

ServeMinnesota Investment Policy

This document outlines a framework that is designed to help the Board and staff of ServeMinnesota to answer the question,

Where should we invest our resources in order to have the greatest positive impact as a catalyst for social change in Minnesota?

Investments at ServeMinnesota can take many forms. They might be planning grants to organizations seeking to design a new AmeriCorps program. They can also include the decision to sustain or expand existing programs. And, the staff and Board can consider the value of their time as an investment that they should make intentionally towards the most important activities.

Listed below are a set of criteria that we will use to evaluate investment proposals – both formal and informal – that are presented to ServeMinnesota.

Criteria	Explanation	Indicators
Targeted at solving a critical challenge facing Minnesota	While there are a large number of issues that are identified as “challenges,” we will be most interested in those that have been publicly labeled as threats to Minnesota’s long-term quality of life by state government leaders as well as key civic institutions. While we will generally view programs and initiatives addressing statewide challenges as more compelling, we will also give consideration to those that are designed to tackle problems faced by a particular region of the state.	Programs utilize persuasive evidence that the identified problem is a critical challenge facing Minnesota. Examples could include state demographer reports, research studies, analysis from respected thought leaders, etc.
Unique, compelling role for AmeriCorps members and other community volunteers	We will expect a proposed program to outline how individuals providing a year or two of service can be particularly effective at addressing the identified challenge and how serving in this program/initiative will create a meaningful experience for AmeriCorps members. We will also want to see how the program will create more high-quality volunteer opportunities for other members of the community.	Programs demonstrate how AmeriCorps service makes a difference. Programs should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align member activities and program goals • Develop and deliver quality professional training for members • Build site capacity through improved results and/or value-added supplemental support • Create meaningful volunteer opportunities that contribute to program goals
Focus on measurable outcomes	Programs seeking an investment of ServeMinnesota resources must be committed to and capable of quantifiably measuring and reporting on the outcomes their program will produce. In particular, we will be most interested in programs that can show a direct connection between the outcomes they generate and the public challenge that needs to be addressed.	Programs create performance measures that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate consistency with state/federal government and/or research/academic organizations measurement outcomes • Align with the identified challenge the program seeks to address • Measure specific results that the AmeriCorps program – not the entire organization – is delivering.
Application of evidence-based approaches	We will expect those seeking an investment from us to demonstrate that the efficacy of their model or intervention is supported by documented and independent research. We are particularly interested in programs that directly involve leading experts from the relevant subject area in the design and/or evaluation of the program.	Programs document evidence that they are using “state-of-the-art” or “best” practices in their program design and implementation. Programs should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point to studies of similar programs that are considered “best” practice • Document precise elements of its program that are acknowledged as “best” practice • Document validity of interventions • Apply model consistently across all sites (not site by site variations)

Broad base of support	We want to leverage our investment with resources provided by the government, philanthropic, and business sectors. As such, we will prefer to invest our resources in programs and initiatives that can demonstrate strong political support as well as make the case for why the business and foundation communities will be willing to support the effort financially.	Programs demonstrate how they have built a large network of support. Programs should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase diverse sources of funding • Cultivate Interest and recognition from philanthropic and public sector investors, who see and communicate the value
Dedication to Quality	We will expect programs and initiatives seeking our investment to clearly outline how they plan to incorporate quality management practices, such as regularly measuring and reporting on performance, surveying the customers of their service, and engaging in organization-wide learning and improvement strategies.	Programs regularly measure and report on program performance. Program should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess internal operations for quality management • Assess external outreach and member satisfaction • Survey service recipients • Engage in program learning and improvement strategies • Design protocols and systems to measure and ensure the fidelity and consistency of program implementation across sites (model driven) • Solicit feedback from established experts in the field to guide program implementation and ensure it is consistent with best practices and current research
Return on investment	While we recognize that many “start-up” investments we will be asked to make may not generate an immediate positive return, we will expect those seeking such investments to outline how longer-term investments in their program or initiative will produce such a return in the future. We will favor those investment opportunities that are most likely to produce societal benefits whose value far exceeds the dollars invested.	Programs document their return on investment (ROI) and can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point to studies of similar programs that have demonstrated ROI • Document a quantifiable, societal ROI for specific outcomes • Show the actual amount of return for their program that is X times more than the amount of funding
Potential for scale and replication	Programs we consider to invest in may propose to start off small in size or scope; however, we plan to select those that have the potential and willingness to expand substantially in the future so that our investment can have an even greater impact on solving social challenges. This growth can come in the form of the program itself getting larger and/or by other organizations – either in Minnesota or elsewhere – implementing the program in their area.	Programs demonstrate potential for replication and scale. Programs should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create high quality, easily replicable documentation (training manuals, etc.) • Demonstrate breadth of need and/or population served • Deliver cost-effective results • Develop unique models that are not duplicative of other programs