



Sharing the Power of Learning

# Host a Literacy VISTA Request for Proposals 2017-2018



# VISTA

Volunteers In Service To America

## OVERVIEW

Minnesota Literacy Council, in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service, seeks innovative, forward-thinking projects in which to invest AmeriCorps VISTA resources for the 2017-2018 program year. ***By partnering with Minnesota Literacy Council to host a Literacy VISTA project, your organization can expand, improve and sustain literacy programming to help Minnesotans gain the skills they need to move out of poverty.***

Minnesota Literacy Council can partner with your organization to develop and implement a valuable capacity-building project, based on the needs you identify and your vision for program growth. A Literacy VISTA project builds the capacity of your organization to more effectively fight poverty by creating or expanding programming to address literacy needs of children, youth or adults. The literacy council provides your organization with the opportunity to host a full-time, qualified and energetic AmeriCorps VISTA member dedicated to realizing the project goals. The literacy council provides training and technical assistance to both you and the VISTA member at all stages of project implementation. In addition to providing the vision for the project and working with the literacy council to develop a project plan, your organization provides on-site supervision of the VISTA member and day-to-day management and oversight of the project. A Literacy VISTA project allows your organization the time and the initial start-up investment to put infrastructure in place for new, expanded or improved high-quality literacy programming that will be integrated into and sustained by your organization after the VISTA project ends. A typical project is renewed annually for three years.

***We invite your organization to participate in this annual competitive selection process.***

## TIMELINE\*

- VISTA project proposals due.....**January 25, 2017**
- Sites notified of selection decisions.....**February 8, 2017**
- Site supervisors attend one full-day training .....**February 16 or 20**
- Sites submit detailed project plan and VISTA Assignment Description (VAD).....**March 3, 2017**
- Sites recruit and select VISTA member(s).....**March through May**
- VISTAs approved by MLC and CNCS State Office.....**early June 2017**
- VISTAs begin their year of service.....**July 29, 2017**

\*Dates are subject to change, and events on the timeline are contingent upon final decisions from the Corporation for National and Community Service regarding award of AmeriCorps VISTA resources.

Questions? Contact Meghan Paul-Cook at [mpaulcook@mnliteracy.org](mailto:mpaulcook@mnliteracy.org) or 651-251-9069.

## VISTA

VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) is a National Service program funded by the federal government through the Corporation for National and Community Service. Founded in 1965, VISTA became part of the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993. VISTA members dedicate a year of full-time service to the community in exchange for a modest living allowance and benefits including an end-of-service Education Award. Minnesota Literacy Council has received a generous grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service to sponsor and support VISTA members to serve in nonprofit organizations, schools, and public agencies across Minnesota. While the Corporation for National and Community Service has not yet determined award amounts for 2017-18, Minnesota Literacy Council is soliciting project proposals in anticipation of continued AmeriCorps VISTA resources. The plans outlined below are contingent upon final award decisions from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

For more info about AmeriCorps VISTA, please visit [www.NationalService.gov](http://www.NationalService.gov). For more info about the Minnesota Literacy Council VISTA program, visit [www.mnliteracy.org/educators/host-vista](http://www.mnliteracy.org/educators/host-vista).

## MINNESOTA LITERACY COUNCIL

Minnesota Literacy Council is a nonprofit organization dedicated to sharing the power of learning through education, community building and advocacy across our state. We offer services for adults, children and families seeking to improve their literacy skills and statewide support for other literacy programs. The Literacy VISTA program is one way that Minnesota Literacy Council provides capacity-building support to literacy programs in the state of Minnesota. For more information on Minnesota Literacy Council please visit [www.mnliteracy.org](http://www.mnliteracy.org).

## LITERACY VISTA: OUR VISION, GOALS and CORE PRINCIPLES

***We envision a future in which all Minnesotans are able to read, write and communicate effectively.*** Evidence shows that having strong literacy skills empowers and equips people to move out of poverty.

*Minnesota Literacy Council's Literacy VISTA program goals:*

1. Provide non-profit organizations or educational institutions throughout Minnesota with resources to build their capacity to address poverty through expanding and improving programming supporting literacy skills.
2. Provide opportunities for VISTA members to gain skills and experience that will allow them to become leaders in their chosen field.

