

VISTA LIVING GUIDE

Thank you for your commitment to a year of service to help alleviate poverty in America and specifically in Minnesota. While starting as a VISTA you received a lot of information on volunteer recruitment, capacity building, poverty alleviation, grant writing, etc. All very helpful tools in getting you started, but how are you to support yourself during this time?

This document is to support your life as a VISTA. How do you make the most out of your living allowance, what free resources or discounts are available to you, what is there to do around Minnesota, and much more!

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This is not a comprehensive list. If you know of something that is not on this list or needs editing, please inform the Minnesota VISTA Leaders through this [Google Form](#). All information you can provide will be added to the Guide.

For professional development needs, please refer to the [VISTA Professional Development Guide](#).

BUDGETING

Consider exploring free online resources for budgeting tips and tools:

- [VISTA Campus: “Managing Your Living Allowance”](#) offers information on everyday savings, budgeting, and financial literacy.
- [Prepare + Prosper](#) provides free tax prep to low- and moderate-income individuals. Prepare + Prosper helps Minnesotans move out of poverty by providing pathways to increase income, build assets to become financially secure, and by advocating for change that breaks down barriers to financial success.
- Budgeting Apps: Mobile apps are becoming popular tools for helping VISTA members manage their living allowance. These are a few recommended, free apps: [Mint](#), [BudgetEase](#).
- [The Simple Dollar](#) is a place where anyone can come to acquire financial information on finding the best products and services, saving money, making smart investments, and controlling personal finances.
- [EMERGE](#) is a local community development organization that helps community members with financial literacy. Their website has many guides that help with different elements of finance management.
- [Ramsey County Financial Assistance Services](#)

HOUSING

Multiple housing resources exist to help you find a safe, enjoyable and affordable place to live. Here are some useful steps to consult and complete before you find a place:

1. Identify your Price Range
 - a. Identify your expenses and living allowance to prepare a monthly budget using the [Budget Calculator](#) at VISTA Campus.
 - b. If possible, your rent should be less than 50% of your monthly income.
 - c. Consider living with roommates for price reduction if you need/want to
2. Find the Right Neighborhood For You
 - a. Read up on the ins-and-outs of moving to the Twin Cities at [Live MSP](#)

- b. Explore different neighborhoods on [Nextdoor](#), the neighborhood social media platform
 - c. Determine your commute to work with [MetroTransit's Trip Planner](#)
 - d. Learn what's in your area: [Walk Score](#)
3. Search for a Place to Live
- a. What to look for when going apartment hunting [article](#)
 - b. Apartment Search Engines
 1. [Apartment Guide](#)
 2. [Pad Mapper](#)
 3. [Rent](#)
 4. [Craigslist](#)
 5. [Zillow](#)
 6. [Nextdoor](#)

For those serving in the Twin Cities:

Each year a google doc is created to connect AmeriCorps members to potential housemates. [Spreadsheet can be found here.](#)

Recommended Affordable Housing: (please note that some of these options are at faith-based locations)

- [Twin Cities Houses of Hospitality](#) is an intentional community in Minneapolis/St. Paul, rooted in Christian hospitality, that engages young adults (age 21-30) around connections between a life of faith, service, justice and vocation.
- [Urban Neighbors](#) is a faith-motivated, ministry-of-presence experience for college students and working professional. Both single people and married couples are welcome to be Urban Neighbors. Community members volunteer 2-3 hours weekly with a local ministry or organization.

Temporary Housing

- [AirBnB Vouchers for service members](#): AirBnB and Service Year Alliance are working together to support and engage young people who serve communities through a service year. Airbnb vouchers are meant to help service year corps members through short-term transition periods.

TRANSPORTATION

Note: Every VISTA program provides different transportation supports. Please check with your VISTA Leader or VISTA Program Manager around reimbursement/support.

- [Metro Transit](#): plan your trip, routes and schedules, stops and stations, and find information on single/monthly passes.
- Bike + Bus: take your bike on the bus, with bike racks on front or inside the light rail, [here's a video about how to!](#)
- Ridesharing: [HourCar](#), [Rideshare through MetroTransit!](#)

Biking:

- If you want to purchase a bicycle check out the Minneapolis police department [bike auction](#) or simply try out [Nice Ride](#).
- Calculate the length of your trip with [Map My Ride](#). The app is awesome! Good for any kind of exercise too!
- [Spokes](#), [Cycles for Change](#), and [Grease Rag](#) offer free space, tools and workshops for repairing your bike. Cycles additionally sells used bikes for affordable prices and has volunteer opportunities and Learn to Ride classes for new riders.
- [Our Streets Minneapolis](#) inspires people to bicycle and advocates for a city where everyone feels comfortable riding.
- Check out the protected, cross-city [Midtown Greenway bike path](#).

