

Baylor receives grant to benefit West recovery

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WACO—As West continues to recover from last year’s devastating [fertilizer plant explosion](#), the Central Texas town will have some of its most pressing needs addressed this summer through a \$280,009 grant to [Baylor University](#) that provides employment for young people from West who want to serve their hometown.



The blast on April 17, 2013, caused more than \$100 million in damage to the town of West. (Baylor Photo)The grant from the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) will enable the Baylor [Interdisciplinary Poverty Initiative](#) and the city of West to establish an AmeriCorps VISTA summer associates program, which will provide young people summer jobs while they create and participate in projects that will leave a lasting legacy for their hometown.

“We are thrilled to be able to offer this to the West community as a resource to assist them as they define what they want to do in the recovery process,” said Rosemary Townsend, director of business affairs and

community partnerships in Baylor's office of community engagement and service.

Baylor commitment

"Baylor publicly said, 'We will be with you as you walk through this process.' This is a tangible thing that the university can do in partnership with our neighbors in West and the Corporation for National and Community Service as the city determines its needs and priority areas."

Fifteen people—including 12 first-responders—lost their lives in the April 17, 2013, explosion. According to the Insurance Council of Texas, the blast caused more than \$100 million in damage to West, destroying key infrastructure and damaging or destroying more than 150 homes and businesses. The destruction led to challenges for the residents of West, including a lack of local jobs, decreased access to quality and affordable housing and childcare options, and severely damaged school facilities.

As West rebuilds and regenerates its economy and continues to heal, Townsend said, VISTA summer associates will play a valuable role.

Under the grant, Baylor will hire 35 summer associates from West who are recent high school graduates or currently attending a college or university and plan to return to West for the summer.

Student projects

Student projects will focus on education, health and economic development, Townsend said. Possible projects include creating a community garden, organizing and operating an afternoon youth camp, partnering with West Independent School District and the library and providing staff assistance to the West Chamber of Commerce to promote the city as a viable location for new businesses or investment.

Students will work 40 hours a week from June 9 through Aug. 17, earning \$928 per month. Each will be eligible for an additional education award of \$1,175 at the program's end.

"The VISTA summer associates program is a wonderful fit for West on a number of levels," said Jan Hungate, chief administrative officer for West ISD. "Besides the fact that we now have a new summer employment opportunity for our graduates, the planned projects will require brainpower and ingenuity, and will create positive contributions to the community in this time of recovery and growth."