



## Narratives

### Executive Summary

N/A

### Strengthening Communities

The City of Big Spring is in a rural county of 35,012. It has two major highways that intersect it and two things that put us on the map--a State Hospital on one end of town and a VA Hospital on the other end of town. More than fourteen percent of the Big Spring's population is senior adults which has enabled Big Spring to become a recognized "retirement community." Many of the senior residents retired from Webb Air Force Base or have moved here because of Big Spring's low cost-of-living. We have a population of 22.2% below poverty level that includes homeless MHMR patients, and many low-income families. Many of the families moved here to be near a loved one housed at one of Big Spring's four prisons. Other major employers include a refinery, Big Spring State Hospital, VA Medical Center and other health care agencies. There is a broad range of socio-economic factors in the make-up of our small West Texas town. Big Spring RSVP has excellent relationships in our community. We have partnered with non-profit organizations, civic clubs, schools and other governmental agencies. Many organizations call to express a need that RSVP volunteers can uniquely fill. This small community has a giving spirit and a great capacity to work together. As needs are identified, we network to find partners who can contribute to meet that need. We collaborate to bring resources together--to use funding, education, media and volunteers--whatever each has to offer. The RSVP Director, Coordinator, Sponsor and Advisory Council use every opportunity to promote RSVP in the community. PSA's and interviews are used regularly in the newspaper, radio and television. Our Sponsor, the City of Big Spring, has made it possible to advertise on the public access channel and on the City website. The Sponsor promotes RSVP as the greatest program in town for seniors. Our Advisory Council is made up of volunteers, station coordinators and community leaders who actively promote the program. Our volunteers fill positions as requested based on their time, experience and

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interest in the varied projects that are available. Many volunteers enjoy special project volunteering i.e. working one or two hours each month as an advisor or committee member to set up community events (Community Health Fair, Relay for Life, Alzheimer's Memory Walk, etc.). They work to increase awareness, to educate, and assist in fund raising projects thereby showing support these worthwhile organizations. Big Spring RSVP is one of the first responders to an appeal for help within the community. RSVP volunteers with CERT and the Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association were instrumental in working with disaster officials when the Alon refinery suffered a major explosion four years ago. Volunteers worked with Emergency Management officials, the Police Department, Fire Department and Alon personnel to cordon off the area and maintain traffic control on two major highways. They helped enable emergency vehicles to get to the hospital and keep roads open for other emergency traffic. Small towns can make a difference as were learned through the disaster of hurricane Katrina several years ago. Often the volunteers themselves will identify a need and call for reinforcements. Organizations know of our reputation for always responding to a call for help. RSVP attends planning sessions for upcoming community projects. The Director, staff and Advisory Council strive to educate others about the bonuses RSVP volunteers bring to any project.

### **Recruitment and Development**

At present we have 218 unduplicated volunteers on our active rolls. Our workplans will reflect a duplication in areas of volunteers who serve in more than one Volunteer Station. Our goal is to recruit volunteers as they reach the age of 55 or more in our community. We achieve this goal by working with the Advisory Council, Volunteer Stations and volunteers themselves to educate the public about the benefits to the volunteer and the community. Big Spring RSVP also serves as a community volunteer referral agency. We receive calls or visits from younger people who need information or a referral to an agency where they might volunteer. We recruit them as Community Volunteers, interview them, and make every effort to help volunteers of any age find a place to serve. When a new

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volunteer position request is received that requires specialized training and new skill development, the Director and staff often train along with the volunteers (i.e. CERT, emergency community drills, hospice, etc.). We can recruit and better understand challenges volunteers face if we know what the volunteer is actually doing. Volunteers are offered additional training as their experience and interest develops and/or assignments change. Everyone is encouraged to learn as much as possible about the organization they serve. Having access to the internet and public access television has enabled RSVP to reach a new audience. Our recruitment from these two venues has increased our recruitment success. The Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau include RSVP brochures in their mail outs. RSVP partnered with the Chamber, CVB and the Big Spring Development Corporation to have Big Spring designated as a "recognized retirement community." Articles are published in the newspaper that describes activities and opportunities for volunteers. We also work with the churches and other faith-based, non-profit organizations to recruit volunteers. During programs and personal interviews potential volunteers are encouraged to see the "big picture" of what their contribution means to our community. We use volunteers who are already involved in the project to give a "testimony" of their experiences and how they have grown as individuals because of their volunteer experiences. We contact the volunteers who express dissatisfaction or uncertainty about a job assignment and address their specific concerns. Staff also screens requests from the public for volunteers. No volunteer is assigned until a volunteer job description is submitted. They have an opportunity to give feedback before long term commitments are made. Volunteers receive an orientation packet within the first quarter of becoming an RSVP volunteer. Duties and requirements are discussed with the volunteer upon his/her assignment to a specific volunteer station. The RSVP staff may accompany the volunteer to his interview at a particular volunteer station. MOU's require that volunteer stations be responsible for training the volunteers on site. If a volunteer has questions or is not suited to a particular activity, RSVP staff will work with him/her until a satisfactory position

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in found. We strive to find high quality assignments within the volunteers' area of interest, experience and time expectations.