Minnesota Literacy Council invests VISTA resources in programs that are **new or looking to expand or improve their impact** and can articulate a vision for how they can use a three-year Literacy VISTA project to make a lasting impact on the community. We seek organizations that will provide a positive experience for VISTA members to learn and grow personally and professionally while serving the community.

## Our core principles

- **Anti-poverty focus:** supporting community efforts to overcome poverty.
- **Capacity-building:** strengthening and supporting efforts that focus on literacy by building infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, and securing long-term resources.
- **Community empowerment:** valuing the inherent strengths and resources of the community and involving those who are most affected in the planning, development and implementation of projects.
- **Sustainable solutions:** providing short-term resources to help organizations achieve lasting solutions to poverty.
- **Service:** providing individuals with the opportunity to serve Minnesota's communities as VISTA members, learning about literacy program development, effective solutions to poverty and about their own strengths in the process.

## LITERACY VISTA PROJECTS

Literacy VISTA projects should have one of the following goals:

- **Increase the scale or reach of the host site,** allowing additional types of services to be offered and/or more individuals to be served.
- **Increase the effectiveness of the host site** in providing literacy services to high-poverty communities.

Literacy VISTA projects should increase the scale/reach or effectiveness of one or more of the following types of literacy services:

- **School Readiness** (programming preparing young children for kindergarten)
- **K-12 Success** (getting school-aged children and youth reading at grade level; boosting literacy skills such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, story-telling, writing; increasing confidence, interest and engagement in reading and writing; and/or ensuring students are on track to graduate and have the literacy skills necessary for success in post-secondary education)
- **Adult Literacy** (supporting English as a Second Language for immigrants and refugees, preparing students to obtain a GED or other high school equivalency credential, providing pathways to college and career readiness, or other basic adult education services)

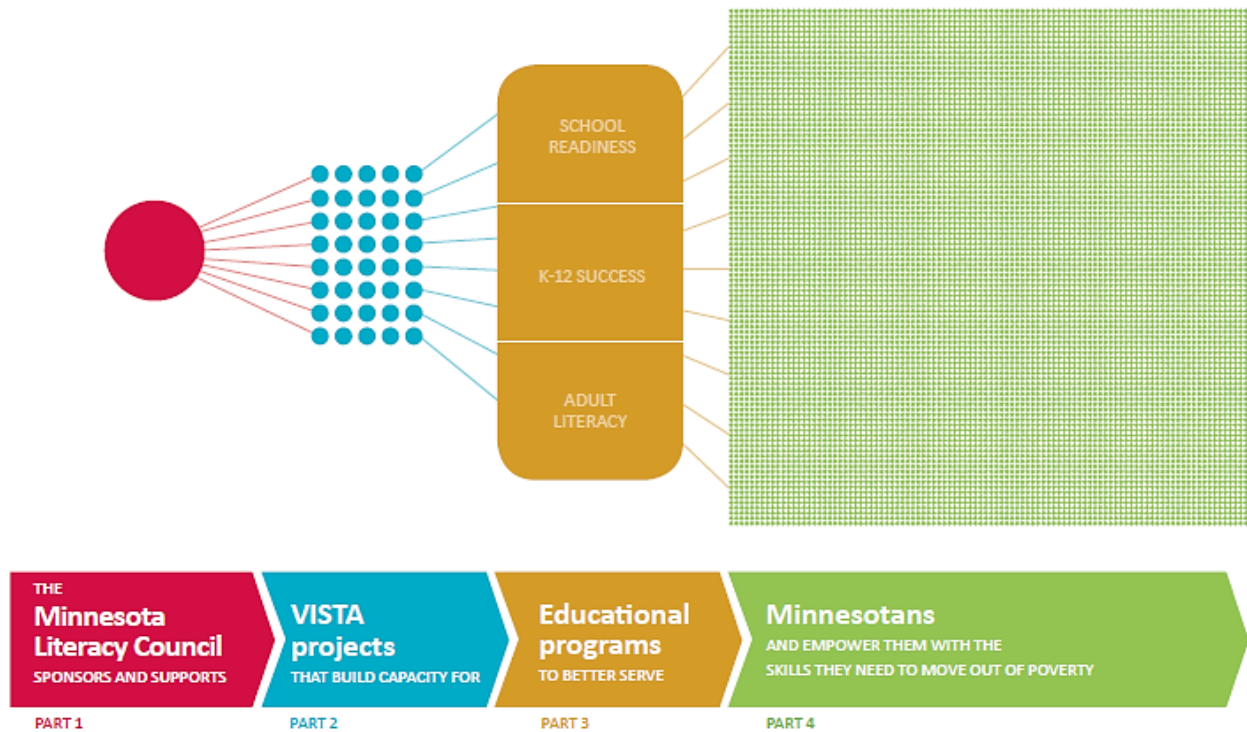
**Literacy VISTA projects should not focus on *computer literacy, financial literacy or information literacy*** unless it is secondary and complementary to the goal of becoming proficient in reading, writing and communicating effectively.

