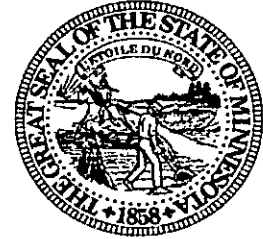




Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State
Minnesota Public Benefit Corporation / Annual Benefit Report
Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 304A



Read the instructions before completing this form
Must be filed by March 31
Filing Fee: \$55 for expedited service in-person, \$35 if submitted by mail

The Annual Benefit Report covers the 12 month period ending on December 31 of the previous year.
Notice: Failure to file this form by March 31 of this year will result in the revocation of the corporation's public benefit status without further notice from the Secretary of State, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Section 304A.301

1. Corporate Name: (Required) The Improve Group
2. The public benefit corporation's board of directors has reviewed and approved this report.
3. In the field below, enter the information required by section 304A.301 subd. 2 or 3 for the period covered by this report, (see instructions for further information): Note: Use additional sheets if needed. (Required)

See attached.

4. I, the undersigned, certify that I am the chief executive officer of this public benefit corporation. I further certify that I have signed this document no more than 30 days before the document is delivered to the secretary of state for filing, and that this document is current when signed. I further certify that I have completed all required fields, and that the information in this document is true and correct and in compliance with the applicable chapter of Minnesota Statutes. I understand that by signing this document I am subject to the penalties of perjury as set forth in Section 609.48 as if I had signed this document under oath.

Leah Goldstein Moses

Signature of Public Benefit Corporation's Chief Executive Officer

April 2, 2018

Date (Must be dated within 30 days before the report is delivered to the Secretary of State for Filing)

Email Address for Official Notices

Enter an email address to which the Secretary of State can forward official notices required by law and other notices:
Leah@theimprovegroup.com

Check here to have your email address excluded from requests for bulk data, to the extent allowed by Minnesota law.

List a name and daytime phone number of a person who can be contacted about this form:

<u>Leah Goldstein Moses</u>	<u>651-315-8916</u>
Contact Name	Phone Number

Entities that own, lease, or have any financial interest in agricultural land or land capable of being farmed must register with the MN Dept. of Agriculture's Corporate Farm Program.

Does this entity own, lease, or have any financial interest in agricultural land or land capable of being farmed?
 Yes No

The Improve Group

Public Benefit Report 2017



The Improve Group's Public Benefit

The Improve Group is a woman-owned evaluation, research, and strategic planning consulting firm based in St. Paul, Minnesota. We became a Public Benefit Corporation in 2016, a reflection of our work helping mission-driven organizations make the most of information, navigate complexity, and ensure their investments of time and money lead to meaningful, sustained impact.



In 2017, our biggest impacts were ...

- Supporting organizations making significant positive social impact.
- Bringing the expertise of community members, subject matter experts, and evaluation together to understand and address social problems.
- Aligning our organizational structure and practices around our strategic goals and public benefit.

In 2018, we plan to ...

- Refine the ways we contribute to positive social change.
- Innovate new ways to bring community voices to the table.
- Be a partner for innovation.
- Empower others through capacity building and training.

Goal	Strategies	Impact	Plans for the future
Unleash the power of The Improve Group to influence social change	We work with clients making a difference to deepen their impact; our practice areas study opportunities for greater influence.	Clients working to make the world a better place amplify the impact of their work.	Clarify our definition and role for social change; strengthen and enhance our practices contributing to positive social change.
Use innovative strategies to meet the needs of a wide range of communities	We work with clients at a variety of resource levels, including on a pro bono basis; we use a community-responsive approach.	Organizations from a wide range of backgrounds and resource levels are empowered to use evaluation to deepen their impact.	Build systems and processes for product development; strengthen our capacity building toolkit; achieve profitability assumptions.
Leverage and align our resources with goals	We transitioned to a project-centered teaming approach; we hired diversity, equity, and inclusion consultants; we worked with minority- and woman-owned businesses for catering and supplies.	Our internal operations further support social change.	Clarify and streamline systems that allow staff to do best work and grow; continue our internal diversity, equity, and inclusion journey; enhance trust and collaboration among team; infuse mindfulness in our work.

