

Host a Literacy VISTA Request for Proposals 2018-2019



OVERVIEW

Minnesota Literacy Council, in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service, seeks proposals from organizations interested in hosting a full-time AmeriCorps VISTA member during the 2018-2019 program year. Literacy VISTA members work on expanding, improving, and sustaining literacy-focused programming to help Minnesotans gain the skills they need to move out of poverty.

A Literacy VISTA enables your organization to turn a dream project into a reality. VISTA projects may focus on the literacy needs of early childhood, school-age children and youth, adults, or families in any community in Minnesota. VISTAs may create new programming, make improvements to existing programs, or expand the scale or reach of programs. By doing so, they help your agency to: serve more individuals, reach a greater audience, more deeply impact causes of poverty, and expand the quality and quantity of program offerings.

At the same time, Literacy VISTA is an opportunity for VISTA members to build leadership; explore career paths in public service, social service, or education; and engage deeply in community work. It is a unique opportunity to invest in, coach, and mentor emerging leaders in the education and nonprofit fields.

As a host site, you provide the vision, project plan, day-to-day management of the project, and on-site supervision of the VISTA member. The literacy council provides training and technical assistance to you and the VISTA member at all stages of the project.

With a Literacy VISTA project, your organization can gain the time and initial investment to put infrastructure in place for creating, expanding or improving high-quality literacy programming for children, youth, adults, or families for years beyond the VISTA's service. A VISTA member serves full-time for 12 months, with the option to continue service for multiple years. A typical project is renewed annually for 3-5 years.

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

CONTACT

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TIMELINE*

November 2017-January 2018 Information Sessions (attendance at one required for new sites)

January 25, 2018 Deadline for project proposals Early February 2018 Sites notified of selection

February 15 and 16, 2018 Site supervisor trainings, 9am-3pm (select one)

March 1, 2018 Deadline for detailed project plan, VISTA Assignment Description

(VAD), and service opportunity first draft

April 1, 2018 Final deadline for finalized VAD and service opportunity

March-June 2018 Member recruitment, interviews, and selection

April 30, 2018 Deadline for Site Agreement, Board Letter of Commitment, and initial

\$1,000 cost-share payment

Early June 2018 Deadline for VISTA member selection

July 20, 2018 Deadline for Annual Organizational Assessment and On-site

orientation and training plan

Late July/early August 2018 Pre-Service Orientation for new VISTA members and VISTAs begin

their year of service

Mid-August 2018 Literacy VISTA members Early Service Training

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 (12 months) 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 2018-19, 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. For more info about the Minnesota Literacy Council VISTA program, visit www.mnliteracy.org/americorps-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, youth, and families seeking to improve their literacy skills and statewide consulting, training, volunteer management, and other resources for other literacy programs. The Literacy VISTA program is one way that Minnesota Literacy Council provides capacity-building support to programs in the state of Minnesota. For more information on Minnesota Literacy Council please visit www.mnliteracy.org.

^{*}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.

LITERACY VISTA: OUR VISION, GOALS, OBJECTIVES, 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.

Literacy VISTA Goals

- 1. Move people out of poverty through educational attainment by expanding the ability of nonprofit organizations and educational agencies in Minnesota to address these critical issues.
- **2.** Provide opportunities for individuals to serve their communities and gain skills and experiences that lead to lifelong civic engagement and leadership.

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 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.

Literacy VISTA Objectives

- To increase low-income individuals' and communities' access to high-quality literacy services, by
 increasing the quantity and quality of services provided and by eliminating obstacles, resulting in
 more individuals being served.
- To improve **academic performance** of children and youth from kindergarten through 12th 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 and communities.
- To mobilize **volunteers** to address community needs in the area of education.

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.

ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS

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

ELIGIBLE LITERACY VISTA PROJECTS

Literacy VISTA projects develop, build, support and deepen literacy-focused programming that directly impact the educational access, persistence, and completion for low-income children, youth, adults, or families. Eligible projects focus on either:

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

Eligible Literacy VISTA projects 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; parent education; family literacy)
- K-12 Success (getting school-aged children and youth reading at grade level; boosting literacy skills such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, story-telling, writing, oral language; increasing confidence, interest and engagement in reading, writing, and learning; ensuring students are on track to graduate and have the literacy skills necessary for success in post-secondary education; parent engagement and family literacy)
- Adult Literacy (serving individuals at least 18 years old who are not enrolled in K-12 school system; 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; 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.

