

VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

Title: Farmers' Market Economic Development VISTA

Sponsoring Organization: MN Farmers' Market Association (MFMA)

Project Name: Farmers' Market Sustainability Project

Project Number:

Project Period: 02/14/23-02/13/24

Site Name (if applicable):

Focus Area(s)

Primary: Economic Opportunity

Secondary: Capacity Building

Note:

If your VAD is not accepted, the State Office will note the reason(s) why here.

VISTA Assignment Objectives and Member Activities

Goal of the Project: The ultimate goal of this project (after 3 years) is to have built an expansive framework that trains our community of farmers' markets to be thriving, professionally-managed, and synergistic; so they in turn, can actively support our local farmers, food makers, and consumers. In year 1 the VISTA worked on data collection and community outreach. In year two, the VISTA continued data collection, brought industry leaders together to form the Farm Finance Resource Collaborative, and developed the Farmers' Market Academy (FMA) training. The year 3 VISTA will continue building capacity of farmers' markets as well as small farmers and food makers, including those who are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) in the areas of marketing, financial literacy, and other business supports to build capacity of farmers' markets and vendors to serve their community's needs for fresh local produce, protein, and cottage food.

The third-year emphasis will be on implementation, evaluation, and sustainability while continuing to build trusting relationships with the region's food system stakeholders. The VISTA will continue work in 4 key project areas: continuing to support the FM360 metrics collection project through data collection and coordination, implementing the Farmers' Market Academy and evaluating its success, organizing the Farm Finance Resource Collaborative to continue building resources for small scale farmers, and capacity for sustainability.

Objective 1: FM360 Metrics Collection Project (5/13/2023 – 10/31/2023) Continue to facilitate the collection of FM360 surveys at farmers' markets in the SE region of the state. Increase the percent of farmers' markets participating from 25% to 40% and work on building the FM360 team capacity.

VISTA Activities:

1. Build the capacity to sustain data collection in the Southeast and other regions
 - a. Communicate the benefits of the survey results to all market managers in the region and continue to build relationships with managers who did not participate last year

- b. Organize volunteers to help collect customer surveys to reach more farmers' markets in the Southeast
 - c. Train volunteers to be regional data collection coordinators to expand capacity statewide
2. Conduct customer surveys at all participating SE farmers' markets.

Objective 2: Farmers' Market Academy (FMA) (2/20/2023-3/30/2023 - 11/01/2023-2/13/2024)

Evaluate the FMA and based on the evaluation outcomes, make adjustments to improve the training opportunities for farmers' market stakeholders in 2024. This objective will most likely be split between the first and last quarter and will require the VISTA to draw on the FM360 survey results from year one and two, and collaborate with partners to meet the identified capacity building needs of local producers.

VISTA Activities:

1. Implement, and evaluate the Farmers' Market Academy pilot.
 - a. Coordinate the trainings for farmers' market managers and vendors in the SE region.
 - b. Evaluate the success and impact of the trainings.
 - c. Determine if any changes need to be made to the trainings.
 - d. Explore how to make the trainings more effective.
2. Prepare a plan to make the FMA more accessible to BIPOC communities by adequately identifying and prioritizing stakeholder needs.
 - a. Identify and pursue grants that would allow us to translate FMA and general MFMA resources.
 - b. Analyze best means to communicate these opportunities with various communities.

Objective 3: Farm Finance Resource Collaborative (FFRC) (2/14/2023 – 2/13/2024) Coordinate collaborative meetings to build an environment of shared resources and goals around farm finance literacy for small and medium sized farmers (both specialty crop and livestock).

VISTA Activities:

1. Create meeting agendas and facilitate conversations around farm finance resources with collaborative members.
 - a. Help the collaborative continue to set goals as a group to increase farmers' access to understanding how to keep financial records and why it's important.
2. Find creative ways to make this information accessible to farmers' market vendors in the SE while upholding MFMA's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) goals in this work.

Objective 4: Anti-Racist Farmers' Market Toolkit Pilot Program (11/01/2023 – 2/13/2024) Plan and implement the first Anti-Racist Farmer Market Toolkit pilot program with 5 farmers markets in the SE region of the state. Work with industry leaders and find funding for external evaluative support while upholding MFMA's DEI goals for 2023.

VISTA Activities:

1. Recruit 5 farmers' markets in the SE region of the state to participate in the pilot program.
 - a. Organize and schedule meetings / check-ins with market managers and the pilot team.
2. Begin to build partnerships to create a network of supportive nonprofits, foundations, educational and agriculturally related entities that can sustain the Anti-Racist Farmers' Market work and increase its accessibility.
 - d. Create an asset map of the local resources available for translation and interpretation services that market managers can use.