# 2020 - 2021 FIRST® AmeriCorps VISTA Program

## 2020 - 2021 FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders

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## 2020 - 2021 FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Members

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<td>WISCONSIN</td>
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Kate has spent the better part of 15 years around the FIRST programs. An alumnus of the FIRST® Robotics Competition Team 1108 Panther Robotics, she has been involved with all four programs of FIRST in a number of roles including helping to found, support, coach, and mentor teams. Kate’s experience with FIRST extends to being a volunteer for all four programs as well. She has held nearly every role, from safety glasses to judge advisor, Control Systems Advisor and is even a well-known emcee and game announcer in the Kansas City area.

Kate chose to be a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA because she wanted to pay it forward. Her goals for this year include getting to know the already existing FIRST community, increasing the number of individuals who recognize FIRST in the community, and ensuring that the growing number of FIRST LEGO® League students will have a continued pipeline with FIRST Tech Challenge and FIRST Robotics Competition.
Kathleen McTigue began her FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA position in September 2019. Prior to starting this position, Kathleen worked in New York City supporting recently arrived refugees and immigrants through economic empowerment programs. Kathleen has lived and traveled in many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean and has focused her career on urban agriculture and participatory training. Kathleen is thrilled to be part of the international robotics programs offered by FIRST and is interested in expanding her knowledge and network. In addition to her role as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA, Kathleen is mentoring a new FIRST LEGO® League team at a public school in Carolina, Puerto Rico.
Zephaniah Long
zlong@firstinspires.org

Zeph Long brings ten years of FIRST experience to the AmeriCorps VISTA Program, having been involved with organization as a FIRST LEGO® League participant, and moving on to FIRST Tech Challenge for four years. For the last six years, he has volunteered extensively at FIRST events around the nation. Zeph graduated from high school in 2014 and earned a Bachelors of Science in Natural Science/Mathematics in 2016.

He currently serves as a VISTA leader located in North Carolina. His efforts are driven by the belief that FIRST is an inspiring and life changing program that should be available to all students, regardless of their background. In addition to Zeph's responsibilities to the FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA Program, he is also a representative for LGBTQ+ of FIRST, is on the board of directors for the Rainbow STEM Alliance, and is also involved with local organizations focused on advocacy and support of the LGBTQ community.
Angel has extensive training in bookkeeping and entrepreneurship logistics. She has been in leadership roles within sales companies, nonprofit organizations, as well as personal small business ventures. Angel has volunteered for nearly a decade in educational programming and community awareness activities.

Angel learned of FIRST 4 years ago and believes it to be the cure for educational gaps in poor communities. In her own words “Through collaborations and strategic partnerships FIRST can catapult any kid with curiosity and a drive, out of poverty and into purpose. FIRST is about engineering robots but more about the little engineer inside each one of us that’s waiting to build their own future.”

Her background in business began at age 14 keeping accounting records for her father. Angel has since furthered her education to develop these skills, so that she may pass them along to the next generation within her community. Her focus and passion has been centered around coordinating volunteers, students, and employees; as well as her strong dedication to organizing communities to positive action.
ALABAMA – Birmingham

Emmy Bray
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Emmy discovered her lifetime passion for FIRST when she was six years old and first laid hands on a box of LEGO® with the intention to build a robot. Now, she has 14 years of FIRST experience and is ready to use it during her time as a VISTA in her home state of Alabama. Over the next year she hopes to create several new teams and setup a sustainable network of support so that, even after her service has ended, her work will have taken roots and continue to grow into beautiful new FIRST teams.