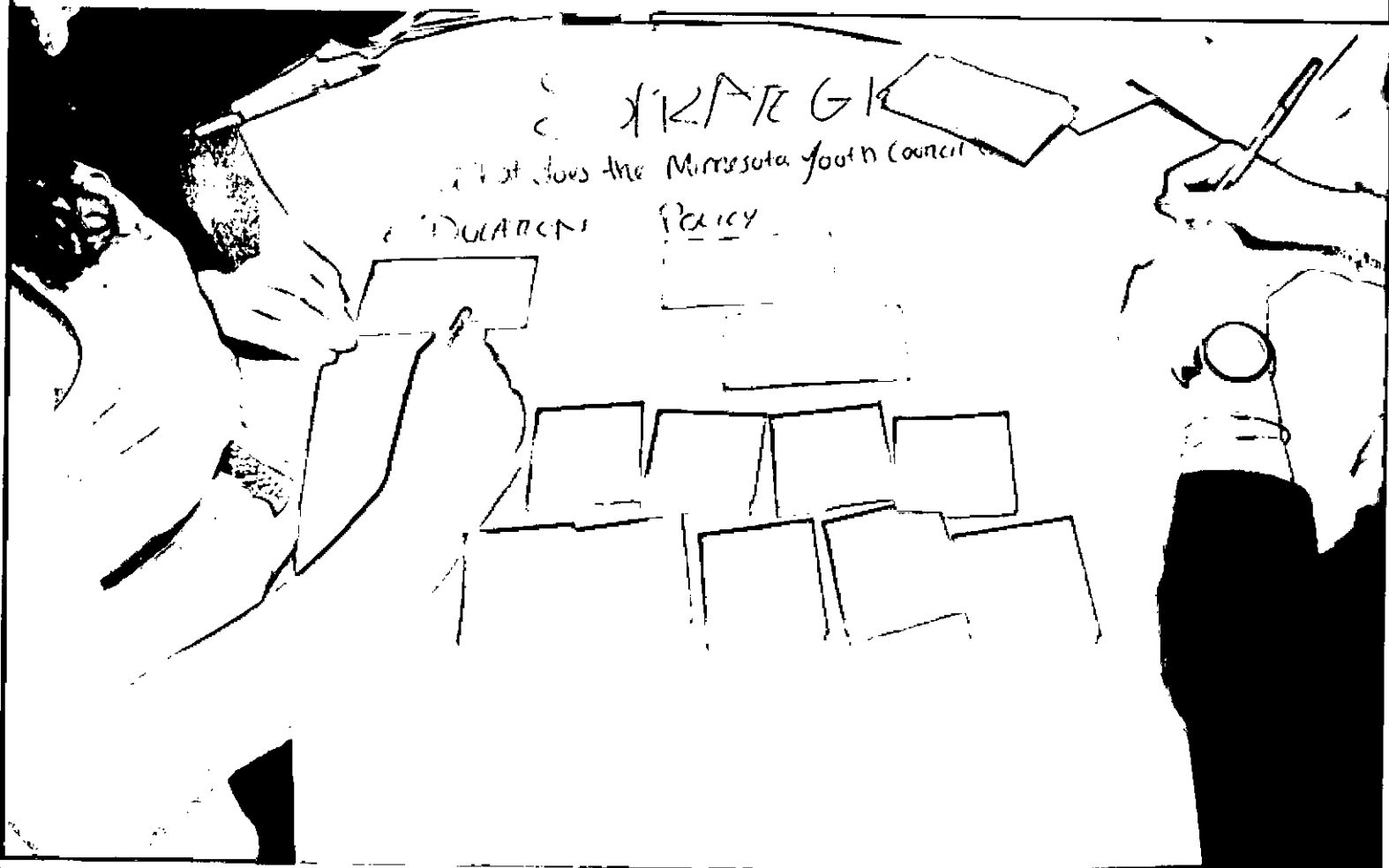
About The Improve Group

The Improve Group helps mission-driven organizations deepen their impact. This benefits the public by ensuring organizations have a positive impact on the communities they serve. Our vision is that mission-driven organizations will effectively develop more resilient, equitable, and thriving communities. We have partnered with mission-driven organizations for 18 years, and have grown to a staff of more than 25 people, including more than 20 evaluators. Through our work in evaluation, we support efforts to create a more inclusive, supportive environment in which all people—but particularly those from vulnerable or underserved communities—can flourish. To do this, we empower community members—those who have the most at stake—to take a leadership role in the evaluation process. We developed and practice a Community-Responsive ApproachSM in our practice that seeks to amplify the voices of underrepresented community stakeholders.

We have underlying goals of:

- Making positive social change through our work.
- Meeting the needs of communities through a variety of innovative products and tools.
- Leading through a joyful, engaged, powerful team.

How do we accomplish these goals? The Improve Group consults with organizations, helping them research new ideas, develop strategies, and evaluate what they have already done so they can have a greater impact on the communities they serve. We are also part of a larger community of social enterprise organizations, both learning from and contributing to the field of social impact and social impact measurement.



Strategies & Impact

In 2017, our work had **impact in three major areas**. We helped extend the impact of clients working to make the world a better place; we empowered organizations from diverse backgrounds to use evaluation; and we aligned our internal operations with positive

Strategy: Unleash the power of The Improve Group to influence social change.

