

State Commission

ServeMinnesota is a catalyst for positive social impact, working with AmeriCorps members and community partners to address critical needs facing the state. Also known as the Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service, ServeMinnesota is responsible for administering federal AmeriCorps funds to programs throughout Minnesota. As a nonprofit organization, it improves the lives of Minnesotans by offering life-changing service opportunities to thousands of individuals who focus on education, affordable housing, employment, or the environment. Its mission is to use the lever of AmeriCorps national service to achieve measurable results through innovation, strategic investments, and alignment with community needs. Currently, there is at least one AmeriCorps member serving in 77 of the 87 Minnesota counties. By combining the people power of AmeriCorps with research-based strategies, ServeMinnesota is addressing the most intractable problems and shares its proven practices nationally. More than 2,000 AmeriCorps members are serving in 13 programs at more than 1,200 sites statewide. Last year, AmeriCorps members mobilized 21,835 volunteers.

AmeriCorps State

Minnesota Reading Corps is an early literacy program designed to help children become proficient readers. AmeriCorps members provide research-based literacy tutoring to students beginning at three years-old through third grade. The program operates in more than 800 sites statewide with more than 1,200 AmeriCorps members serving 30,000 students. In 2013, a study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago confirmed that Reading Corps students, including students with high risk factors, outperform their peers. In addition, it was concluded that the program is effective in any setting – urban, suburban, and rural - and that Reading Corps coaching and training ensures that AmeriCorps members are successful regardless of their educational background. Furthermore, the research center found that the program keeps educationally at-risk children on track in general education. Students who did not receive tutoring were three times more likely to need special education than program participants were. These results for the entire state would result in a savings of \$9 million in special education services.

Minnesota Alliance with Youth-Promise Fellows provide much needed support for students in grade 6-10 who are on a trajectory to drop out of school. Promise Fellows help young people overcome challenges with attendance, behavior, and core academics to get on track for on-time graduation. In more than 120 sites statewide, 210 AmeriCorps members help 6,300 students remain engaged in school. Nearly 1 in 5 high school students (18 percent) drop out before graduation, and the dropout rates for students of color and low income students are dramatically higher, resulting in some of the worst achievement gaps in the nation. Students without a high school diploma are likely to experience lifelong negative consequences including unemployment and poverty. Entire communities benefit from the economic return of each high school graduate through increased earnings, spending, and taxes paid. Using a Multi-Tiered System of Supports approach, Promise Fellows ensure youth at risk of dropping out receive a variety of interventions utilizing caring adults, academic support, service-learning, and civic engagement, delivered in both school and out-of-school settings.

AmeriCorps National

College Possible Twin Cities, which serves 10,500 high school and college students, is closing Minnesota's degree divide and building a competitive workforce for the future. By 2020, 74 percent of jobs in the state will require a post-secondary education, but only 8 percent of low-income students nationally earn a college degree by age 24. College Possible Twin Cities' AmeriCorps coaches guide low-income students through all aspects of preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in college and support students all the way through college graduation. Students who are guided by College Possible AmeriCorps members have a 98 percent college admission rate and are 10 times more likely to graduate from college than their low-income peers. A 2013 Harvard randomized controlled trial found that students in College Possible's AmeriCorps-based program model had a significant positive increase in four-year college enrollment. By harnessing the power of national service, College Possible creates better futures for all Minnesotans.

Through Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa, which is headquartered in Saint Paul, 231 AmeriCorps members restored habitats, built trails, and responded to disasters in 2015. AmeriCorps field members serve in crews of four to six throughout the state, including in Grand Rapids, Moose Lake, Ely, Bemidji, Brainerd, Saint Paul, and Mankato. Field crews travel throughout Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin to fulfill service projects with federal, state, local, and nonprofit partners. Thanks to the support of the AmeriCorps members, the project partners build their capacity to restore natural habitat on public lands, improve water quality, respond to disasters nationwide, and increase access to outdoor recreation in the Upper Midwest. In 2015, AmeriCorps members removed 12,427 acres of invasive species; planted 150,983 trees; cleared 159 miles of river; and built or improved 362 miles of ATV, snowmobile, hiking, biking and horse trails.

AmeriCorps VISTA

The Minnesota Literacy Council's AmeriCorps VISTA Project creates and expands literacy-focused programs to help bring low-income students in grades K-12, and their families, out of poverty. In the last year, 35 AmeriCorps VISTA members served at 31 schools, nonprofit organizations, and local government agencies across the state. The members fostered hundreds of community partnerships and created sustainable systems and materials, including lesson plans, databases, tracking systems, assessments, volunteer handbooks, online resources, and outreach tools. The members also supported 2,268 community volunteers who served 72,644 hours; strengthened literacy services for 17,102 youth and 2,601 adults; and raised more than \$203,000. These efforts produced literacy gains for 52 percent of adult learners (686 out of 1320 assessed), 95 percent of pre-school-aged children (122 out of 129 assessed), and 80 percent of K-12 students who participated in out-of-school-time programs or tutoring (337 out of 422 assessed). In addition, every one of the 43 high school seniors who received services applied for and was accepted into a post-secondary program.