### Program Management

Big Spring RSVP partners with the Volunteer Stations who are covered under Performance Measurements (PM). Each PM statement is written with the Station Coordinator's assistance. They have input into the measurement process. At reporting times, the Director requests the latest data from the Volunteer Coordinator/Volunteer Station to provide the Corporation timely and accurate measurement information. As community needs are identified, the Director networks with organizations and other partners to see how these needs can be met. Volunteers want to be challenged in their assignments, so we try to meet their interests while we address those needs. Volunteers are offered opportunities to try new experiences, train to improve existing skills and to take advantage of community education opportunities. We encourage them to communicate with RSVP about these issues. Volunteers are invited to participate on community boards and councils thereby giving them first-hand experience in exploring ways to meet the needs of our community. In many instances the volunteers not only help define the need, but also become a part of the solution. Some type of project evaluation is done annually to cover all areas of performance measurement. The volunteers' perspective, the stations' and the Advisory Council's opinions are important to having a quality project. RSVP staff works with Volunteer Station Coordinators who are under Performance Measurements to make sure evaluating and reporting conditions are met each year. Meetings may be required to make sure the measurement process is working as written. Each year the grants, community funds and In-Kind donations are evaluated and budgeted to make the most of each dollar spent on the project. Records are kept of expenditures and income each month by the Sponsor and the Director. The Advisory Council is advised of how certain funds are used to enhance the quality of the project. The project's financial responsibility is audited each year as a part of the City of Big Spring's audit

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requirements. Staff and Advisory Council work in the community to secure cash and In-Kind resources. Fund raising is a major consideration each year to ensure that special projects or emergencies can be met. Seniors take trips with the RSVP Travelers--seniors supporting volunteers. Local businesses contribute products or services to honor volunteers at each year's banquet. The Big Spring Senior Center allows RSVP to use its facilities several times each year for activities--which means hundreds of dollars saved on renting a facility.

### **Organizational Capability**

The City of Big Spring has sponsored the RSVP project for over thirty years. The Sponsor is a staunch supporter of RSVP. Organizationally, RSVP benefits from the resources of the sponsor agency for additional support that includes administrative support, record keeping and financial management. The City administers the program through the Project Director who works with the City Manager and the Finance Director. The Finance Director oversees the grant process and has an appointee who serves on the Advisory Council. The RSVP Director answers directly to the Finance Director for fiscal responsibility of the grant. Each year the City oversees approximately twenty grants with approximately \$1,000,000 in grant funds that are used for criminal justice, environmental and community improvement objectives. The City of Big Spring supports senior programs and community service projects that help our community grow and prosper. RSVP has a proven track record in federal grant management. Becky Letz has been Project Coordinator for ten (10) years. She has experience dealing with the public and seniors. She stays current on all issues concerning senior citizens and the RSVP project. She has volunteered for Mobile Meals, hospice, Alzheimer's Association and her church. Staff manages the 218 volunteers and 34 volunteer stations. Anything concerning senior citizens--Medicaid, Medicare, legal issues (wills, medical and end of life issues), Identity Theft and medical information are covered in yearly RSVP educational programs. More than fifty percent of the volunteers are covered by impact-programming. The City of Big Spring supplies the RSVP project with

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space, utilities, some equipment and supplies. Records are kept on a computer program, Volunteer Reporter. It tracks hours and other statistics that are necessary for accurate reporting. Staff has been educated on purchasing procedures and management support and travel policies for its employees. Both staff positions have clearly defined job descriptions. A City handbook is kept with current policies and procedures outlined in depth. The City also provides yearly self-assessment and management assessment of each employee.

### **Other**

**Harnessing Baby Boomers' Experience--Big Spring RSVP** has focused on recruiting Baby Boomers for intergenerational projects. We recognize that the way we volunteer has changed because of this generation and we must develop projects with short time commitments that have maximum impact to the community. Younger volunteers support "causes" especially those that affect their loved ones. Keeping a parent or other loved one independent for as long as possible is very important to them. They may "walk" for the Cancer Society or Alzheimer's Assoc. to raise awareness and funds to educate about these debilitating diseases. Younger volunteers also gravitate to causes that support their community's environmental issues. We recruit for Keep Big Spring Beautiful and other recycling efforts. These are assignments that show immediate results and benefit the community as a whole.

**Mobilizing More Volunteers--RSVP** has become the community resource center for recruiting and placing volunteers of all ages. Many people call the office after seeing ads on the public access channel and the City website. Volunteers of all ages are recruited from these two venues. RSVP then contacts volunteer stations to interview and place these individuals. We take the time to work with the community no matter what the age of the volunteer might be. Service organizations call looking for worthwhile projects for their membership and RSVP works with them to find appropriate and satisfying projects.

### **PNS Amendment (if applicable)**