Projects should be based on best practices for improving literacy skills and student engagement. Projects should be based on an identified community need, and/or should include community need assessment as part of the VISTA member's responsibilities. Projects could involve developing new curriculum, engaging volunteers as one-to-one tutors or mentors, creating new opportunities for learning in a classroom setting, organizing out-of-school time enrichment activities, developing distance learning modules, family literacy or intergenerational learning, or other interventions. Regardless of the specific type of intervention, all projects must align with our mission to improve the ability of Minnesotans in low-income communities to read, write and communicate effectively.

## Literacy VISTA Objectives

- To increase low-income individuals' **access** to high-quality literacy services, both by increasing the quantity of services provided and eliminating obstacles, resulting in more individuals being served.
- To improve **academic performance** of children and youth from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, particularly with regard to literacy.
- To increase **academic engagement** of children and youth.
- To improve **school readiness** for pre-school aged children in terms of **social-emotional skills** and **literacy skills**.
- To increase the number of youth prepared to **graduate on time from high school** and **enroll in post-secondary education**.
- To increase **English language skills** of adult learners, and to increase the number of adults with a **high school equivalency credential**
- To increase the **effectiveness** of host organizations in serving the literacy needs of low-income individuals.

## VISTA Logic Model



## THE ROLE OF VISTA MEMBERS

The purpose of VISTA is to build the capacity of organizations. Rather than providing direct service (i.e. tutor students), a VISTA member will strengthen and support your organization by building infrastructure, expanding partnerships, securing long-term resources, coordinating training, designing new or expanding existing programs, and more.

VISTA members may not replace an existing paid staff position and may not take the place of a permanent staff position.

VISTA members are short-term resources that serve to build the long-term sustainability of programs. Host sites re-apply each year and are typically awarded up to three years of VISTA members, with the possibility of extending into a fourth or fifth year if Minnesota Literacy Council and partner site mutually agree on a need for extension. VISTA projects should be developed with a goal to ultimately eliminate the need for VISTA members and maintain programming without them.

VISTA responsibilities focus on activities that **create a lasting impact** on your organization's ability to serve the literacy needs of low-income communities through new program development, program expansion, or improving program effectiveness.

### **We expect that all VISTA projects will include the following:**

- Creation, implementation and improvement of **infrastructure** for new or expanded literacy-focused programming; and
- Systematic **evaluation** of the effectiveness and impact of the new or expanded literacy-focused programming.

### **Examples of approved VISTA capacity-building activities include:**

#### **Developing, Designing or Enhancing Program Content**

Developing or designing new program content; creating systems for standardizing content across programs; aligning program content with standards; creating processes for reviewing and modifying program content; evaluating program content to ensure it is responsive to participants' needs; finding ways to make better use of technology to increase effective use of content and materials; developing and implementing training for staff on new program content and related systems, tools and processes.

#### **Designing or Conducting a Program Evaluation**

Developing a comprehensive, actionable logic model; defining measurable outcome objectives and output targets; conducting a program evaluation; analyzing evaluation results to guide program improvement; disseminating evaluation findings.

