitalization on issues relating to economic development, primarily workforce development, and social/community issues such as race relations and local engagement in the neighborhood. The Washington Revitalization is in its infancy at the moment. Currently, a citizen coordinating committee is forming to develop a strategic plan. Also, a consultant is garnering feedback from various community stakeholders and residents in an effort to better understand what issues are facing the Washington Neighborhood.

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The Human Rights VISTA Project directly assisted in the revitalization process. The VISTA contacted various Latino and African-American residents for meetings with the consultant.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission: The VISTA members at the commission collaborated with the Chinese Association of Iowa, planners of the Latino Heritage Festival, Capital City Pride, One Iowa, the local district of the United Methodist Church, the Commission on Native American Affairs, the State Historical Building, the Iowa Immigration Education Coalition, the ICRC State Fair Planning Committee, multiple local non-profits, over 20 local human and civil rights commissions, State of Iowa government, other VISTA Leaders across the nation, Bethesda Lutheran Church in Ames, the Iowa Pride Network, Commission on Asians and Pacific Islanders, Commission on the Status of African American Affairs, disability organizations, the Iowa Abraham Bicentennial Commission, the Des Moines Register, University of Iowa, University of Northern Iowa, Friends of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission, Greater Des Moines Friends, private colleges around the state, American Red Cross, Commission on Volunteer Service, Lutheran Services in Iowa, National Federation of the Blind, and the Commission on the Status of African Americans. In conjunction with the Iowa State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service, VISTA members reached out to hundreds of organizations and individuals across the state to link them with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service events. This included phone, email, and personal visits with service project sites and coordinators; publicity; database entry; coordination of food pantry delivery logistics; photographing multiple projects in the central Iowa region; transfer of information between two different websites where people could sign up to volunteer at or host service projects; and participation in local projects. The VISTA members also encouraged all of the other VISTA members in our Project to participate in or coordinate service projects.

Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans: SAA: Drake University has been a major ally and resource: it has held two events there and is currently working on a third. It has never had to pay for the space and all of the volunteers are Drake students. It has also worked very closely with ICASA (Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault) to develop information events and the VISTA member has attended their events as well to show support. The VISTA member is currently working on building a working relationship with The CENTER, the LGBT resource center here in Des Moines in regard to "The Roundtable," a group for LGBT women of color.

Iowa Department of Human Rights: Worked with Native American tribes in Iowa, Sister to Sister mentoring program, and Greater Des Moines Partnership

Postville: Collaboration has begun regarding the housing rehabilitation project with a non-profit based out of Waukon, IA, called Allamakee New Beginnings. Hopefully, that partnership will sustain even after VISTA volunteers move on. Iowa State Extension provided budgeting workshop for residents. Other partnerships include: Community Action Agency, First Lutheran Church in Decorah (best practices for food pantry), NE Iowa Food Bank (best practices and assistance), St. Bridget's Catholic Church (T-Visa translations), Jewish boys' school in Postville (food needs), Master Gardener (community garden), Iowa Legal Aid, and the Archdiocese of Dubuque (personal stories project).

Sioux City: The Siouxland Coalition to End Homelessness collaborated with the Sioux City Human Rights Commission VISTA Project to address the needs of tenants that were being displaced from rental properties due to foreclosures. The collaborative activities consisted of organizing and staffing volunteer run office that offered resources and direction to agencies to people seeking help, as well as individual case work.

As a group, the VISTAs collaborated with the three local colleges to promote events concerning Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Black History Month. Main contribution was publicity, by writing press releases and hanging posters. Austin partnered with the Sioux City chapter of the NAACP for an upcoming Juneteenth event. During this time period, they were in the initial stages of planning the event. The NAACP proposed the idea of having a Juneteenth celebration in January. Late February, it was decided that the SCHRC would take on the event. One VISTA member took on event planning as one of his primary duties.

The VISTA member at the Midtown Family Community Center continues her previous partnerships as described in the prior progress report. Significant partnerships took place with Morningside College, Boy Scouts, Briar Cliff, Our Savior's Lutheran Church (food pantry), Sisters of St. Francis, Jones Street Neighborhood Coalition, Iowa Finance Authority, the Commission on Native American Affairs, Sunnybrook Community Church; HUD, and ISU Extension Services.

