

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation VISTA Project Host Site Application Guidelines Effective May 2020

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF), a donor-supported foundation, invests for economic growth in the 20 counties of south central and southeastern Minnesota. The Foundation has provided more than \$114 million in grants, loans and programming within the region during the past 34 years. SMIF's key interests include early childhood, community and economic development.

SMIF is proud to sponsor the **AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) Grant Program** that engages more than 8,000 individuals annually across America to support community efforts to overcome poverty and low-income. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve full time for a year at nonprofit organizations or local government agencies to build the capacity of these organizations to carry out programs that build skills of financial literacy, professional development and business/entrepreneurial engagement to increase economic prosperity of diverse groups in our region. AmeriCorps VISTA members recruit and manage community volunteers, raise funds, help coordinate projects to build capacity toward long-term sustainability. They support, but are not limited to, programs that improve academic performance, expand job opportunities, develop financial assets, alleviate hunger, reduce homelessness, and improve health services.

SMIF VISTA PROGRAM FOCUS

Our sponsorship design is aligned to support SMIF's Prosperity Initiative, REV (Rural Economic Ventures) and Community Foundation communities who seek to host VISTA members in assignments that build economic capacity of diverse populations through financial literacy and professional skill development.

While VISTAs focus on capacity-building activities, they may, on occasion, perform limited direct service activities when deemed necessary to complete the VISTA's overall capacity-building assignment. VISTAs may also participate in direct service activities as part of term-limited special initiatives such as National Days of Service.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF AMERICORPS VISTA

Principle #1 - Anti-Poverty Focus

AmeriCorps VISTA supports community efforts to overcome poverty. Any nonprofit organization, educational institution, or tribal or government agency with a project explicitly designed to alleviate poverty may sponsor an AmeriCorps VISTA member.

Principle #2 - Community Empowerment

AmeriCorps VISTA values the inherent strengths and resources of the community. AmeriCorps VISTA expects project sponsors to involve residents of the community in planning, developing, and implementing the project. This approach allows low-income individuals the freedom to speak for themselves in determining the projects that best suit their specific needs.

Principal #3 - Capacity Building

AmeriCorps VISTA expands the ability of sponsor organizations to alleviate poverty. AmeriCorps VISTA members strengthen and support organizations by building infrastructure, expanding community partnerships, securing long-term resources, coordinating training for participants, and much more. These capacity-building activities enable organizations to provide better services to low-income individuals and communities.

Principle #4 - Sustainable Solutions

AmeriCorps VISTA members serve as a short-term resource to help sponsor organizations achieve lasting solutions to poverty.

HOSTING A VISTA

Any nonprofit organization or public agency involved in alleviating poverty may partner with AmeriCorps VISTA to develop a project and host AmeriCorps VISTA members. Potential sponsors must have the capacity and commitment to recruit, train, supervise, and support AmeriCorps VISTA members.

VISTAs are not staff members or employees of the partner site organizations to which they are assigned. VISTAs may not engage in activities at partner organizations that would displace or supplant paid staff, contractors, or existing volunteers.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for a SMIF grant, organizations must meet the following requirements:

- Eligible organizations are tax exempt 501(c) organizations, units/agencies of local, state or federal government and public schools.
- An organization in existence for at least one year.
- Located (or serve) within SMIF's 20-county region:

Blue Earth	Fillmore	Le Sueur	Olmsted	Wabasha
Brown	Freeborn	Martin	Rice	Waseca
Dodge	Goodhue	Mower	Sibley	Watsonwan
Faribault	Houston	Nicollet	Steele	Winona

VISTA PROJECT HOST COMMITMENT

- COVID-19 Teleservice: VISTA members will coordinate with sites to engage in tele-service from their home until further notice from CNCS. This is a moving target and we will be in contact with sites and members as circumstances change. Site virtual trainings with members and ongoing connections virtually with site supervisors would be the norm. AmeriCorps Director will monitor and stay connected to both VISTA member and VISTA site throughout the process of tele-service period.
- Provide day-to-day supervision of the activities of the VISTA member
- Provide VISTA individualized on-site orientation and training at the beginning of their term
- Ensure VISTA member dedicates an average of 40 hours per week to their VISTA work plans and Vista assignment to address the community needs identified in application.
- Schedule regular meetings with VISTA to discuss project and concerns
- Provide adequate working space, materials, supplies and access to a phone and computer to permit VISTA member to perform his/her assigned duties
- Ensure VISTA member is reimbursed for all local travel associated with project

- Allow VISTA member to participate in scheduled professional development and training opportunities, site visits, and conference calls.
- Providing a welcoming work culture with staff who understand VISTA member's role

EXCLUSIONS

Member activities and/or projects that are not in the scope of grant program parameters:

- VISTA members cannot replace or fill-in for site staff at any time
- VISTA members cannot hold paid positions for their service site during service placement
- VISTA members cannot provide service to for-profit business or for-profit nonprofit entities

APPLICATION PROCESS

Grant Review and Award Process

SMIF awards AmeriCorps VISTA Project Host Site grants on a competitive basis. Applications will be selected based on your organization's eligibility and readiness to host a VISTA member. Project Host Site selections will be for a 12 month funding cycle starting August 2020. SMIF will provide a public announcement highlighting the award on behalf of the grant recipient.

Proposal Components

Completed application (www.smifoundation.org, click on "Applications")

For grant award consideration, submit a completed application by **June 30, 2020** via email to barbarag@smifoundation.org or postal mail with the post mark date no later than June 30, 2020 to:

Barbara Gunderson, AmeriCorps Director
Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
525 Florence Avenue
PO Box 695
Owatonna, MN 55060

Incomplete grant applications or applications submitted after deadline may not be considered.

All applicants will be contacted via email confirming receipt of application. For further information or questions regarding the application, contact Barbara Gunderson at 507-456-0353 or email at barbarag@smifoundation.org.

SMIF is a member of the Minnesota Council of Foundations and adheres to the Council of Foundation's Statement of Principles and Practices. SMIF's annual report is available on-line at www.smifoundation.org



We are committed to recruiting and engaging individuals without regard to disability, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. Reasonable accommodations provided upon request. . AmeriCorps is funded through the Corporation for National & Community Service and Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation.