Guidance for Plan, Build, and Impact Grants

Purpose of This Guidance

The Service United Fund supports states and territories in using service as a strategy. Given that this is a new philanthropic initiative and that the grant program is competitive–meaning that we anticipate not being able to fund every application–we have compiled guidance for states and territories as they develop grant applications. This guidance is not a list of strict requirements, but rather a set of variables that the fund team has observed as relevant to successful service strategies.

Importantly, the Service United Fund appreciates that every state and territory has a different context for service, and we are eager to support different strategies and approaches for how to expand service in your state or territory. We are also here to answer your questions and to be a partner–if you would like to further discuss which category your state or territory might be best positioned to apply for, we encourage you to reach out to the Service United Fund team.

Grant Categories

The three grant categories reflect a progression: planning a service approach, launching or strengthening service programs, and integrating service into state priorities and systems so that it lasts. The main difference between a service program and a service strategy is the depth of leadership commitment and how fully service is built into key state infrastructure and priorities.

The amounts listed for each category represent upper limits. Requests may fall anywhere within the range, and we expect the amount requested to reflect the scope, scale, and anticipated outcomes of the proposed work. We encourage you to be both ambitious and realistic.

Plan	Build	Impact
Up to $100,000 Up to 12 months	**Up to $500,000** 12 to 24 months	**Up to $1,500,000** 24 to 36 months
Plan a service strategy or plan significant changes to existing service programs	Launch or expand one or more state service programs	Launch or expand a state service strategy

In every category, we expect the work to advance all three Service United pillars:

1. Support young people in continuing their education or entering the workforce.
2. Bring people together across lines of difference to strengthen communities.
3. Address one or more key issues facing your state or territory.

Plan Grants

Purpose: Plan grants support states and territories in designing a service strategy or planning significant changes to existing service programs. This includes early engagement with the agencies, sectors, and partners who will be critical to success.

A Plan grant may be a good fit if your state or territory:

- Has identified service as a priority aligned with the Governor's agenda, but has not yet defined a strategy or program model.
- Wants to conduct a landscape review to understand existing service programs, community needs, and education and workforce opportunities for young people.
- Wants to begin, or deepen, conversations with state agencies, education and training providers, employers, community-based organizations, and funders.
- Has not yet identified a lead agency or partner, or needs to build staffing and capacity before launching a program.

Activities may include:

- Landscape and needs assessments.
- Convening and engaging stakeholders across agencies and sectors.
- Designing the program model or strategy, including service roles, recruitment, member supports, and pathways to education and employment.
- Identifying governance structures and a lead entity.
- Developing a preliminary budget, financing approach, and outcomes framework.

By the end of the grant, we expect a clear, actionable plan with identified partners, defined outcomes, potential funding sources, and a realistic path toward launching or expanding service. Plan grant recipients may be well-positioned to apply for a future Build or Impact grant.

Build Grants

Purpose: Build grants support states and territories in launching or expanding one or more service programs, strengthening coordination among partners, and documenting early results.

A Build grant may be a good fit if your state or territory:

- Has a defined program model and a lead agency or partner with the capacity (or would have the capacity with the grant requested) to launch or expand within the grant period.
- Has existing state-based service programs that are well-positioned to participate or have expressed interest in expanding.
- Has existing relationships with state agencies, education and training providers, employers, and community-based organizations that can be strengthened.
- Where the program leads to a credential or certification, knows the relevant certifying bodies, training partners, higher education institutions, and potential employers.
- If launching a new program, can realistically place members within the grant period. Some period for planning at the beginning of the grant is acceptable.

Activities may include:

- Launching or expanding service programs across one or more service settings.
- Strengthening coordination across agencies and sectors.
- Establishing the member experience, including recruitment, training, supervision, support, and pathways to credentials, higher education credit, or employment.
- Collecting data and documenting early outcomes.
- Refining the program model based on early lessons.
- Beginning to identify longer-term funding and partnership opportunities.

By the end of the grant, we expect programs to be operating with members in service, early outcomes documented across the three pillars, partnerships strengthened, and initial thinking in place on how the work will continue and grow.

Impact Grants

Purpose: Impact grants support states and territories in launching or expanding a statewide service strategy: one that is led and stewarded within the state, integrated into state priorities and systems, and positioned to continue beyond the grant.

An Impact grant may be a good fit if your state or territory:

- Has established service as a clear leadership priority, with commitment from the Governor and relevant agencies, and connections to broader state priorities such as workforce development and meeting needs in key issue areas.
- Operates, or is ready to launch or expand, a significant service program or a coordinated set of programs across agencies and service settings.
- Has a track record of cross-agency and cross-sector partnerships, and a lead entity positioned to provide statewide coordination and oversight.
- Has, or can build, systems to track member and community outcomes.
- Can secure the 20 percent match from in-state public or private sources over the course of the grant.
- Has a clear vision for sustaining the work beyond the grant period.

Activities may include:

- Building the capacity of the lead entity to lead and steward the strategy statewide beyond the grant.
- Convening and coordinating partners across agencies and sectors, including K-12, higher education, workforce systems, community-based organizations, and partners in the issue areas the strategy addresses.
- Providing statewide coordination and oversight to support aligned implementation, shared accountability, and high-quality member experiences across service settings.
- Aligning federal, state, philanthropic, and private investments with state priorities and evolving community needs.
- Embedding service-to-career pathways in education, workforce, and other state systems.
- Engaging in substantive work to support long-term sustainability.
- Expanding to additional sites or regions.
- Measuring, evaluating, and refining program design and experience, with attention paid to the three Service United pillars.
- Using data on member outcomes and community impact for continuous improvement.

By the end of the grant, we expect service to be meaningfully embedded in state infrastructure, supported by durable public, philanthropic, and private funding, formalized partnerships, and supportive policy, with demonstrated outcomes and a clear path to continuing the work after the grant ends.

Questions for Applicants to Consider

As you assess your readiness and develop your plans, consider the following:

- **Alignment:** How does the proposed work reflect the Governor's priorities and advance all three pillars? Which key issues will it address?
- **Leadership and ownership:** Who will lead the work, and what authority and relationships do they bring? How will the work maintain support through leadership transitions?
- **Capacity:** What staffing, expertise, finances, and bandwidth are in place today, and what would the grant add?
- **Partnerships:** Which partnerships are already established, and which still need to be developed? What role will each partner play?
- **Young people:** How will young people be recruited, compensated, and supported? How will their service connect to education, credentials, and employment?
- **Bringing people together:** How will the work connect people across lines of difference?
- **Measurement:** What outcomes will you track for members and communities, and how?
- **Sustainability:** How will the work be funded and led after the grant ends?
- **Timeline:** Is the proposed timeline realistic given your current starting point?

Factors the Service United Fund Will Consider

In reviewing applications, the Service United Fund team will consider:

- **Fit with the category requested:** Does the applicant's current readiness match the scope and timeline of the grant?
- **Leadership commitment:** Is there clear support from the Governor and relevant agencies, and a plan to sustain that support over time?
- **Clarity of vision:** Is there a clear, coherent approach to advancing all three pillars?
- **Feasibility:** Are the plan, budget, and timeline realistic, and is the amount requested proportionate to the proposed scope? Do they account for existing capacity gaps?
- **Strength of partnerships:** Are key partners committed, and are their roles defined?
- **Quality of the member experience:** Are young people well supported, and do their service experiences lead to meaningful education and career pathways?
- **Learning and evaluation:** Is there a credible plan to collect data, document outcomes, and use lessons to improve?
- **Sustainability and leverage:** Does the proposal build toward long-term funding and ownership within the state? For Impact grants, is the match secured or realistically achievable?
- **Contribution to the broader portfolio:** Does the proposal offer lessons that could benefit other states and territories, and does it add to the range of approaches the Fund supports?