Eligible projects must:

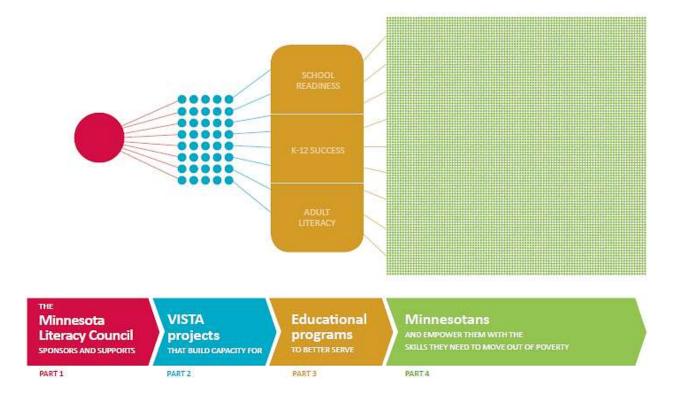
- Be based on best practices for improving literacy skills and student engagement;
- Be based on an identified community need, and/or include community need assessment as part
 of the VISTA member's responsibilities; and
- Align with our mission to improve the ability of Minnesotans in low-income communities to read, write, and communicate effectively.

Sample eligible projects could involve:

- Developing new curriculum
- Designing train-the-trainer models
- Engaging volunteers as tutors, mentors, or program facilitators
- Creating new opportunities for learning
- Organizing out-of-school-time enrichment activities
- Developing distance learning modules

- Finding ways to increase family and community engagement
- And/or other educational and literacy-focused interventions

VISTA Logic Model



THE ROLE OF VISTA MEMBERS

The purpose of VISTA is to build the capacity of organizations. VISTA members do not provide direct service (e.g., tutor learners). Instead, VISTAs strengthen and support organizations by building infrastructure, expanding partnerships, securing long-term resources, developing or improving program content, coordinating training, designing new or expanding existing programs, and more "behind-the-scenes."

VISTA members may not replace an existing paid staff position and may not take the place of a permanent staff position. VISTA is intended to be a short-term resource that makes a long-term impact.

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.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

We expect that all VISTA projects will include the following:

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

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.).

HOW DOES THE VISTA GRANT WORK?

VISTA members are short-term resources that serve to build the long-term sustainability of programs. All Literacy VISTA projects must be designed with a three-year timeline in mind to support sustainability.

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.

Each year of a project is meant to build upon the previous year:

- Year 1: VISTA creates project foundation, conducts research, and begins implementation process
- Year 2: VISTA continues to implement project, evaluates and makes refinements from Year 1, and begins to create structure for sustainability
- Year 3: VISTA focuses on sustaining the project beyond the VISTA resource
- Years 4 and 5 (if needed): VISTA continues to focus on sustaining the project beyond VISTA

Key questions to consider:

- Who would be doing this work if you had no VISTA? Who will continue the work after the VISTA
 resource ends? Is this type of work typically done by paid staff in other similar organizations?
 (VISTAs are intended to create something new and/or enhance existing efforts and not to
 deliver core organizational functions.)
- What will remain after your VISTA project ends? (If nothing remains but a hole in your human resources that a VISTA member previously filled, capacity was not built.)
- How will the work be sustained? (Creating new programs and/or systems that cannot be sustained after the VISTA resources end is counterproductive and a waste of resources and time. Sustainability planning is an essential element of VISTA project planning.)

HOST SITE RESPONSIBILITIES

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 and project oversight. 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 performance evaluations for the VISTA member.

Project planning

Host sites are expected to work with Minnesota Literacy Council to develop a project work 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 actively **recruit, interview and check references** for their 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, phone screening all applicants, and conducting general statewide recruitment activities. The primary responsibility for filling the VISTA position, however, rests with the host site.

VISTA Member training and professional development

Host sites must arrange for initial **on-site orientation and training** in the VISTA's first weeks and ongoing training and professional development 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 (typically monthly). Training is considered a part of the VISTA's full-time service and is not "extra."

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 progress reports and an annual Organizational Self-Assessment) to share progress on project goals and impact.

Communication with Minnesota Literacy Council

Host sites are expected to **maintain regular communication** with Minnesota Literacy Council national service staff about the project and VISTA member. Host sites should notify the literacy council immediately regarding changes to the VISTA project plan; any issues that arise with VISTA member performance; unscheduled termination of a VISTA member or unscheduled changes of status and conditions of a VISTA member such as arrest, hospitalization, or unapproved absences; or anything else impacting the completion of the VISTA project.

Adequate work space

Host sites are expected to provide a **comfortable and welcoming work environment**, including reasonable office space, access to building and workspace, materials and supplies necessary to perform their assigned duties, use of a computer, phone, and email access comparable to that of paid staff.