Impact: Clients working to make the world a better place extend the impact of their work.

We worked with clients large and small to **make the world a better place**. This ranged from guiding small fellow PBCs through articulating their impact to conducting major statewide surveys in partnership with the State of Minnesota. A sampling of our clients includes:

The Olmstead Implementation Office, which ensures the implementation of the "Olmstead Plan," a broad series of key activities our state must accomplish to ensure people with disabilities are living, learning, working, and enjoying life in the most integrated setting. In our largest project of 2017, we implemented the Olmstead Quality of Life Baseline Survey, reaching more than 2,000 Minnesotans with a range of disabilities to hear about their quality of life in their own words.

OLMSTEAD QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY BY THE NUMBERS...



19,475
Letters sent



33,823
Phone calls
made



9,000
Potential
participants
reached



22
Interviewers



2,005
Surveys
completed

Second Harvest Heartland, which has a mission of ending hunger through community partnerships.

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights, which aims to make Minnesota discrimination-free.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Center for Prevention, which has a mission of making healthy choices possible for all Minnesotans.

The American Friends Service Committee, which promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action.

Impact: Clients working to make the world a better place extend the impact of their work.

The Sherwood Foundation, which promotes equity through social justice initiatives enhancing the quality of life in Nebraska.

Men As Peacemakers, which engages individuals and communities in innovative strategies that promote equality, repair harm, and prevent violence against women and children.

The Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation, which promotes private giving for the public good.