WINTER TRANSIT

Winter Biking:

Bike Maintenance

- [Winter Bicycle Maintenance and Cleaning](#): Keeping your bike clean is the key to ensuring your ride doesn't fall apart. Here are a few maintenance tips to keep your bike healthy during the winter.

Layering Up

- [What do you wear in winter?](#): Our Streets Minneapolis asked just that question. See what others are wearing this winter season!

Driver Etiquette

- Drivers should be aware of cyclists and the dangers they face when biking. Read [Winter Biking Tips](#) to learn more about what measures they should take when approaching or passing a cyclist in winter.

Winter Driving:

Car Maintenance

- Prepare your car for winter before the snow hits. [View these 9 Winter Car Maintenance Tips](#).

Survival Kit

- [How to Make a Winter Survival Kit](#) will help you prepare for the snow and if you were to get stuck.

Snow Emergency Alerts

- If you are living in [St. Paul](#) or [Minneapolis](#), sign-up for their Snow Emergency Alerts. This will provide you with information on plowing routes so you don't get towed!

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) help Minnesotans with low incomes get the food they need for nutritious and well-balanced meals. The program provides support to help stretch your household food budget. SNAP is not intended to meet all of your household's food needs--it is a supplement. The amount of benefits you might get is based on your income, expenses, and the number of people in your household. If approved for the program, you will get an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card which is like a debit card. Each month, your benefits will be credited to your EBT account.

- View the [VISTA Handbook](#) to understand the rules of the Food Stamps Program and how it applies to VISTAs.
- To learn more about applying for and utilizing SNAP, visit the [Minnesota Department of Human Resources](#).
- Children's Defense Fund created a resource called [Bridge to Benefits](#) where Individuals enter information about income, household, and expenses and Bridge to Benefits identifies and links to applications for public support (SNAP, energy assistance, child care assistance, etc) that may be available to the individual. This helps identify what a member may be eligible for.

EATING CHEAPLY

Farmers' market is a cheap and healthy way to stock up on fresh produce. Many farmers markets also have a Double Dollars program, in which SNAP recipients receive double the amount of "dollars" at the farmer's market. This means you can get double the amount of produce! Check out:

- [St. Paul Farmers' Market](#)
- [Minneapolis Farmers Market](#)
- Search Farmers Markets across the state by visiting [Minnesota Grown](#)

Co-Ops are another option for getting healthy foods. Prices are high because of the local, organic, and fair trade goods, but it can be affordable to buy in bulk. Check out:

- Search the [Minnesota Co-op Directory List](#)

For everyday groceries and pantry essentials, chain stores usually offer the best prices and selection. View the statewide locations of Minnesota's large, affordable grocery staples:

- [Aldi Foods](#)
- [Cub Foods](#)
- [Trader Joe's](#)
- [Econo Foods](#)
- [Target](#)
- [Mike's Discount Foods](#)

[Fare For All](#) is a great way to save money on quality, nutritious food. They buy fresh fruits, vegetables, and frozen meat in bulk to save you up to 40% off grocery store prices.

[Good Grocer](#) operates through community volunteers who operate the store and in turn receive a discount on their groceries. As operational costs are minimized, they are able to lower food prices.

Need a little inspiration to make delicious, filling and creative meals on a budget? Here are a few food blogs that focus on easy and inexpensive recipes and ideas:

- [Budget Bytes](#) focuses on food that is quick and satisfying and breaks down each meal with the cost of individual ingredients and servings.
- [\\$5 Dinners](#) offers recipes for meals costing approximately \$5.00. The site also contains information on kitchen tips, coupons and gardening.
- [BrokeAss Gourmet](#) breaks down the price of each ingredient and highlights meals for less than \$20.00. Great for potlucks and entertaining.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- [Mnsure, Minnesota's health insurance marketplace](#)
- [MN Low-Cost Healthcare Directory](#)
- [Guide to Additional Healthcare Resources](#)
- [Family Tree Clinic](#)
 - Reproductive and sexual health services
- [Calm](#), [Headspace](#), and [Insight Timer](#): meditation apps

MENTAL HEALTH

- [Minnesota's lesbian gay bisexual transgender and allied mental health providers' network](#)
- [National Queen and Trans Therapists of Color Network](#)
- [Walk in Counseling Center](#)
- [Mental Health and Wellness Resources](#)