#### **Developing or Strengthening Goals/Performance Targets and Milestones**

Developing or strengthening program goals/performance targets to ensure they are clearly defined and aligned with program goals and strategies; articulating short-term and long-term targets and milestones; ensuring program staff and volunteers are aware of relevant goals, objectives and milestones; identifying, developing and/or implementing new tools for assessing and tracking program goals/targets (i.e. pre and post-test assessments, participant surveys, intake forms, databases); finding ways to make better use of technology to increase efficiency in collecting data; developing and implementing training for staff on new systems, tools and processes for assessment and data tracking.

**Developing and Nurturing Partnerships**

Developing and nurturing partnerships in the community to deliver services or otherwise directly support service delivery (for example, by providing a volunteer pipeline); creating processes for ongoing collaboration and communication between community partners; developing or identifying appropriate systems for tracking information related to community partnerships.

**Enhancing Volunteer Recruitment and/or Training**

Creating new opportunities for engaging volunteers; increasing the size and diversity of the organization's pool of volunteers; identifying pipelines for providing an ongoing source of volunteers; increasing the effectiveness of volunteers in program delivery by developing enhanced resources for training and orientation; developing and implementing training for staff on new systems, tools and processes for volunteer recruitment and training.

**Improving Volunteer Systems**

Implementing new systems for volunteer recruitment, training and/or management; formalizing systems so the organization can more effectively and efficiently use volunteers; increasing volunteer retention and reliability by creating improved systems for volunteer support, recognition and management; creating or enhancing a written volunteer generation plan, volunteer manual, job descriptions for volunteers, formal screening process, formal volunteer orientation, systems for measuring volunteer impact, etc.; developing or identifying appropriate systems for tracking volunteer information (i.e. databases, intake forms, etc.); finding ways to make better use of technology to increase efficiency of tracking volunteer data or communication with volunteers; developing and implementing training for staff on new volunteer systems, tools and processes.

**Conducting a Needs Assessment** *(allowable as a secondary component of a VISTA project to complement other capacity-building activities)*

Planning, conducting, or analyzing an organizational needs assessment to determine the needs, opportunities and potential challenges with regard to developing and expanding literacy-focused programming; creating systems to facilitate ongoing needs assessment; developing and implementing surveys, conducting focus groups, etc.

**Implementing New Program-Related Outreach or Fundraising Strategies** *(allowable as a secondary component of a VISTA project to complement other capacity-building activities)*

Creating plans or materials for outreach for new or expanded programming; conducting outreach in the community or among potential participants to increase awareness of programming; developing communications materials to showcase program outcomes or successes to potential stakeholders; identifying and securing resources for new or expanded programming through fundraising, grant-writing, volunteer engagement, or in-kind donations; developing and implementing training for staff on new systems, tools and processes related to new outreach or fundraising strategies.

## SAMPLE PROJECTS

Examples of past projects include:

- Create a volunteer-led class for young children whose parents are in adult ESL classes with a curriculum focused on building skills children will need for success in Kindergarten.
- Enhance an existing after-school program for elementary school children by adding an engaging literacy-focused curriculum that can be easily implemented by existing staff and volunteer mentors (word games, creative writing activities, computer reading games and online learning).
- Collaborate with community partners to build summer programming that engages youth in literacy activities (writing and performing a play, learning how to make books, writing and publishing newspaper articles, participating in book clubs).
- Take a new one-on-one tutoring program to scale by establishing volunteer pipelines, improving systems for volunteer recruitment, training and management, and streamlining systems for tracking data.
- Incorporate the arts in engaging at-risk teens to express themselves through language (writing and performing poetry and music).
- Develop a community partnership to provide on-site adult English as a Second Language classes to residents in a low-income housing facility.
- Add services that increase the intensity of instruction and retention of adult basic education students (volunteer-led tutoring and conversation groups, distance learning, employment readiness activities, etc.).

## REQUIREMENTS OF VISTA HOST SITES

### VISTA Member Supervision

Site supervisors are expected to be actively and regularly involved in the VISTA's work. ***\*Site supervisor involvement is the key determinant of a successful VISTA placement.\**** Expect that your site's VISTA supervisor will spend, at minimum, an average of **10-15 hours per month** on VISTA supervision. Please take this into careful consideration when choosing a staff member for the VISTA Supervisor position.