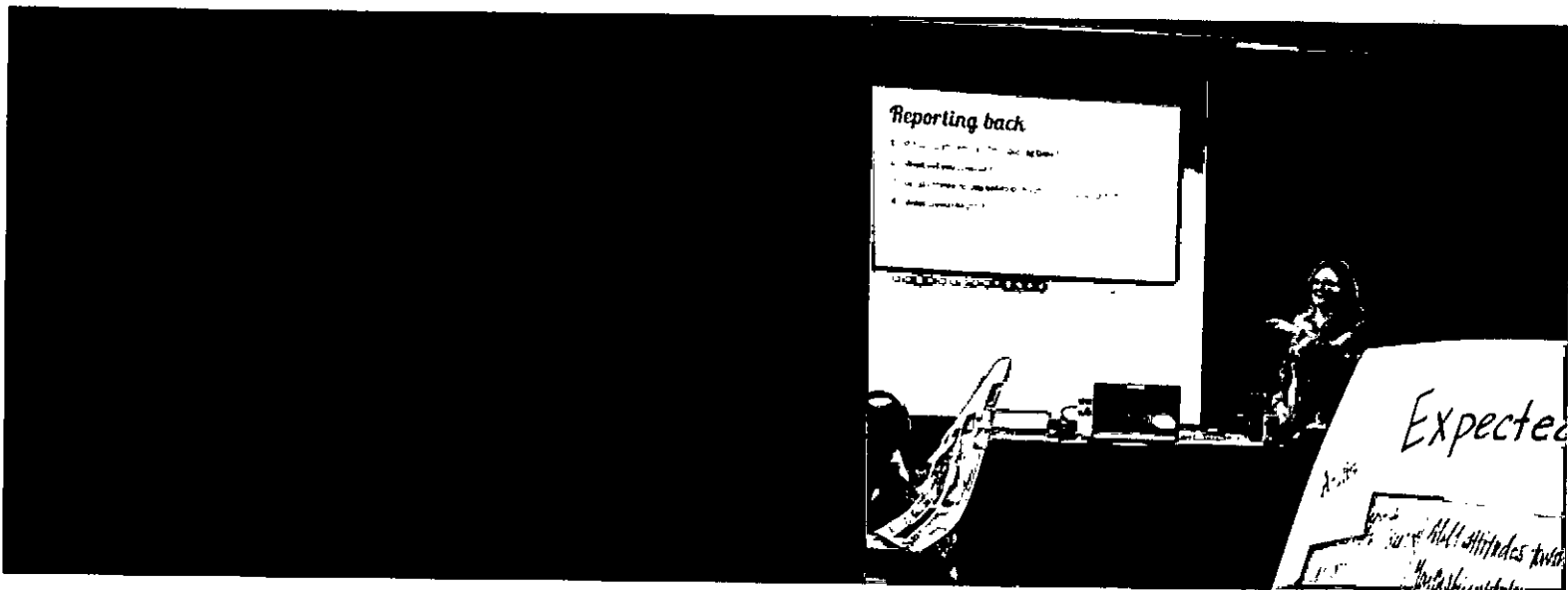
VocalEssence, which has a mission of championing choral music of all genres and celebrating the vocal experience through innovative concerts, commissions, and community engagement programs.

We also explored how to grow our influence with internal practice areas studying important topics in evaluation:

- Systems change
- Social justice and equity
- Public health
- Capacity building
- Marketplace strategies for social impact

Impact

The result of our work with clients is extending their impact. For example, one client is working with their community service providers to help them use the results of the evaluation. Another client is using the Theory of Change we created to inform their strategic plan to chart the next phase for the organization. Yet another organization reported that their board has a deeper understanding of the social issue they are working on as a result of the work we did with them.



Strategy: Use innovative strategies to meet the needs of a wide range of communities.

Impact: Organizations at all resource levels increased their capacity for evaluation, deepening their impact.

We found innovative ways to work with a wide variety of organizations at different resource levels to build their capacity and impact.

We provided the **equivalent of \$10,000 of pro bono services** to local organizations. These organizations included **Connections to Independence**, which provides unique programming and advocacy for foster care youth ages 15-24 to promote a successful and healthy transition to living independently as they reach adulthood; and **St. Stephens Human Services**, which has a mission of ending homelessness through programming including housing opportunities, employment support, emergency services and outreach, and systems change.

We also offered training in partnership with other organizations to help others learn about and use evaluation. See our partners below in "Acronym Soup." Through these trainings, we reached more community members to **spark interest in and build capacity for evaluation**. We also did an experiential event at the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits conference to help people see evaluation in action, called "pop-up evaluation."

Additionally, we conducted research to better understand capacity building needs and piloted a campaign that offered streamlined services aligned to federal funding for evaluation.

Impact

We deepened our clients' capacity to do their own evaluation through capacity building projects. Some feedback from clients includes:

"I especially enjoyed learning a lot during our training sessions on creative data collection, participatory analysis and capacity building, and more."

