



## Host a Literacy VISTA Request for Proposals 2014-2015



### OVERVIEW

The 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 2014-2015 year. ***By partnering with the Minnesota Literacy Council to host a Literacy VISTA project, your organization can expand, improve and sustain literacy programming that helps Minnesotan children and youth gain the skills they need to move out of poverty.***

The Minnesota Literacy Council can partner with your organization to develop and implement an innovative capacity-building project, based on the needs you identify and your vision for program growth. A Literacy VISTA project will build the capacity of your organization to more effectively fight poverty by creating or expanding programming to address literacy needs of children and youth (preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade). 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 also 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 an innovative 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 creating or expanding high-quality literacy programming which will be integrated into your organization and sustainable by your organization after the VISTA project ends. A typical project is renewed for three years.

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

### TIMELINE\*

Applications to host a VISTA due.....	<b>January 15, 2014</b>
Sites notified of selection decisions.....	<b>January 31, 2014</b>
Site supervisors attend one full-day training .....	<b>February (date TBD)</b>
Sites submit detailed project plan and VISTA Assignment Description (VAD).....	<b>March 5, 2014</b>
Sites recruit and select VISTA member(s).....	<b>March through May</b>
VISTAs approved by MLC and CNCS State Office.....	<b>early June 2014</b>
All VISTAs begin their year of service.....	<b>early August 2014</b>

\* 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 VISTA Manager at the Minnesota Literacy Council, Ellen Bergstrom, at [ebergstrom@mnliteracy.org](mailto:ebergstrom@mnliteracy.org) or 651-251-9151.

## 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. For many years, the Minnesota Literacy Council has received a generous grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service to sponsor and support approximately 40 VISTA members each year to serve in the area of children and youth literacy in schools, public agencies and nonprofit organizations across Minnesota. While the Corporation for National and Community Service has not yet determined award amounts for 2014-15, the Minnesota Literacy Council is soliciting project proposals in anticipation of continued AmeriCorps VISTA resources.

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

The 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, as well as statewide support for other literacy programs. For more information on the Minnesota Literacy Council please visit [www.mnliteracy.org](http://www.mnliteracy.org).

The Literacy VISTA program is one way that the Minnesota Literacy Council provides capacity-building support to literacy programs in the state of Minnesota.

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

***We envision a future in which all children and youth in Minnesota are able to read, write and communicate effectively, allowing them to graduate high school prepared for college or career. We believe that having strong literacy skills will empower young people to move out of poverty.***

*The 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 building literacy skills in the community.
2. Provide opportunities for VISTA members to gain skills and experience that will allow them to become leaders in their chosen field.

The 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 also seek organizations that will partner with the literacy council to 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 to address 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**

Our goals for Literacy VISTA projects:

1. Build the capacity of the host site, allowing more individuals to be served, additional types of services to be offered and/or for a higher quality of service.
2. Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the host site in providing literacy services to high-poverty communities.

Literacy VISTA projects may focus on building capacity for 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)
- College Access (ensuring students are on track to graduate and have the literacy skills necessary for success in post-secondary education)
- English language skills for children and youth who speak another language at home

Literacy VISTA projects **do 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 in the English language.

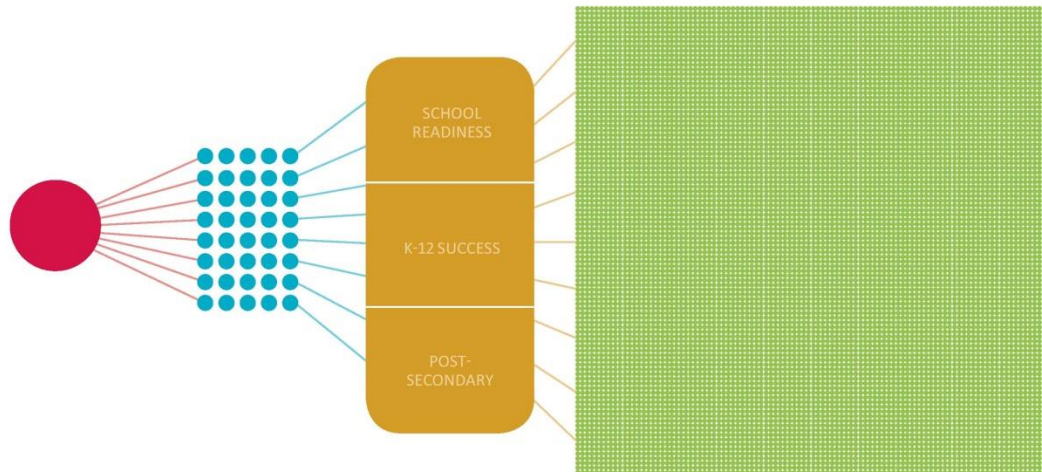
Projects should be based on proven, research-based methods of improving literacy skills and student engagement. Projects may provide in-school, after-school or summer programming for youth and/or focus on family and community engagement. Projects could involve developing new curriculum, engaging volunteers as one-to-one tutors or mentors, creating new opportunities for learning in a classroom setting, or organizing out-of-school time enrichment activities. Regardless of the specific type of intervention, all projects must align with our mission to improve the ability of Minnesota's children and youth in low-income communities to read, write and communicate effectively in English.