Waterloo: Boys & Girls Club (youth outreach); Social Action, Inc. (community conversations)

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### Resource Development

Ames: Current VISTA member is responsible for volunteer recruitment, training, retention, and collaboration of projects. Donations have been provided by the Morning & Noon Rotary Clubs and monetary donations for group trainings and food at trainings. Similar donors are also projected to sponsor the purchase of a block party trailer for the Ames Community Conversations. Community volunteers have been instrumental in forming subcommittees to raise such funds.

Commission on the Status of African Americans: The VISTA members procured space for free from Drake University, estimated at a \$200.00 value. The volunteers have been Drake students who have assisted the VISTA member in IT training as well as advertising events in the form of listserv announcements as well as free posted flyers and posters. These volunteers also assist the VISTA member by describing what the needs of their students are and how the Commission can reach out to Drake's student body. They have helped develop and plan events for Drake students to encourage involvement and awareness. Most of the volunteers are with from the Drake community, as the VISTA member lives very close to Drake and is involved in their LGBT group.

Des Moines: The VISTA members secured a free set of admission tickets to Des Moines area attractions to be given as a prize for people who stopped by their booth at I'll Make Me a World in Iowa. The estimated donation was \$50. Mikel Johnson applied for and received a \$10,000 grant from Prairie Meadows for a fair housing campaign.

Dubuque: While there were no cash donations garnered by the VISTA during this reporting period, he procured free training by professional mediators valued at \$1500 and a \$40 coffee donation for Latino Cafecito through the Multicultural Family Center. The community volunteers were personally contacted and asked to either perform direct service at the Multicultural Family Center (MFC) or came to some community event that was organized around the MFC, Project HOPE, or the Washington Neighborhood revitalization process. Other resources developed include: strategic plan for the MFC; website updates; logic model; brochures; timeline; human rights day display; promotional material for Commission Speakers Bureau (including press releases and PSAs); translations; and promotional material for Spanish coffee hour.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission: The VISTA members created a variety of publications during this reporting period. Geof Fischer published a report on employment issues regarding ex-offenders. For the League, a newsletter and brochure were created. To help cover the expenses related to the upcoming booth at the Iowa State Fair, sponsorship packets to be used with past donors and the Central Iowa Society of Human Resource Management member organizations. The greatest resource development came through the expansion of the League and VISTA Project website, the creation of a League Blog, and using Facebook as a new approach to social networking for Ames, ICRC, and the Iowa Immigration Education Coalition.

Iowa Immigration Education Coalition: VISTA member is currently managing a stakeholder website, as well as managing the transfer of a new revamped site. He was involved with the initial meeting with IT company, Global Reach, in an effort to assess the possible benefits of a website management web application. During this time, Global Reach offered their services at an approximately 50% discount.

Sioux City: The resources developed for the Sioux City Human Rights Commission have primarily been in the form of business donations and volunteer man-power. On December 10, 2008, the commission celebrated Universal Human Rights Day by awarding the War Eagle Civil Rights Award to two people and two organizations in our community. The ceremony was followed by a luncheon for which VISTAs obtained two \$40 coffee Cambros donations from Starbucks Coffee Company.

The Iowa Commission on Native American Affairs held a meeting in Sioux City on January 16, 2009, for which three VISTAs obtained \$135 in grocery donations and 30 lbs of pork loin. To receive these donations, the VISTAs drafted a letter to each of the businesses and hand delivered the request to the store managers.

On February 28 and March 7, volunteers moved a local family and obtained and moved furniture as well. There were a total of 17 volunteers that helped with the effort and they were obtained by sending out emails through the Siouxland Coalition to End Homelessness as well as the Human Rights Commission asking the community for help. Often times when people within this network read the email they would forward it to someone they personally knew that could help. The need to help tenants in the community had been very well publicized through the news stations and newspaper and many people were ready to help in any way possible. A successful and helpful strategy involved preparing the public by requesting people to be ready to help when the need was raised. For example, at the Commission meeting in February, one VISTA member who is coordinating the

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housing crisis response gave an update to the commissioners and requested they be ready to help when the specific need came.

For the Midtown Family Community Center, the VISTA member received approximately \$1000 of donated IT assistance, two used computers for free from Department of Housing and Urban Development (value of \$1000), and six new bookshelves (valued at \$280).

