

# Vacancy Collaborative VISTA Assignment Description (VAD)

## Research and Capacity Building VISTA

**Sponsoring Organization:** Mission: St. Louis

**Project Name:** Vacancy Collaborative Research and Capacity Building

**Project Number:** 14VSMO001

**Project Period:** Aug 19, 2019 – Aug 18, 2020

**Focus Area(s):** Healthy Futures, Economic Opportunity

### Summary and Goal

Since our peak population in 1950, St. Louis City has lost over 60% of its population.<sup>1</sup> There are over 25,000 vacant properties in the City, and more than 40% of the City's census tracts have vacancy rates higher than 20% with most of them concentrated in North St. Louis.<sup>2</sup> Residents in these neighborhoods live with overgrown lots and crumbling buildings that contribute to disinvestment, high rates of poverty, increased crime, decreased property values, and health and public safety risks. These properties strain City resources and affect the prosperity of the entire region.

To address these concerns the Vacancy Collaborative (VC) launched in 2018 after several years of effort and planning. The VC is a coalition of partners committed to the reduction of vacant property as a top priority in St. Louis. The VC is not a stand-alone entity, but a coalition of community representatives, private and non-profit stakeholders, and City agencies. The VC helps to coordinate existing vacancy efforts under one umbrella and encourages the public and private sectors to work together toward solutions in a comprehensive and coordinated way.

### Objective of the Assignment

The Vacancy Collaborative Research VISTA will strengthen the development of the VC through research and capacity building. Activities will focus in three main areas: research on VC governance structure, long-term sustainability, and implementation of the Vacancy Action Strategy.

### Member Activities

- Research the needs of the VC for long-term sustainability by
  - Identifying capacity gaps within the coalition
  - Developing strategies to meet the needs and fill the gaps
  - Investigating grants and funding opportunities to sustain the VC's work

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<sup>1</sup> Krewson, Mayor Lyda. "A Plan to Reduce Vacant Lots and Buildings in the City of St. Louis," July, 2018. <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/mayor/initiatives/vacancy.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> Mallach, Alan. "The Empty House Next Door" Policy Focus Report, Lincoln Institute Of Land Policy and Center For Community Progress. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://www.lincolninst.edu/sites/default/files/pubfiles/empty-house-next-door-full.pdf>

- Help put the Vacancy Action Strategy (the emerging VC strategic plan) into practice by
  - Maintaining a comprehensive understanding of Vacancy Collaborative goals as outlined in the Vacancy Action Strategy
  - Developing communication tools to carry out the plan
  - Creating the procedures and infrastructure to share information with VC partners and neighborhood residents
- Support the development of the VC structure by
  - Researching different coalition structures
  - Identifying best practices for decision making and governance
  - Developing a framework for input and review
  - Develop procedures and systems for effective VC governance while recognizing the autonomy and voice of community members and the coalition partner organizations
- Other activities
  - Attend relevant meetings of the Vacancy Collaborative committees
  - Make occasional presentations to and facilitate discussions with the Vacancy Advisory Committee
  - Support the occasional research needs of the VC working groups as they arise

## **Qualifications**

- Bachelor's Degree from an accredited four year college or university or equivalent experience in research and capacity building.
- Passion for community building and for pursuing and promoting equity and inclusivity in programs.
- Demonstrated ability to work independently, as part of a small team, as part of a larger group/committee, and to take initiative as new projects come up.
- Demonstrated ability to stay on schedule, set timelines, and meet deadlines.
- Excellent computer skills, including using Microsoft Office products.
- Strong problem solving, communication, analysis, and writing skills.
- Willingness to work in a variety of settings and occasional hours outside the normal business day as needed.
- Understanding of St. Louis' history and the causes of our current vacancy challenge, familiarity with urban communities, and knowledge of built environment and/or physical infrastructure of cities.

This position will be supervised by Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis (CBN) staff. CBN serves as the facilitator for the Vacancy Collaborative committees and working groups. To learn more about the Vacancy Collaborative, visit [www.stlvacancy.com](http://www.stlvacancy.com). For more information on CBN, visit [www.communitybuildersstl.org](http://www.communitybuildersstl.org). To learn more about what it means to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA member in St. Louis visit <https://www.servethelou.org/vista>.

**To apply for this position, please send a resume and cover letter to Tara Aubuchon at [tara@communitybuildersstl.org](mailto:tara@communitybuildersstl.org) by Monday, July 8, 2019.**