## Literacy VISTA Goals

- To increase low-income children and youth's **access** to high-quality literacy services, both by increasing the quantity of services provided and eliminating obstacles so that more children and youth can be 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 the **efficiency and effectiveness** of host organizations in serving the literacy needs of children and youth.



# VISTA Logic Model



## THE ROLE OF VISTA MEMBERS

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

VISTA members should not replace an existing paid staff position and should 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 the Minnesota Literacy Council and partner site mutually agree on a need for extension. VISTA projects should be developed with a goal to phase out 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 low-income communities in the area of child, adolescent and family literacy.

### **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 responsibilities include:**

- Designing logic models and strategic plans for new or expanded programming
- Researching the needs of the community and/or organization
- Completing a community assessment to determine the needs, opportunities and potential challenges with regard to developing and expanding literacy-focused programming;
- Writing job descriptions, volunteer assignment descriptions, or internship/work-study assignment descriptions
- Developing curriculum
- Identifying and securing resources for new or expanded programming through fundraising, grant-writing, volunteer engagement, or in-kind donations
- Building partnerships in the community and creating processes for collaborating with partners
- Doing outreach in the community or among potential participants to increase awareness of programming
- Creating marketing or fundraising plans and materials
- Developing methods for tracking and evaluation of programs – for example, skill assessments, satisfaction surveys, focus groups, databases for keeping track of information, disseminating evaluation findings, and more
- Training other staff or volunteers on new systems, tools and processes

## 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 a fun and 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 kids in interesting literacy activities (writing and performing a play, learning how to make books, writing and publishing newspaper articles, participating in book clubs)
- Incorporate the arts in engaging at-risk teens to express themselves through language (writing and performing poetry and music)
- Create a one-on-one tutoring programming utilizing both volunteers and paid staff to support youth academic needs at a shelter for families experiencing homelessness

## REQUIREMENTS OF VISTA HOST SITES

### Project Planning

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

### Project Management

The 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 adequate 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.

### 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 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 trainings/meetings for site supervisors, including two mandatory supervisor meetings per year (generally held in early spring and fall at the Minnesota Literacy Council in St Paul). Site supervisors are also required to complete mid-year and end-of-year evaluations for the VISTA member.

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

Host sites are expected to take the lead in **recruiting, interviewing and checking references** for VISTA applicants. The 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 should 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 be able to **track and report on quantifiable measures of the project's impact on the children and youth served** (for example, gains in reading or writing skills or school attendance rates). Suggested evaluation tools can be provided at request. Host sites are also asked to track 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.). 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 the Minnesota Literacy Council. This will be used to offset a portion of the 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** to VISTA members for project-related travel.

#### **VISTA MEMBERS**

VISTA members receive a living allowance (105% of the host site county's poverty level), health coverage, training and choice of an education award (approximately \$5550) 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 typically serve 40 hours per week in their host sites and should be available full-time for evening and weekend project needs as necessary. Accordingly, they are not permitted to hold other jobs or attend full-time school while in service.

The Literacy Council additionally 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 for children and/or youth (pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) are eligible to apply.



**SELECTION CRITERIA**

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

Category	Weight	Details
Project Summary	5%	
Project Design: - Context: situation/need - Sustainability and capacity-building - Project description - Evaluation plan	75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative is complete and clearly written</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, and focuses primarily on children and/or youth</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates the need for VISTA resources to expand capacity to serve target population</li> <li>• Project supports the MN Literacy Council and AmeriCorps VISTA missions and goals, specifically as they relate to children and youth literacy and the elimination of poverty</li> <li>• Project involves appropriate capacity-building activities (not direct service, not replacing a staff role, sustainable)</li> <li>• Project concept has been well thought-out and has clearly defined goals, objectives, strategies, and evaluation plan</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>• Narrative demonstrates the project will have measurable outputs and outcomes related to increasing the quantity or quality of services provided, increasing the number of children and youth served, and increases in literacy skills, school readiness, school attendance, and/or academic engagement</li> <li>• Narrative demonstrates a realistic plan to make the project sustainable within three years</li> </ul>
Organizational Capacity: - Organization info - Organization mission and history - Project management - Supervisor info	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative is complete and clearly written</li> <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 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 onsite supervision and support that will provide an attractive service opportunity for a VISTA member</li> </ul>

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Proposals for VISTA projects through the Minnesota Literacy Council must be submitted through an online application, due **January 15, 2014**, and available at <http://www.tfaforms.com/297700>.

You are invited to attend a one-hour 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:

Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Minnesota Literacy Council (training room) 700 Raymond Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55114

Thursday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Minnesota Literacy Council (training room) 700 Raymond Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55114

Tuesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
University of Minnesota, Morris (Welcome Center)

Tuesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Riverland Community College, Owatonna (Room 150)

Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.  
Minnesota Literacy Council (training room) 700 Raymond Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55114

Thursday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014, 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.  
Minnesota Literacy Council (training room) 700 Raymond Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55114

Please contact Ellen Bergstrom, VISTA Manager, with any questions or requests for technical assistance or for feedback on project ideas.

651-251-9151

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