### Sustainability

Ames: Through the current VISTA member's efforts, along with future summer and year-long VISTA involvement, a concerted effort has and will be made to streamline communication between and within Community Conversations "Action Teams" to address diversity issues. This has been most effective through the use of an interactive website, and properly updated group calendars and email lists. An "Action Team" has been formed to specifically address the efforts of VISTA members and has been considering the potential for grant research and writing to fundraise for a paid position.

Des Moines: working on the reorganization of Friends of Greater Des Moines

Dubuque: Sustainability of the VISTA's work will be achieved through the use of the items or projects developed by the VISTA. For the Human Rights Commission, the timelines of Iowa Civil Rights History, brochures, and promotional materials will become part of the arsenal of information employed by the Commission. The strategic plan and all the work that accompanied it will guide the MFC into the future as it constructs a board of directors and continues to raise funds. The VISTA has been closely involved in assisting a team to develop the long term capacity of the MFC. In addition to strategic planning, City government support for two paid positions, with benefits, as well as recruitment of a Board that includes community leaders who share a vision of the necessity of the MFC to a strong and vibrant community, will insure that the MFC will be able to continue and will not be contingent on the goodwill of local donors.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission: creation of additional manuals for both the VISTA Project and ICRC projects; cross-training of VISTA members; sponsorship packets that can easily be updated for any major event; continued addition of civil rights issues resources and best practices; greater emphasis on researching possible grants and applying for applicable grants

Iowa Immigration Education Coalition: will be training the organization's interns with the website management applications along with other relevant technology

Postville:

- \* Food Pantry: criteria/guidelines for use by clientele. This will improve the workings of the food pantry. Food Pantry User Manual to assist with volunteer transition and recruitment as well as food pantry maintenance.
- \* Community Garden: having food pantry clients manage the food pantry plot. Incorporate ISL classes/study sessions with the workings of the community garden
- \* Housing Rehabilitation: the city of Postville to take the lead/have important role.

Sioux City: creation of intake forms and manuals to handle the housing crisis

### Multi-Site Performance

While many national community service projects focus on relieving short term problems or focusing on a specific issue, the Iowa Human & Civil Rights VISTA Project attempts to address root causes of poverty and discrimination, in addition to building the capacity of agencies mandated to enforce the state's civil rights laws or educate the general public on human rights. While the entire project deals with poverty and discrimination, by expanding to multiple sites across the state, it has been able to tailor the approaches to addressing poverty and discrimination to fit the context of the different communities. This means some VISTA members might work with afterschool programs and community centers in low-income neighborhoods, while other VISTA members connect immigrants and refugees with humanitarian relief and ESL classes. Due to the number of VISTA members in our project, when a crisis happens, such as a series of mass evictions or the discovery of the exploitation of dependent adults with mental disabilities, we can pull members from their sites to address the immediate needs and then create positions to look at long-term solutions, strategic planning, and strengthening community partnerships.

In this reporting period, we broadened our reach to include emergency humanitarian relief for a four county region impacted by the temporarily closing of the area's main employer following an immigration raid, a community conversations on diversity initiative in a college town experiencing major changes in demographics, a theater through the arts educational program for

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low-income students, and a statewide community conversations project to address the employment needs and rights of dependent adults with limited mental abilities.

### Other Accomplishments

Ames: Current VISTA member, Adam Cotton, has been featured in local radio broadcasting.

Commission on the Status of African Americans: SAA: The VISTA member developed a blog for the Commission to not only extend the reach, but also to appeal to a younger audience. The VISTA member writes all the articles and completely developed the site. The site has had about 400 hits and the Commission hasn't even advertised for it yet, so they are hoping that number will quickly rise once they push the presence of the website.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission: facilitated a statewide training on the updates to the American Disabilities Act

Postville: VISTA members continue to conduct a needs assessment of Jewish community. Most of this community is unable to use the food pantry, so a voucher system was set up with a kosher grocery store. They were also featured in the online version of TIME Magazine.