ALABAMA – Huntsville

Scarlett Bautista
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Scarlett Bautista has been involved with FIRST since her freshman year of high school in 2013. She chooses to serve as a FIRST VISTA because she feels that it is important to help today’s youth become leaders in STEM and in their communities by using the resources and skills that she has gained through FIRST. She is currently an electrical engineering student at Calhoun Community College and intends to continue her education at UAH in the spring. For four years of her involvement with FIRST, she was a member of Team 538, The Dragon Slayers. She then was given the position as the Social Media Director for FIRST in Alabama and joined the FIRST LEGO® League Alabama Planning Committee. FIRST has had a great and positive impact on her life and she is very grateful to have the opportunity to be able to share it with those who may not otherwise have the chance to experience it.
ARIZONA – Flagstaff

Patti Strones
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Patti initially got involved with FIRST when her children participated on teams in high school. Currently she is a 10-year volunteer for the FIRST Robotics Competition Regional in Arizona as well as a 6 year volunteer for the FIRST World Championships. She began her journey as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA this past November. During her service, her goal is to encourage all students to take advantage of the opportunities provided by FIRST and making sure everyone has access to the programs in FIRST.

Helping the community and youth organizations overcome barriers to participating in FIRST. She aims to help the youth in her community to be able to experience what her son and daughter were fortunate to participate in.

ARIZONA - Flagstaff

Camyra Gage
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Camyra serves because FIRST was a big part of her life growing up and she wanted to help make the same experience possible to others. She was first introduced to the FIRST program when she was 8 years old and then joined FIRST LEGO® League a few years later. Camyra then join the FIRST Robotics Competition Team 1519, Mechanical Mayhem, in high school. She spent most of her free time in high school helping to start FIRST Tech Challenge teams and mentor FIRST LEGO® League and FIRST LEGO® League Jr teams as well as volunteering at events in roles such as field reset to judge’s assistant.

Camyra’s favorite thing about being a FIRST VISTA is getting to help make the FIRST experience possible for underserved communities. From this experience, she hopes to help make FIRST possible to students in a less fortunate environment be able to participate in the same program as other students. To the table, she brings the knowledge she has gained through her years in the FIRST program and through volunteering within her community.
CALIFORNIA – San Jose

Miosha Page
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Hello! My name is Miosha Page and I’m currently serving in Los Angeles, California with the i.am.angel Foundation. I serve because I believe that all students, no matter their zip code or neighborhood, deserve access to equitable educational opportunities and resources. Before serving with FIRST VISTA, I served for 2 years with City Year Detroit, working directly with students, parents, communities, and schools to provide support to under-resourced areas. Through my direct service, I have a great understanding of what students actually need and how important the resources we as FIRST VISTAs provide are. An exciting skill that I’m bringing to the table is my ability to not only talk about, but talk to communities and allow them to lead the kind of services I provide to my host organization for them. My favorite thing about being a FIRST VISTA is the ability to be resourceful and come up with ways to make the next FIRST VISTA’s service more impactful after my service year is over.

FLORIDA - Jacksonville

Nickie Chatman-Brown
nchatman@firstinspires.org

Nickie has an extensive background in Education. She has been an educator for 16 years with her first teaching job at the high school she graduated from. Nickie learned about FIRST while serving as an Americorps member for Communities in Schools of Jax Duval Reads Program. She was asked about volunteering to be the robotics coach at the school where she was serving in the afterschool program. She accepted the position and hasn’t looked back since. Nickie has served as a coach and mentor for many teams.

Nickie chose to become a VISTA because she wanted to learn more about the FIRST programs and become a resource for other coaches, mentors and volunteers.
Florida – Jacksonville

Sachin Sundar
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Sachin serves because he was a part of programs for underprivileged children and it significantly contributed to who he is today. He hopes to be a part of a high impact environment so that he may pass on what was given to him. Sachin hopes to gain an understanding of the disparities that members within the community he is assigned are affected by and create an impact by introducing FIRST programs in schools. He hopes that he will learn from his coworkers and community members.

This is his first year with FIRST. Sachin has previously volunteered with Gus Bus Tutoring, College Bound DC, Virginia Student Refugee Achievement Project, and worked for the NIH for the past two years. His involvement in the NIH Academy Enrichment Program increased his knowledge base and awareness on the disparities various groups face. Sachin is a research-oriented individual with a strong ability to connect with others and be resourceful. His favorite thing about being a FIRST VISTA is having the chance to introduce high yield concepts in STEM in a fun, engaging manner to underprivileged students.