PET WELLNESS

- [Animal Humane Society Kindest Cut](#)
 - Welcomes individuals with [limited incomes](#) who are otherwise unable to afford basic spay/neuter, preventative care, and dental services for their companion cats, dogs and rabbits.
- [Minnesota Spay Neuter Assistance Program](#) (MNSNAP)
 - Provides both high-quality, affordable and accessible spay and neuter services to those in need and animal welfare education in communities

- The Pet Project:
 - Provides:
 - Pet food shelf
 - Supplies
 - Occasionally financial support
- [People and Pets Together](#)
 - Mission is to prevent the surrender of family pets during times of economic crisis. Resources provided include: pet food shelves, veterinary care resources, and housing resources
 - [People and Pets Food Shelf](#)
- [The Pet Fund](#)
 - [Financial assistance in the form of one-time grants](#)
- [Mission Animal Hospital](#)
 - The guiding mission of Mission's work is to provide high quality veterinary care to low income groups, the unemployed and the elderly.
- Animal Humane Society
 - [General Resources](#)

SAVINGS AND DEALS

VISTA members are notorious for discovering deals, coming up with creative ways to save and making the most out of their living stipend. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- [Twin Cities Free Market](#) is an interactive website that allows people to easily list or search for free items they want to get or give away. This helps reduce the amount of goods being thrown away.
- [Thrifty Hipster](#) is a local MN Company. Run by locals that know the scene, they update the site with the most complete and up-to-day happy hours and bar listings. They also have the best music, art, and other fun.
- [Steals from Star Tribune](#): find new and exciting restaurants to enjoy, get great deals on exciting events, see plays and concerts at discounted prices, savor a relaxing getaway to the North Shore—all these great deals in one convenient place!
- [City Pages Best of](#): explore the best that the Twin Cities have to offer.
- [Craigslist -- Minneapolis Free Stuff](#): Free stuff from around the Twin Cities.
- [Amazon Prime](#): Prime is just \$5.99 a month for qualifying customers with an EBT card.

ENTERTAINMENT

There are lots of fun and cheap ways to stay busy in Minnesota all year long. See the list below:

THEATRES

- [Riverview Theater](#): second-run movies for \$3 and only \$3 on Tuesdays
- [St. Anthony Main](#): great historic theatre with \$5 tickets on Tuesdays
- [Woodbury Theatre](#): locally owned theatre with \$4 tickets before 6pm and \$6 tickets after 6pm
- [Hopkins Cinema 6](#): general admission \$3, \$2.50 all day Tuesday
- [Guthrie Theatre](#): concerts, live events and shows in a renowned river-side building. Rush tickets are \$15-40, regular are more
- [Minnesota Orchestra](#): known for the musicians and gorgeous Orchestra Hall. Offer student discounts and rush tickets
- [Minnesota Opera](#)
- [ACME Comedy Company](#): \$5 tickets on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays with a college ID, free for you and three guests during your birthday month. Every Monday they have free open mic night.
- [Ordway Center for the Performing Arts](#): rush tickets at a discount with a valid college ID
- [History Theatre](#): a national leader in producing award-winning historic theatre. Persons under the age of 30 receive a 30% discount on regular ticket prices

MALLS and SHOPPING CENTERS

- [Mall of America](#): boasts an amusement park, movie theatre, aquarium and 400+ stores. It is also on the light rail line
- [Southdale Shopping Center](#): anchor stores like Macy's, J.C.Penny and Marshall's, in addition to over 120 specialty stores
- [Rosedale Shopping Center](#): same anchor stores as Southdale, but is also attached to the Roseville AMC theatre
- [Burnsville Center](#): south of Minneapolis, this is the nearest full shopping mall to Northfield, Faribault and Mankato
- [IKEA](#): known for inexpensive house wares (i.e. furniture, cooking utensils, bedding and décor)
- [Ridgedale Mall](#): anchor stores like J.C.Penny, Macy's, Nordstrom, and Sears, in addition to 120+ other stores
- [Twin Cities Premium Outlets](#): Located in Eagan (just south of St Paul) and has over 100 outlet stores - everything from Old Navy and Nike to Coach and Saks Fifth Avenue

MUSEUMS

- [Mill City Museum](#): a scenic museum built amid mill ruins along the Mississippi. Adult tickets are \$11, or \$9 with a college ID
- [American Swedish Institute](#): a beautifully restored mansion, show and new Swedish café. Adult tickets are \$7, or \$4 with a college ID
- [Museum of Russian Art](#): stunning art nestled into a Spanish Colonial style mission. Adult tickets are \$9, or \$5 with a college ID
- [Bell Museum of Natural History](#): great interactive exhibits. Adult tickets are \$6, or \$4 with a college ID, free on Sundays