"...the process has pushed us to think more clearly about the initiative and how we expect community change"

"...training has provided grantees with new skills and ways to assess impacts of their work"

Acronym Soup: Training Partners

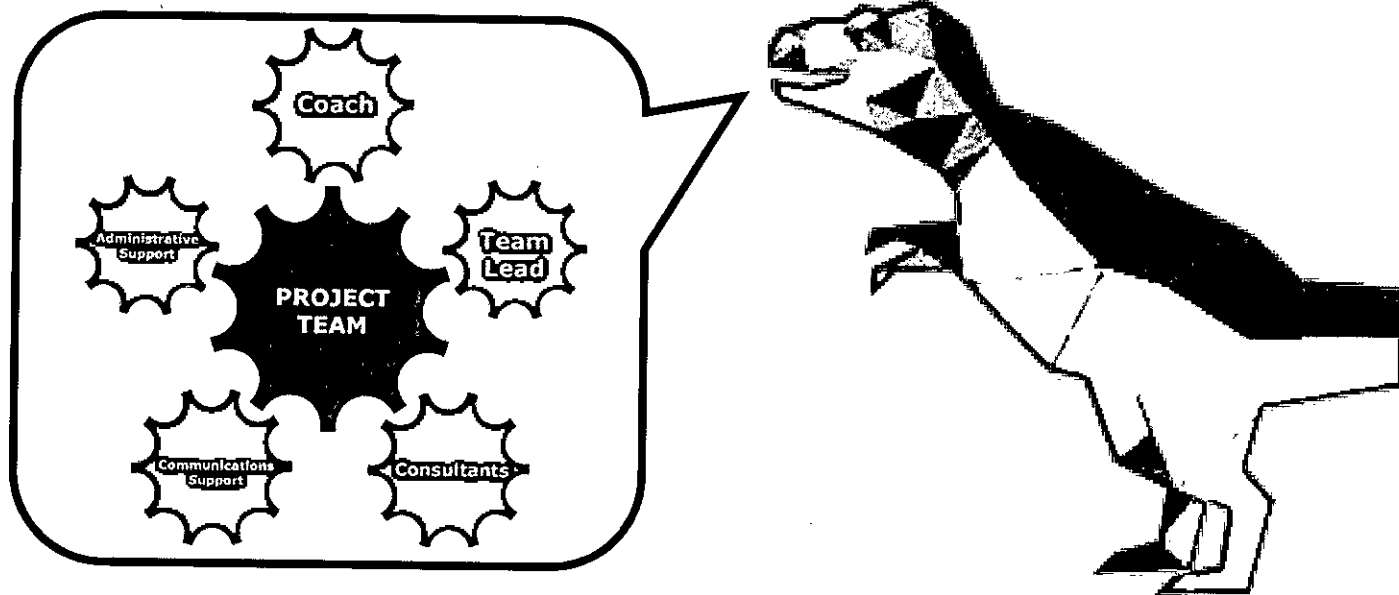
MCN: Minnesota Council of Nonprofits	VISTA: Volunteers in Service to America
MLC: Minnesota Literacy Council	AEA: American Evaluation Association
MAVA: Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration	MCF: Minnesota Council on Foundations
MINN: Minnesota International NGO Network	The Improve Group

Strategy: Leverage and align our resources with goals.

Impact: Our internal operations further support social change.

In 2017, we aligned our internal operations, processes, and practices to further support social change in a variety of ways:

We transitioned our teaming structure to a **project-centered approach**, building each consultant team based on staff interest and experience. This ensures each of our projects is led by a team with members who are passionate about the project and who bring the most relevant experience. With our team approach, a project lead oversees a team of consultants; each team member brings unique talents that help to generate new ideas, improve clarity, and ensure accuracy and quality.