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** financial match to Minnesota Literacy Council. This cost-share is used to directly support the Literacy VISTA program, including member and supervisor training and technical assistance. The cost-share rates are as follows (subject to change in response to federal funding or policy changes):

Years 1-3 of a project: \$5,000

Years 4-5 of a project: Full cost-share - \$12,312*

*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 \$12,312. This amount may increase due to cost of living increases set by the federal government.

Service-related travel reimbursement

Host sites are expected to provide mileage reimbursement (or reimbursement for public transit costs) to VISTA members for project-related travel, at rates and using processes as approved for the host site's paid staff. If no policy/rate for host site paid staff travel reimbursement exists, use the current federal mileage reimbursement rate.

Additional benefits and support for VISTAs

Additionally, host sites are not required but **strongly encouraged to provide additional supports and benefits to VISTA members whenever feasible**. Host sites that are able to do so often have an increased ability to recruit and retain high-quality VISTA members. By doing so, they help to create pathways for more people from a wide range of identities and backgrounds to participate in VISTA service (beyond those who have pre-existing sufficient financial safety nets) and enable more VISTAs to successfully complete a term of service.

As you envision your VISTA project, consider the multitude of ways in which you could support your VISTA member in successfully completing their service and having an even greater impact on your project and community.

According to Corporation for National and Community Service policies, VISTA members may not directly receive any financial support beyond their bi-weekly living allowance and service-related travel reimbursement. However, additional benefits that are allowable and encouraged include:

- Emergency funds
- Housing assistance (in the form of payment directly to a landlord or mortgage company, or inkind in the form of physical housing)
- Public transit passes or gas cards
- Food or grocery cards
- Professional development funds (in addition to the \$150 each Literacy VISTA member receives from Minnesota Literacy Council)
- Cell phone reimbursement (in the form of payment directly to a phone company)
- Formal career coaching and mentoring
- Other ideas

Please discuss in advance any additional benefits you might be able to provide with the literacy council.

VISTA MEMBERS

VISTA members receive a living allowance (105% of the host site county's poverty level, currently set at \$12,312 pre-tax per year for Minnesota), a healthcare allowance, training, professional development funds, relocation allowance (if eligible), childcare allowance (if eligible), federal student loan deferment/forbearance, 10 personal and 10 medical leave days, workers' compensation, Employee Assistance Program enrollment, and choice of an education award scholarship (approximately \$5,920) or end-of-year stipend (\$1,800) in exchange for a year (12 months, 365 days) of full-time service. These benefits are provided by Minnesota Literacy Council and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

VISTA members serve full-time (about 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.

SELECTION CRITERIA

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

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Category	Weight	Details	
Organizational Capacity: - Organization information - Contact information - Participation in National Service Programs - Organization description - Project management and supervision	25%	 Organization's mission and current programming fit with the proposed VISTA project Organization is capable of providing the necessary level of support for a successful VISTA project and successful VISTA member Narrative demonstrates the organization has the capacity and will be prepared to provide an appropriate work environment for a VISTA member Narrative demonstrates that the organization has a plan for providing ample supervision and support for both the VISTA and the project as a whole 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 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 	
Project Concept: - Summary of request - Need statement - Project vision - Community	60%	 Project supports Minnesota Literacy Council and AmeriCorps VISTA missions and goals, specifically as they relate to literacy and the elimination of poverty Project concept is innovative and forward-thinking with a compelling vision Target population has significant literacy needs and indicators of 	
involvement - Goal statement		poverty	

 Capacity-building focus Capacity-building results Capacity-building activities Programming interventions 		 Narrative demonstrates the need for VISTA resources to expand capacity to serve target population Project concept has been well thought-out and has clearly defined goals, objectives and strategies 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 Narrative demonstrates a realistic plan to make the project sustainable within three years 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 Project involves appropriate capacity-building activities (not direct service, not replacing a staff role, sustainable)
Performance Measures: - Capacity-building - Anti-poverty	15%	 Application includes measurable outputs and outcomes that are realistic and relevant to the project concept Outputs and outcomes align with Literacy VISTA goals and priority measures

APPLICATION PROCESS

Proposals for VISTA projects through Minnesota Literacy Council must be submitted through an online application **by 11:59 p.m. on January 25, 2018**. The application form is available at www.tfaforms.com/452761.

Prior to submitting a proposal, **you are required to participate in an information session** to learn more about Literacy VISTA and the application process. Dates are as follows (choose one). Location is Minnesota Literacy Council (700 Raymond Ave, Suite 180, St Paul, MN 55114), unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday, November 29, 2017, 10am-12pm (webinar) Thursday, December 14, 2017, 1-3pm Tuesday, January 9, 2018, 1-3pm Thursday, January 18, 2018, 10am-12pm

Also available by recorded webinar upon request.

Please contact the literacy council's national service staff to sign up for any of the above Info Sessions, 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.

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