

Cheap and Fun Ways to Live on the Stipend

Just because you are living on the stipend doesn't mean you can't have fun--it just takes a little creativity! The best source for cheap and fun things in your community is the collected wisdom of former members (ask your supervisor) but here are some general ideas on ways to live it up for cheap. For other information about simple living, look up the [voluntary simplicity](#) movement, which helps people scale back their lifestyle in order to live life more fully.

Live Cheaply--By keeping your other expenses down, you ensure that you have enough left over to treat yourself when you really need it. Here are some cheap living ideas from former members:

- Do without a car -- public transportation, biking, and walking will save you money and keep you fit!
- Take advantage of the benefits -- food stamps, subsidized housing, utility assistance (see above for more info)
- Be energy smart - turn off lights when not in use, keep heat low, and use environmentally-friendly CFL lightbulbs to save money and help the environment.
- Use dollar stores for cheap cleaning supplies and household goods
- Shop at thrift stores and garage sales for clothes, furniture, etc.
- Use [freecycle](#) to get donated items that would otherwise go to the dump
- Get haircuts at a beauty school
- Go to matinees instead of evening movies (or rent a video!)
- Don't order drinks with dinner--just drinking water will save you money every time
- Cut coupons and cook at home
- **Download and print this [letter](#) to ask local businesses to give extend their other discounts to AmeriCorps and VISTA member**

Save Money and the Earth by Living Green!



Start out by finding out about your current environmental impact, then look below for some ideas about how to reduce your ecological footprint and (usually) save money at the same time!

Be energy smart: Check out these great tips from [Puget Sound Energy](#) and [Seattle Light](#) about ways to save energy in your home. Many techniques are as simple as sealing up cracks and using [energy smart light bulbs](#). In fact, you can make a huge impact just by reducing your heat by a few degrees in the winter and wearing a sweater. Most utility customers also have the option of supporting alternative energy by requesting that some of your energy is purchased from green sources. It costs a little more but not much--[find out how!](#)

Don't drive yourself to work: Consider [public transportation](#), [biking](#), carpooling or

walking. For you drivers out there, check out the [environmental impact of your car](#).

Opt out of junk mail: Call 1-888-567-8688. While you're at it, go ahead and put yourself on the Do Not Call list, too--they're adding cell numbers soon. 1-888-382-1222

Eat locally grown, organic food: Available at [farmers markets](#), food co-ops and most grocery stores. Sometimes it costs a bit more, but your supporting your health, local farmers, and the environment. If you have a backyard, go ahead and [compost those food scraps](#)--you'll make a great soil enhance and save lots of waste from the landfill.

Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle: Reduce packaging by buying in bulk (often cheaper) when possible. Try to buy materials that are recyclable, and learn who to call to [set up recycling](#) in your area. Most communities have some form of curbside recycling, which makes just as easy as taking out the garbage and often cheaper. Remember, some items (like car batteries and computer monitors) should never just go to the landfill--call 1-800-RECYCLE to find out your nearest drop-off center.

Teach the Children: Many of our members work with youth in some way, and passing green living ethics on to them is a great environmental service! Click [here](#) for lesson plan ideas for energy and conservation and/or contact the [Northwest Environmental Education Council](#)--they offer environmental education resources for working with youth.

Have Fun -- Here are 23 ideas from members about cheap ways to have fun.

1. YMCA membership - they have sliding scale fees and usually give good discounts to AmeriCorps and VISTA members
2. Get outside - check out the [State Parks](#), [National Parks](#), [National Forests](#), and local parks in your area. WA is a beautiful state with a lot of free (or nearly free) fun to be had outdoors!
3. Library card - many libraries also have movies and CDs you can check out in addition to the fabulous books
4. Museum free days - many museums have one day a week that is free or reduced-cost
5. Watch local sports - go to the local high school games or watch a local semi-pro game. Tickets are usually cheap.
6. Play sports - get a team together and join a league or search out the free local hoops, nets, and fields that you need to play your game
7. Happy Hours - not just for drinking, many bars and restaurants offer cheap food during happy hour
8. Volunteer at events - volunteer to work at an event and see it for free

9. Get crafty - learn to knit or quilt or paint or...lots of crafty supplies are cheap and make for hours of fun
10. Do things together - get a group together to rent a movie or order a pizza or go out to dinner. By splitting costs, you save money.
11. [Online chess](#) or other games
12. Local plays and art shows - high school performances and amateur theater can be fun and much cheaper than professional
13. Lectures and readings - many community colleges and non-profit groups bring in speakers, and book stores bring in authors for free readings from their work
14. Frisbee Golf - make up a course in a local park, grab your frisbee and your friends, and you're off
15. Scavenger hunt - make a list of items to find in your town (a take-out pizza menu, a flower in December...) and split into teams to see who can get the most items by the deadline. Or come up with a list of things each group must do (potato sack race down Main St. sidewalk, build a human pyramid), split into teams, and accomplish your tasks. Take the pictures to prove it!
16. Board games - you can often find them cheap at thrift stores, or play charades--no materials necessary
17. Karaoke - free once you're in, and always memorable
18. Open mic nights - perform or just watch, these are often free at local coffeehouses
19. Go for a walk - get to know your community on foot
20. Renegade art party - get together your artsy craftsy knick-knacks (or whatever you have on hand), invite over some friends, and make some art. Then take it out on the town and post it (with permission) or hand it out.
21. Rent a car for the weekend, and get out of town! With enough people, this doesn't have to be expensive, so pile in and hit the road.
22. Have your own "drive-in" movie. Put chairs and couches on the patio to watch a video at night in the summer--no car necessary.
23. Tour factories and get free samples. Washington has lots of breweries and wineries as well as cheese and fruit juice plants. Most of these places offer free (or nearly free) tours followed by delicious samples.

Have more and better ideas? Share them! Go to the AmeriCorps bulletin board by clicking the button below and post your cheap and fun ideas.