FLORIDA - Tampa

Marissa Schiereck
mshiereck@firstinspires.org

Marissa Schiereck was introduced to FIRST when she was seven years old. She continued being a part of FIRST in high school where she joined Team Duct Tape 2845 in FIRST Tech Challenge. During college, Marissa was the president of her university’s FIRST Alumni Club and was a FIRST referee for local competition. She even had the amazing opportunity to be a referee at FIRST Global 2019 in Dubai. Marissa brings with her various skills from fabrication to
volunteer coordination from working at machine shops and nonprofits. She was influenced by the amazing volunteers at FIRST to be a VISTA and help build a strong FIRST community in Tampa so that others can participate in the wonderful experience FIRST programs provide.

FLORIDA – Tampa
Tyresa Jackson
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Tyresa Jackson, is a graduate student at Teachers College, Columbia University. Prior to matriculating into Teachers College, she earned a Masters of Public Administration (Public Policy and Administration) from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. With both degrees, Tyresa Jackson, would like to use cognitive science to inform education policy. Her professional experiences include being a graduate assistant at John Jay College of Criminal Justice for Women in the Public Sector and for a disaster risk management project.

In her free time, she is a special events volunteer for Girls on the Run – New York City Chapter and she serves as the secretary for the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) New York Metro Chapter. Her interests include combating human trafficking, education reform, and increasing the number of women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).

FLORIDA – West Palm Beach
Marion Ross
mross@firstinspires.org

Marion serves because she would like to see the whole child nurtured and not just aspects. Through reading comprehension, to food delivery, and STEM skills she would like to encourage our kids to strive for positive change. Marion hopes that this experience will provide her with long lasting connections within my community. She has experience as a Coach/Mentor for her children's FIRST team and was asked by her local PDP to become a VISTA. Her favorite things about FIRST is seeing “ah ha” moments within the community and its children.
FLORIDA – West Palm Beach

Jose Varela

jvarela@firstinspires.org

Jose serves because he knows his community is underserved and he wants to do something to help them. In his service, Jose wants his community to be able to make a name for themselves because he feels they are looked down on by other wealthier communities. While he does not have no prior history with FIRST, this is his first year serving with both FIRST and AmeriCorps. Jose his computer science knowledge which comes in handy when FIRST teams need assistance with something technical. His favorite thing about being a FIRST VISTA is getting the opportunity to experience new technology and programs.

INDIANA - Indianapolis

Matthew Malinak

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Matthew joined his high school’s FRC Team 862: Lightning Robotics as a freshman in 2011. At the University of Michigan, he graduated with a degree in Industrial and Operations Engineering in 2019 while being heavily involved with FIRST through UM’s alumni group (FAMNM). Matthew decided to serve as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA because of his passion for FIRST, and to have the opportunity to be able to directly help with FIRST’s mission. With a history in FIRST volunteering, coordinating, and mentoring at all program levels Matthew is looking forward to bringing his experience and skills to benefit FIRST Indiana Robotics.
NEVADA - Reno

Lauren Halvorson
lhalvorson@firstinspires.org

Lauren wants to serve because she wants to have a positive impact on the world and today’s youth. By the end of this experience she wants to have new, lasting connections and a want to gain more computer skills. Her father served in the Peace Corps (Micronesia, 81-83), so she always knew she wanted to join a service organization at some point. Her social skills from working for Disney World might help with a project at some point. She is also very persistent, which always comes in handy. Her favorite thing about being a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA is the people she has been working with! They are all so kind and welcoming.