Supervisors must make time to meet regularly with VISTA members to provide support, feedback, guidance, training and mentoring and to assess progress toward project goals. Site supervisors are required to attend two VISTA supervisor workshops per year (generally held in early spring and fall at Minnesota Literacy Council in St Paul). Site supervisors are also required to complete mid-year and end-of-year evaluations for the VISTA member.

### Project Planning

Host sites are expected to work with Minnesota Literacy Council to develop a project plan and VISTA Assignment Description (VAD). These documents must be approved by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

### Project Management

Minnesota Literacy Council expects that VISTA host sites will demonstrate commitment to the success of the VISTA project by overseeing the day-to-day management of the project, including direct supervision of VISTA members, reporting and evaluation, and ensuring VISTA members have sufficient resources and on-site support to fulfill their project responsibilities. This involves **budgeting adequate staff time** for direct supervision of the VISTA member and of the project. Host sites are also responsible for providing

the necessary administrative support to design and complete the goals and objectives of the VISTA project and ensure sustainability.

### **Sustainability**

Host sites must ensure that the VISTA’s work is continually leading toward organizational and community capacity to continue the efforts of the project once the VISTA resources are withdrawn. All VISTA projects should be developed with the goal of **phasing out** the need for VISTA members and strengthening the ability of the project to continue without them. As much as possible, host sites should incorporate feedback from the community, involve community members in the project and capitalize upon existing community assets in order to support long-term sustainability of the project.

### **VISTA Member Recruitment and Selection**

Host sites are expected to take the lead in **recruiting, interviewing and checking references** for VISTA applicants. Minnesota Literacy Council will assist you in this process by providing training and technical assistance, placing your position description on the AmeriCorps online recruitment website and conducting general statewide recruitment activities. The primary responsibility for filling the VISTA position, however, rests with the host site.

### **VISTA Member Training**

Host sites must arrange for initial **on-site training** in August and ongoing training throughout the year as needed for their VISTA members. Additionally, sites must allow VISTA members to attend a mandatory Minnesota Literacy Council VISTA two-day orientation and several in-service days scheduled throughout the program year.

### **Project evaluation and progress reporting**

Host sites must track and report outputs related to the program and the VISTA member’s activities (for example, number of individuals served, number of volunteers recruited, number of volunteers trained, amount of donations leveraged, etc.). As much as is feasible, host sites are also asked to track and report on quantifiable measures of the project’s impact on the individuals served (for example, gains in reading or writing skills, number of students graduating from high school or obtaining a high school equivalency credential, etc.). Site supervisors (with input from VISTA members) are required to complete **five formal online progress reports per year** (four quarterly reports and an end-of-year report) to share progress on project goals and impact.

### **Financial and in-kind match**

As part of the host site’s agreement to host an AmeriCorps VISTA member, the host agency commits to making a **cost-share contribution** to Minnesota Literacy Council. This cost share will be used to offset a portion of Minnesota Literacy Council’s expenditures for the VISTA program. This amount increases with each year of the VISTA project. The graduated cost share system is as follows (and is subject to change in response to federal funding or policy changes):

Year 1:	\$3,000
Year 2:	\$4,000
Year 3:	\$5,000
Year 4*:	Full Cost Share - \$11,796*
Year 5*:	Full Cost Share - \$11,796*



\*Most VISTA projects are able to attain sustainability by the third year of the project; however, under special circumstances, VISTA host sites are allowed up to two more years of the VISTA resource at full cost share. Full cost share is equal to the amount of a VISTA member's living allowance, which is currently \$11,796. This amount may increase due to cost of living increases set by the federal government.

Additionally, host sites are expected to provide a **comfortable and welcoming work environment**, including reasonable office space, use of a computer, phone and email access comparable to that of paid staff. **Host sites are also expected to provide mileage reimbursement** (or reimbursement for public transit costs) to VISTA members for project-related travel.