Early in 2017, we committed to deepening our practices around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Throughout the year, we gathered staff input about what our employees hoped we would learn, what the process would be like, and how they hoped we worked with external consultants. We used that information to hire consultants to guide us through individual assessment, team-building, and organizational practices. We are just launching our work with our consultants and look forward to building a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace, and seeing those principles infused in our work.

Throughout the year, we were socially responsible in our office operations and employee programs. At staff meetings and events, we prioritized selecting vendors that are minority and woman-owned. We also matched employee donations throughout the year. Finally, we aimed to limit the carbon footprint of our office.

Impact

We deepened our public benefit by supporting community-based and mission-driven organizations.

- Employee donations were matched to double support to the causes that are important to them. Through this long-standing program, we matched \$4,435 in donations from 11 employees to 20 organizations in 2017.



- We coordinated participation by 22 of our employees in a two-hour packing session at Feed My Starving Children. According to the organization, we were part of a group that packed 202 boxes of MannaPack Rice which is equivalent to 43,632 meals, or the 119 kids fed for a year.

We supported woman, minority, and locally owned suppliers and vendors:

- For our staff lunches (which cost nearly \$10,000 in 2017) we prioritized hiring caterers that were women-owned, minority-owned, or locally based.
- Our primary print and paper supplier (an expense of roughly \$90,000 for the year) is woman-owned (Innovative Office Solutions).
- A large percentage of our consultants and contractors are women or are from minority groups.



As a company, and individually, we limited our carbon footprints:

- We use a filtered water system, which saved the equivalent of 9,500 plastic bottles.
- We assessed our towel cleaning service and determined an approach with less environmental impact.
- We use a coffee supplier that grows and brews sustainable, fair, and direct trade coffee and provides earth friendly products.
- We participated in a "bike-walk-transit" challenge to incentivize employees to use the nearby light rail or other less-polluting means to get to work.

According to our Best Places to Work survey, our happy, engaged staff align with our values.

- 100 percent of employees agreed with the statement, "I am proud to work here."
- 94 percent of employees agreed with the statement, "Everyone here is treated fairly regardless of race, gender, age, ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation, or other differences."



Roadblocks

While we made impacts in the three areas identified above, we also encountered roadblocks to our work, including time, competing priorities, resources, and a tight job market.

Time. Public benefits, particularly those focused on the social change consistent with our mission, take many years—if not decades—to come to fruition. In addition, time is precious for our team, partners and clients. To ensure we are continuing to focus on our public benefit, we try to intentionally infuse a focus on our values and goals into all of our work.

Competing priorities. Each of our three goals (making positive social change through our work; meeting the needs of communities through a variety of products and tools; and leading through a joyful, engaged, powerful team) requires attention and resources. Sometimes a decision we think will advance one of the goals has an unexpected negative impact on a different goal. We are constantly having to balance the impact we are having in each of the three goals.

Resources. The Improve Group has bootstrapped its operations since its founding 18 years ago. Over the past year, we've identified some ways we can significantly increase our public benefit through training, collaboration, and innovation. To launch these new services, we need greater resources in the short-term for development. We are starting to evaluate different investment strategies and processes for analyzing opportunities to determine how best to fund these initiatives.

Tight job market. The tight job market meant that it took us longer to fill positions and that we had open positions for several months in 2016 and 2017. With workforce gaps, we were spread thin and had to narrow down some of our initiatives.

On the Horizon: Goals for 2018

We are excited for 2018 and look forward to deepening our public benefit. We hope to achieve more around each of the three strategies outlined above.