NEW HAMPSHIRE - Manchester

Tyler Jones
tjones@firstinspires.org

In 2016, after graduating from college, Tyler moved to Manchester, New Hampshire to serve with AmeriCorps as a member of City Year New Hampshire. After two years of service, one of which was as a VISTA, he took some time to consider his options before finally deciding to return to national service as a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA. During his time with City Year, Tyler was fortunate enough to see the positive changes that FIRST programs can have on students. He chose to return to AmeriCorps in order to contribute to making these positive changes even more accessible and available to children nationwide.
NEW YORK – New York City

Srikar Gudimella
sgudimella@firstinspires.org

Srikar joined FIRST as a VISTA because of FIRST’s important work in increasing the accessibility of STEM education and opportunities in underserved communities. As a FIRST LEGO League alum, he believes that FIRST’s programs play a key role in inspiring future STEM professionals. Srikar hopes to use his year of service to explore the challenges that face the country’s largest school district and how New York City’s government, nonprofits, and community work together to address those issues. He is looking forward to working with his incredibly talented and knowledgeable colleagues and hearing about their experiences in education and service.

PUERTO RICO – San Juan

Heleen Bennett
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Heleen is new to FIRST, but is incredibly excited to work for an organization that inspires young people to think critically and engage in hands-on STEM activities that can solve global issues. From 2016 to 2018, she served with the Peace Corps in Ethiopia as an Agriculture Extension Specialist. Heleen’s experiences with community development and youth engagement encouraged her to continue pursuing work related to promoting equity for all people. She hopes to utilize her time with FIRST to increase participation amongst marginalized communities within her region. She is currently serving in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
Maria del Pilar Angulo  
mangulo@firstinspires.org

Pilar has a PhD in Biology and was a Professor at the University of Puerto Rico. Pilar was particularly touched by low income students. Most of the time, they didn’t have the necessary tools to be able to be successful students. They lacked basic skills, because they didn’t acquire them in their schools. To Pilar, you could see that they had that “fire in their bellies” that they really wanted to succeed and become agents of change. What inspired Pilar to become a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA was that it is important to her to be able to work with low income/unserved students and communities.

Jose Porrata  
jporrata@firstinspires.org

Jose joined the FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA program because he wanted to do useful, honest work that actually makes a difference. He does agree that poverty is one of the worst problems Americans and the world faces, and wishes to tackle that in any way. Jose onboarded with the program in December 2019, his birthday month! He has skills in writing, blogging, and empathy. If empathy can be considered a skill, that is. He also has a decent amount of political knowledge that can be useful for dealing with the local climate. His favorite thing about the FIRST VISTA program is knowing that he is able to work for the greater good, and he has seen the good they do during his time as a VISTA.
PUERTO RICO – San Juan

Martha Rivera

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As an immigrant from Mexico and later on, a military wife, Martha R. Rivera experienced first-hand what it meant to make do with what was available, and thankfully accepted help from those around her. When she relocated to Puerto Rico back in 2002, she felt the need to break the poverty cycle around her, and in her thirties went back to school and acquired a degree in journalism. All three of her sons and even Martha’s husband followed her steps and acquired their degrees. But Martha’s mission is not over, she knows that she is not able to help all the kids in Puerto Rico, but with FIRST’s support, the seeds of curiosity will be sowed, and with time they will bear fruit.

PUERTO RICO – San Juan

Daniel Guevara Rodriguez
dguevararodriguez@firstinspires.org
Daniel has a Bachelor’s Degree in Media Communication from Interamerican University of Puerto Rico. He has worked as a public relations officer, has produced radio shows and events, and has led various charitable campaigns for groups and organizations.

His desire for personal and professional growth has led him to gain essential knowledge and experience in communications, digital platform management, and multimedia content development. Daniel wants to inspire others and support their growth. This motivated him to support the work of FIRST, learning what can make a difference in the lives of those in his community while acquiring skills that will allow him to start his own digital agency. What he likes most about being a FIRST VISTA is that it allows him to see the diversity that exists in the program, and to help others find their motivation for life, joy, skills, and opportunities that help them to fulfill themselves as human beings, reaching their own goals in order to serve society.