#### **VISTA MEMBERS**

VISTA members receive a living allowance (105% of the host site county's poverty level), a healthcare allowance, training and choice of an education award (approximately \$5815) or end-of-year stipend (\$1500) in exchange for a year of full-time service. These benefits are provided by the Minnesota Literacy Council and the Corporation for National and Community Service. VISTA members serve full-time (typically 40 hours per week) in their host sites and should be available for evening and weekend project needs as needed. VISTA members must request approval to hold another part-time job or attend school part-time while in service.

The literacy council provides support to VISTA members in the form of training, technical assistance, peer support from a VISTA Leader, and networking and professional development opportunities.

#### **ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS**

Nonprofit, government agencies, schools and faith-based organizations delivering needed educational and community services in Minnesota are eligible to apply.

## SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will be judged in a competitive selection process against the following criteria:

Category	Weight	Details
<u>Organizational Capacity:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organization information</li> <li>- Contact information</li> <li>- Participation in National Service Programs</li> <li>- Organization description</li> <li>- Project management and supervision</li> </ul>	25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization’s mission and current programming fit with the proposed VISTA project</li> <li>• Organization is capable of providing the necessary level of support for a successful VISTA project and successful VISTA member</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates the organization has the capacity and will be prepared to provide an appropriate work environment for a VISTA member</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates that the organization has a plan for providing ample supervision and support for both the VISTA and the project as a whole</li> <li>• Staff member is identified to directly supervise the VISTA member and manage the VISTA project, will be able to dedicate 10-15 hours a month at minimum to project management/supervision and is qualified and prepared to provide adequate supervision and support</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates organization has a plan for project management and on-site supervision and support that will provide an attractive service opportunity for a VISTA member</li> </ul>
<u>Project Concept:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summary of request</li> <li>- Need statement</li> <li>- Project vision</li> <li>- Community involvement</li> <li>- Goal statement</li> <li>- Capacity-building focus</li> <li>- Capacity-building results</li> <li>- Capacity-building activities</li> <li>- Programming interventions</li> </ul>	60%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project supports Minnesota Literacy Council and AmeriCorps VISTA missions and goals, specifically as they relate to literacy and the elimination of poverty</li> <li>• Project concept is innovative and forward-thinking with a compelling vision</li> <li>• Target population has significant literacy needs and indicators of poverty</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates the need for VISTA resources to expand capacity to serve target population</li> <li>• Project concept has been well thought-out and has clearly defined goals, objectives and strategies</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates an ambitious but manageable plan for utilizing a full-time VISTA member to build the host site’s capacity to be more effective and/or expand services</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates a realistic plan to make the project sustainable within three years</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates a plan for community involvement that will give the target community a role to play in decision-making and long-term sustainability of the project</li> <li>• Project involves appropriate capacity-building activities (not direct service, not replacing a staff role, sustainable)</li> </ul>
<u>Performance Measures:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacity-building</li> <li>- Anti-poverty</li> </ul>	15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application includes measurable outputs and outcomes that are realistic and relevant to the project concept</li> <li>• Outputs and outcomes align with Literacy VISTA goals and priority measures</li> </ul>

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Proposals for VISTA projects through Minnesota Literacy Council must be submitted through an online application by 5:00 p.m. on **January 25, 2017**. The application form is available at [www.tfaforms.com/452761](http://www.tfaforms.com/452761).

Prior to submitting a proposal, **you are required to participate in an information session** to learn more about partnering with the Minnesota Literacy Council to host a Literacy VISTA, and the application process. Dates and locations are as follows (choose one):

**Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Minnesota Literacy Council (training room)  
700 Raymond Avenue; Saint Paul, MN 55114

**Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Via webinar

**Wednesday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Minnesota Literacy Council (training room)  
700 Raymond Avenue; Saint Paul, MN 55114

**Tuesday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

Minnesota Literacy Council (training room)  
700 Raymond Avenue; Saint Paul, MN 55114

**Also available via recorded webinar upon request.**

Please contact Meghan Paul-Cook to RSVP for any of the above trainings, to request access to the live or recorded webinar, with any questions about this application, requests for technical assistance or for feedback on project ideas.

651-251-9069

[mpaulcook@mnliteracy.org](mailto:mpaulcook@mnliteracy.org)