### Stories

Ames: During the current AmeriCorps VISTA member's service to the City of Ames, he has been responsible for the coordination, training, and productivity of six "Action Teams." These team members collectively account for over 50 volunteers, including various city employees, retired community members, ISU students, faculty, and staff, clergy members, school board members, as well as several city council members, the police chief, the assistant city manager, and the Mayor of Ames. As an example of success, one of these Action Teams has begun fundraising, has done research on effectiveness and costs, and made preparations for the purchase and utilization of a block party trailer. This party trailer is projected to be in use by early July, if not sooner, and will serve the entire Ames community, including low income, minority, and recently formed neighborhoods. Other action teams will address diversity issues in the areas of education, ongoing dialogues, and marketing campaigns associated with inclusiveness, etc.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission: One of the activities that the second through sixth grade students participated in during the VISTA members' presentations at the State Historical Building in January had the students come up with two lists: one on how people are different from each other and one on how we are all the same. For some of the ways people are all the same, students talked about people being over 90% compose of water, having over 300 bones, and all needing to go the bathroom. Once during the reenactment of the Underground Railroad, we were discussing the need for code words and phrases. To let the inhabitants of the safe house know that some slaves would be delivered that night, one student announced that later that night he would be bringing some pigs and chickens. The kids all shouted "no" when asked if they thought the boy was going to actually carry over some pigs and chickens after supper. A girl who was part of the group at the house quipped up, "Good, because I'm a vegetarian."

Iowa Immigration Education Coalition: The current website Geof Fischer has been involved with is a public resource available to everyone with internet access. It intends to inform the general public (within Iowa) of certain stakeholder issues.

Postville: About 15 Jewish families can now eat better and shop in town due to the voucher system provided from funds for the food pantry.

Sioux City: In early January, it surfaced that 24 properties housing low-income tenants were going into foreclosure and many would have to be vacated. It was estimated that around 100 families would be affected. The three VISTA members worked to organize a meeting for displaced tenants offering them resources and different property opinions. A bi-weekly office was created to offer this service to those affected. VISTAs used volunteers to both staff the office and move families into new homes. The VISTAs also did capacity building by creating and organizing intake forms on all the tenants that were helped as well as creating volunteer briefing and training for community volunteers.

### Attachments and Links

1. The League website: <http://www.freewebs.com/iowacivilrights>
2. League Blog: <http://iacivilrights.blogspot.com/>
3. Iowa VISTA Project website: [www.iowavistaproject.webs.com](http://www.iowavistaproject.webs.com)

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4. Iowa Civil Rights Commission website: [www.state.ia.us/government/crc](http://www.state.ia.us/government/crc)
5. Iowa Civil Rights Commission Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/pages/Des-Moines-IA/Iowa-Civil-Rights-Commission/80313175514?sid=67e3fec03569effe4b44fe84a1681874&ref=search>
6. Des Moines website: <http://www.ci.des-moines.ia.us/departments/HRT/index.htm>
7. Des Moines Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=61448789490>
8. Sioux City Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=39975528958>
9. Ames Community Conversations website: <http://sites.google.com/site/amescommunityconversations>
10. Ames Community Conversations Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1444534756>
11. Multicultural Connections Ministry Team (through Bethesda Lutheran Church in Ames) website: <http://newames.webs.com>
  
12. Iowa Immigration Education Coalition current website: <http://www.iowaimmigrationeducation.org/>
13. Iowa Immigration Education Coalition Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1586191886>
14. League newsletter
15. League brochure
16. Revised Midtown Family Community Center brochure
17. Ex-Offenders Report
18. Multicultural Family Center strategic plan
19. History of Iowa civil rights
20. Media release for Speakers Bureau
21. Project HOPE translation
22. Dubuque brochures (emailed)
23. Speaker's Bureau info (emailed)
24. Earned Income Tax Credit info (emailed)
25. Step-by-Step Story
26. Postville Holiday Party Flyer
27. Postville articles: [http://www.governor.iowa.gov/news/2008/12/4\\_2.php](http://www.governor.iowa.gov/news/2008/12/4_2.php),  
<http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1874205,00.html>,  
<http://www.jewishcommunityaction.org/organize/Postville%20Update.htm>, <http://iowaindependent.com/9277/judge-heads-to-postville-plant-production-resumes>,  
<http://www.gazetteonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?Date=20081203&Category=NEWS&ArtNo=712039947&SectionCat=rss01&Template=printart>, and  
<http://waukonstandard.com/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=45385&SectionID=16&SubSectionID=&S=1>
28. Three Sioux City newspaper articles
29. Status of African Americans blog: <http://iowaafricanamericans.blogspot.com/>
30. Innovations Award application
31. Des Moines brochures
32. Sponsorship packet for the Iowa State Fair
33. Recruitment flyer and newsletter