**TEXAS - McAllen**

**Eduardo Hernandez Castillo**

ehernandez@firstinspires.org

Eduardo serves because he is motivated to make a difference in the lives of those in his community. During his service, Eduardo wants to gain the skills to become a well rounded member of society as well as develop business skills that can help him in the future when he realizes his dream of starting his own business. Eduardo is a FIRST alumnus and participated on a FIRST Robotics Competition team during high school. Eduardo says his favorite thing about being a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA is being able to see the happiness and the joy that students have when competing and reaching their goals.
TEXAS - McAllen

Victor Menchaca

vmenchaca@firstinspires.org

Victor serves because FIRST has inspired him and made an incredible impact on his life. Victor says his favorite thing about being a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA is giving students who wouldn’t otherwise have the opportunity, a chance to show their talents and skills in this program. Being a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA allows Victor to give back to his community and the FIRST program.

TEXAS - McAllen

Andre Adame Ceballos

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Andre serves because he wants to be able to help his community out while inspiring others to pursue a career into a STEM related occupation, just as Andre is doing himself. Andre participated in a FIRST Tech Challenge team from his sophomore until his senior year. His favorite thing about being a VISTA is being able to help eliminate poverty in his community.
Reed Thornton
rthornton@firstinspires.org

Reed has been involved with FIRST for over 7 years. He is a FIRST Alumni and participated on a FIRST Robotics Competition team and a FIRST Tech Challenge team during high school. After high school he is now a mentor for the FIRST LEGO League, FIRST Tech Challenge and FIRST Robotics Competition community teams and is also a referee for FIRST LEGO League and FIRST Tech Challenge competitions. As a FIRST AmeriCorps VISTA a goal for his service is to help build the FIRST program in his Houston community so others may have the same experience and opportunity he was given.

Dana Harris
dharris@firstinspires.org

Dana is new to FIRST and joined because she is passionate about giving back to the community by focusing on providing resources to underserved youth in STEM. Dana was part of a program similar to STEAM while in grades 1 through 6. She understands how important it is to provide underserved youth with resources to become successful for the future. Dana is looking forward to new lessons, connections, and knowledge that FIRST VISTA will provide. She excited to see all the neat robotics that will be introduced by FIRST as well!
Adam Miller
amiller@firstinspires.org

Adam Miller is a first year Americorps VISTA member with a background in the automotive and construction industry. He is also a FIRST Tech Challenge and FIRST Robotics Competition alumni with podium finishes in both programs. He is currently living in Von Ormy, Texas and services the greater San Antonio area.

Reggie Fullwood
rfullwood@firstinspires.org

Before serving as a VISTA, Rejenald served first as a National AmeriCorps member at the affordable housing non-profit Ability Housing in 2018. He has extensive training in IT/troubleshooting and hopes to utilize those skills within the FIRST program. Before his term of service is over, he hopes to make a big impact in the San Antonio underserved communities by showing young kids that robotics and the creative arts in general, can lead to a better future, and an escape from poverty and the issues that young people of color face.
Wisconsin - Milwaukee

Bridget Lee

blee@firstinspires.org

Bridget is new to FIRST and joined because she is passionate about giving back to her community by focusing on providing resources to underserved youth in STEM. She recently graduated with a degree in Mathematics and has worked with underrepresented populations in STEM during her time in University. She is excited to continue uplifting women and other minorities in STEM. Bridget hopes to further develop her public service skills while finding new ways to connect people. Her favorite thing about being a VISTA is the emphasis on capacity building and seeing the excitement that FIRST can bring to students.

Wisconsin - Milwaukee

Amber Wycklendt

awycklendt@firstinspires.org

While Amber is new to FIRST VISTA, she is passionate about encouraging kids to be involved in STEM. In high school, she was inspired by her old chemistry teacher to be an engineer and has not looked back since. Although she will not be doing engineering this year, she is looking forward to giving back to the community in a way that will create a better future for everyone. She is also excited to learn more about Milwaukee and the unique challenges the schools in the city face. Through listening, understanding, and collaborating with the community, she hopes to come up with creative solutions to overcoming obstacles and inspiring children to dream big.