MINDFULNESS

Unleash the power of The Improve Group to influence social change

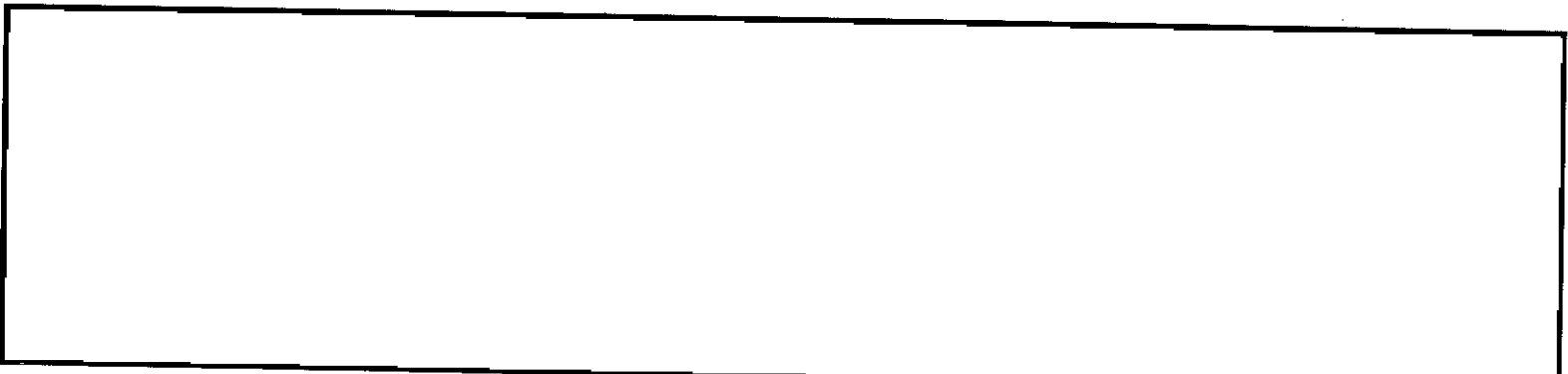
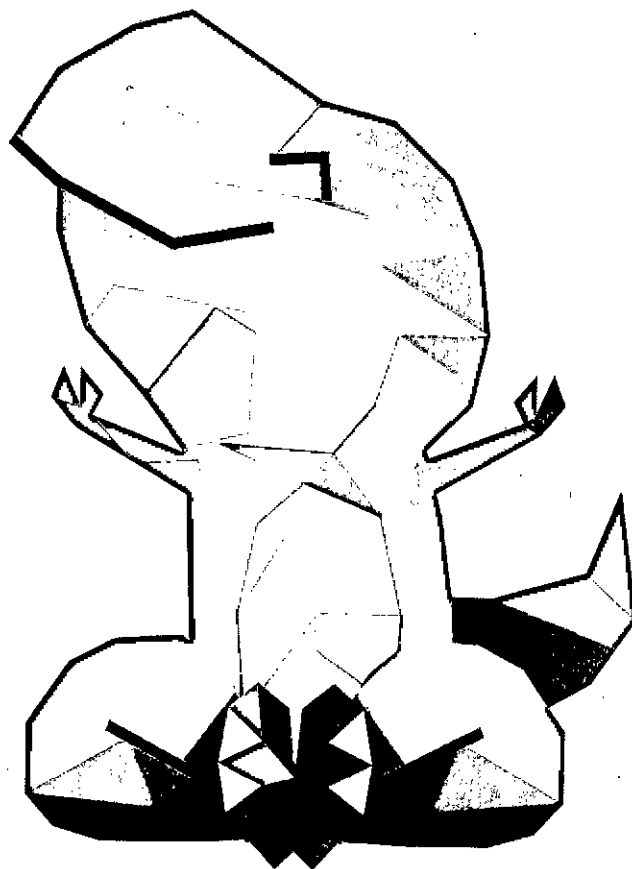
- Clarify our definition of positive social change and our role
- Strengthen and enhance our practices that contribute to positive social change, including our community-responsive approaches

Use innovative strategies to meet the needs of a wide range of communities

- Build systems and processes for product development
- Strengthen our capacity building toolkit
- Achieve the profitability assumptions in our business model

Leverage and align our resources with goals

- Continue our internal diversity, equity, and inclusion journey
- Have clear, streamlined human resources, operations, and management systems that allow our staff to do their best work and continue to grow
- Enhance trust and collaboration among team members
- Infuse mindfulness into our work





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Original File Number 851252-2

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
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Steve Simon

Steve Simon
Secretary of State