- [Weisman Art Museum](#): a renowned piece of architecture holds early 20th century and contemporary art. Admission is free
- [Minneapolis Institute of Arts](#): tours, lectures, film, exhibits, a museum shop and frequent young-adult events. Admission is free
- [Bakken Museum](#): a creative space dedicated to science, electricity and magnetism. Adult tickets are \$7, or \$5 with college ID
- [Walker Art Center and Sculpture Garden](#): free admission Thursday nights from 5-9pm and on the first Saturday of every month. Adult tickets are \$12, or \$8 with college ID. The sculpture garden is always free
- [Science Museum of Minnesota](#): has an omnitheatre and great exhibits. Huge discount on tickets if you bring your EBT card or WIC folder
- [James J. Hill House](#): art gallery and enormous mansion on historic Summit Avenue. Adult tickets are \$9, or \$7 with a college ID
- [Landmark Center](#): this iconic 1902 building is the city's official Visitor Information Center. Free festive Sundays, free self-guided tours, and much more!

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Libraries are a wonderful source in each community for books, movies, and classes. Libraries can also offer free or discounted tickets to events, museums, classes, etc. Check out what your local library has to offer.

- To find your local library view this directory: [Minnesota Public Libraries](#)
- [Hennepin County library](#)
- [Ramsey County library](#)
- [St. Paul Public library](#)

ATHLETICS, PARKS AND RECREATIONS

- [Minnesota State Parks](#): free public hiking trails, wilderness areas, recreation sports areas and camping facilities. \$5 daily permit or \$25 for a yearly permit.
- [Afton Alps](#): try your hand at skiing at Afton Alps
- Intramurals: if you're looking to joining a team, start with the Parks and Recreation leagues in either [Minneapolis](#) or [St. Paul](#), or look up team openings and options at [Cities Sports Connection](#)
- Spectator sports: [MLB Twins](#), [NFL Vikings](#), [WNBA Lynx](#), [NBA Timberwolves](#), [NHL Wild](#), [MN United FC Soccer](#), [St. Paul Saints Baseball](#), [MN Roller Girls](#) and [North Star Roller Girls derby](#).

OTHER ENTERTAINMENT

- [Como Zoo and Conservatory](#): visit the zoo, amusement park, conservatory, gardens and lake Como. Admission is free
- [Comedy Sportz](#): \$10 admission with student ID for 10:30pm shows
- [Padelford Riverboats](#): docked at Harriet Island, these riverboats offer sightseeing tours along the Mississippi River. Monday tickets discounted at \$8
- [Wabasha Street Caves](#): offering walking tours, lost souls tours, ghost and graves tours, winter light tours, and gangster tours. Check them all out!
- Breweries and Tours:

- [August Schell Brewing Company](#); New Ulm, MN
- [Indeed](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Utepils](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Summit Brewing Company](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Surly Brewing](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Flat Earth Brewing](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Fulton Beer](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Grain Belt](#); New Ulm, MN
- [Cold Spring Brewery Company](#); Cold Spring, MN
- [Bauhaus Brew Labs](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Bent Paddle Brewing](#); Duluth, MN
- [BlackStack Brewing](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Dual Citizen Brewing](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Lake Monster Brewing](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Urban Growler Brewing Co.](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Bang Brewing](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Burning Brothers Brewing](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Insight Brewing](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Bad Weather Brewing Company](#); St. Paul, MN
- [Eastlake Craft Brewery](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Modist Brewing Co.](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Inbound BrewCo](#); Minneapolis, MN
- [Pryes Brewing Company](#); Minneapolis, MN

THRIFT STORES

- [Goodwill](#)
- [Salvation Army](#)
- [Savers](#)
- [Arc's Value Village](#): each day you'll find a tag color at 50% off. And every Sunday they feature a special \$1.59 tag sale on clothes, shoes and accessories and \$0.99 tag sale on housewares
- [Hidden Treasures](#): Fridays feature 30% off your entire purchase, colored tag sales change weekly, and major holidays offers 30-40% off everything
- [ThredUp](#): the largest online consignment shop

FINDING THRIFTY THINGS TO DO

- [City Pages](#): browse the Twin Cities event calendar for art, music, festivals, literary events, comedy, sports, dance, theatre and happy hours
- Online deal programs: search for daily discounts on events, restaurants, activities, and more with [Groupon](#), [LivingSocial](#), [Pocket Your Dollars](#), and [365 Twin Cities](#).
- Twitter handles to follow for thrifty entertainment ideas:
 - Minnesota Places [@minnesotaplaces](#)
 - MSP Magazine [@mspmag](#)
 - City Pages [@citypages](#)
 - Thrifty Hipster MN [@thriftyhip](#)