AmeriCorps VISTA member Nina Nguyen, who served at YWCA Mankato in 2014 and 2015, supported the Ready to Learn program, which serves immigrant and refugee families with young children. Ms. Nguyen's service developing the program, conducting community outreach, and strengthening volunteer engagement helped establish the program as a community staple. In 2014-15, 100 children from birth through kindergarten age participated in Ready to Learn. Of the children who had both pre- and post-assessments, 91 percent increased pre-literacy skills and 92 percent increased school readiness. Site supervisor Kelli Damlo writes, "Today the YWCA Mankato is serving far more families and connecting triple the volunteers to a higher quality program because of the two VISTA members who dedicated a year of their life. The efforts that both VISTAs put into the program in setting up processes and procedures, helping to find curriculum, tools to assist volunteers, creating a better case management system have all built the program to where it is at today."

AmeriCorps NCCC

AmeriCorps NCCC members worked with St. John's Abbey Arboretum in Collegeville and The Nature Conservancy to remove invasive species and build a deer-proof fence to protect the ecologically-special oak forest of the Abbey Arboretum. NCCC members split and stacked, renovated a challenge course, and helped the Arboretum staff build 2,000 feet of nine-foot tall deer fence. Members also helped The Nature Conservancy preserve 349.5 acres of dunes, monitor 12,812 square feet of native plants, and combat the spread of cow vetch, Canada thistle, sumac, purple loosestrife, and toadflax – all invasive species. Due to the team's work, the Conservancy and the Abbey greatly improved their efforts to maintain, preserve, and improve the surrounding environment.

An AmeriCorps NCCC team served with the Headwaters Science Center to support STEM education in northern Minnesota. The Science Center offers exceptional learning experiences to stimulate curiosity in science, math, and technology. The NCCC team cleaned cages at the Science Center, fed animals, helped care for a dozen reptiles and amphibians, and painted a mural. The team taught 4,003 children and adults about the animals and exhibits at the center. The team also worked with the Bemidji Community Food Shelf to prepare a garden so the Food Shelf could provide fresh fruits and vegetables to hungry families in the local community. The Food Shelf provides food to people with a short-term, emergency need. While the members served at the Food Shelf, they planted and tended 53 trees, planted vegetables on 1.5 acres of farmland, and repackaged 6,271 pounds of bulk food into smaller portions so it could reach more people community. The team started ten raised garden beds and installed 15,000 feet of an irrigation system.

Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

This past school year, more than 200 Foster Grandparents with Catholic Charities of St. Cloud served 8,000 children across central Minnesota. Ten Foster Grandparents served the community of Mora, giving 7,585 hours of one-on-one and small group help to 56 students with high needs. Foster Grandparent volunteers provide their students a year of focused support in literacy and/or math. As a result, every one of those students showed academic gains. One teacher shared on a performance evaluation, "Our test scores show great improvement with the students Grandma works with. We love our Foster Grandparents!"

Senior Corps RSVP

RSVP of the Red River Valley, sponsored by the University of Minnesota Crookston, currently runs 32 volunteer-led Bone Builder classes for seniors across the region. In a one-year span, 124 RSVP volunteers supported classes for 463 senior participants who wanted to prevent or reverse osteoporosis through this exercise program. The Bone Builders classes are promoted by local agencies and recommended by local physicians because of the benefits to those recovering from surgery and the overall health benefits to participants. Participant surveys indicated that 95 percent of those who had a recent bone density scan showed slight or significant improvement or had no bone loss changes. The survey also reported that 95 percent of participants showed improvement in balance and strength. Several RSVP volunteers attended training on tai chi and have piloted tai chi classes in two new communities, giving seniors more local opportunities to maintain and improve their health.

Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

Last year, Senior Companion volunteers serving with Lutheran Social service of Minnesota served 1,831 senior and homebound people, giving 250,659 hours of service to help them continue to live independently. Client surveys show that 93 percent of clients reported increased social ties and social support as a result of the Senior Companion program. More than 90 percent of the people who were served said that because of their Senior Companion, they could get to medical appointments and go grocery shopping, were eating regularly scheduled meals, and were able to remain living in their own homes and apartments.

Social Innovation Fund

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) is investing to expand the impact of 12 nonprofits in Minnesota that are improving economic opportunities for adults and outcomes for youth who live in low-income communities. College Possible's Summer Bridge program served nearly 500 additional students in the state, while ServeMinnesota served an additional 750 students this past year through the Minnesota Reading Corps program. SIF transforms lives by using evidence to find what works and make it work for more people. SIF Classic and SIF Pay for Success programs harness the expertise of grant-making intermediaries to identify, evaluate, and expand effective nonprofits serving low-income communities.

Volunteer Generation Fund

ServeMinnesota, in partnership with Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration, HandsOn Twin Cities and volunteer centers across the state, is expanding the Service Enterprise Initiative (SEI) across Minnesota and preparing a pipeline of organizations for SEI training. This organizational training certification expands volunteerism and the use of skill-based volunteers who increase organization's effectiveness to address chronic community problems. The partners strengthen the capacity of the state's volunteer connector organizations to create and connect volunteers with high quality assignments, increase the number of skill-based volunteers generated and retained. Each year, 30 organizations will be SEI-trained and working toward certification; 150 nonprofits will be trained in best practices to improve their management capacity and effectiveness, thus creating an SEI pipeline; and organizations statewide will increase their capacity to recruit, connect, and retain at least 34,950 volunteers who will contribute 244,650 hours of service or more each year. The value of these volunteer hours to Minnesota, to be performed by 104,000 volunteers over three years, approaches \$18 million.