



# Narratives

## Executive Summary

RSVP of Rock County, Inc. is an organization providing opportunities for persons 55 and older to volunteer within their community. The mission of RSVP is to enhance the lives of persons aged 55 and older through meaningful service opportunities that match their life skills and interests to community needs. RSVP is proposing that at least 658 volunteers will volunteer in the Rock County, WI and Northern Winnebago County, IL communities. RSVP is requesting \$84,480 from the CNCS to achieve our mission. The services categories addressed are Community and Economic Development, Disaster Recovery/Relief, Education, Environment, Health/Nutrition, Homeland Security, Housing, Human Needs, and Public Safety. Community needs addressed are alcohol and other drug awareness, fostering student's comprehension of local and State history, assisting non-profits in fulfilling their missions, providing caring relationships for youth by adults outside of their home to dispel stereotypes of both young people and senior citizens, reading proficiency for elementary students, congregate meal site support which fosters improved nutrition and increases socialization for seniors, delivering meals to homebound seniors, supporting food pantry operations serving the needy, and helping seniors remain independent. Our Intergenerational Programs incorporate research based methods in providing services through our four sub programs achieving reading proficiency by the end of third grade, hands on experiential learning dovetailing with school curriculum, providing safe structured activities during the time of day when children are most vulnerable, and early drug awareness have all been supported by national and local research. Our Community Referrals program uses local and national research to not only help fill community needs but to modify programs as needs change. Our In-Home/Groups program is supported by an array of data showing that active seniors are healthier and obtain a sense of purpose. This is supported by national and local data (i.e. Search Institute, Community Action Surveys). Our outcomes are listed specifically in the work plans section of this application. Generally our projected outcome is to

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mobilize seniors to help address the ever increasing community needs, reaching thousands of children each school year, assisting over 150 non-profits, and providing donated clothing items to the needy.

### Strengthening Communities

RSVP of Rock County began in 1973 with Voluntary Action Center as a sponsor. In 1987 it became incorporated as a non-profit in the State of Wisconsin. It serves the communities of Janesville, Beloit, Clinton, Milton, Orfordville, Footville, Edgerton, and Evansville in Rock County, Wisconsin and South Beloit, Rockton, and Roscoe in Northern Winnebago County, Illinois. Although improved, Rock County continues to experience poor economic conditions with unemployment at 11.2% in Beloit and 9.4% in Janesville (Dept. of workforce Development, Nov. 2011). These are among the highest unemployment rates in the State. Local non-profits, schools, and civic organizations are affected by these conditions as well. Increased demands for services and dwindled resources for non-profits makes it difficult to meet the needs. Further, a survey conducted by Forward Community Investments and published in December of 2011 revealed that 24% of non-profits responding to the survey (325 non-profits responded) indicated that they have 1 month or less operating cash reserves. Thus volunteer utilization is critical to their operations. Current State and Federal budget decisions could result in less resources for these much needed services. RSVP volunteers help these agencies meet the demands for service performing a variety of tasks which allow paid staff to maximize their cost effectiveness. Research conducted by the Urban Institute (2004) shows that 4 out of 5 charities use volunteers in their activities, either in service to others or in helping to run the organization. Based on the most recent census data, 22% of the Rock County citizens are age 55 and older. The individuals from this age group who volunteer help a struggling community in meeting needs. Further, those persons who volunteer experience a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. This premise is supported by the findings of a study showing that the positive effect of volunteering on physical and mental health is due to the personal sense of accomplishment that an individual gains

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from his or her volunteer activities (Herzog et ell 1998). Thus, the benefits from RSVP services not only help meet critical needs but also help older adults remain healthy and active. With the number of persons aged 55 and older and the prediction based on census data that this population will continue to increase, the supply of potential volunteers will also increase. We collaborate with over 150 public and private non-profit agencies where volunteers serve. Some of our community partners are the cities of Beloit and Janesville, senior centers throughout Rock County, food pantries and senior dining sites throughout the County, schools, hospitals and clinics, and museums. Community partners are selected based on needs. Since we have been present in the community for 40 years, agencies know of us and let us know if they have specific needs that our volunteers can fill. We also have media coverages that periodically let the community know of our accomplishments and services available. Each year a survey is given to our community partners and we receive feedback on program effectiveness, site satisfaction, and whether or not the needs of the site are being met. We use this information to enhance the program and stay current with community needs, making changes to better meet needs where we can. The results of the latest survey indicated 100% of the respondents were satisfied with their RSVP volunteers and just over 90% felt that the RSVP volunteers had a positive affect on their agency. Many of our community partners recognize the need to recognize the volunteers and their accomplishments. They conduct their own recognition activities for the volunteers which serves to reinforce and motivate the volunteers to continue. Further, our partners communicate to their constituents and fellow service providers the effectiveness of RSVP volunteers which serves to promote our program. Our volunteers also serve in other service programs within the community. They work alongside other volunteer groups (school aged volunteers, civic organizations who provide volunteers like Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.) on specific projects like Kids Agaisnt Hunger, Beloit Riverfest, and the Rock County Fair). Many volunteers serve on non-profit Boards and local governmental committees. RSVP continually recruits volunteers by advertising specific

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opportunities in area newspapers as well as our quarterly newsletter. The Executive Director also speaks at area senior centers, churches, and civic groups to promote our program. We find that often times our best recruitment tool is our volunteers. They enlist friends who tell their friends. Efforts are made to attract diverse volunteers by speaking to Afro-American groups and attending the annual Hispanic fair which is the forum for agencies to let the hispanic citizens know of services available to them. Public awareness of RSVP is strong. Newspaper articles, newsletter circulations, and word of mouth continues to make the community aware of our presence. Funding opportunities are continually explored and we are known by nearly all of the philanthropic groups, foundations, and private donors. RSVP is always looking at potential funding sources and we submit proposals for funding on a regular basis. We have received monies from local foundations and continue to submit requests. We have consistently been successful with mobilizing resources as evidenced by the fact that we always exceed the required federal match for funding. The executive director and/or assistant director serve on numerous community-wide boards and committees including: Rock County Council on Aging, Beloit Safe Community Coalition, United Way's Executive Directors Council, Rotary Club of Beloit, Rock County and Beloit Senior Fair Committees, Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, Community Partnerships for Older Adults, and Rock County Nutrition Council. These groups mirror the needs that exist in the community and thus provide input into the planning and implementation of RSVP projects in those areas where RSVP programming can help meet those needs. A recent case in point is the formation of the "Seniors Volunteering for Seniors" initiative which was sparked by "local input" about the discontinuation of a program providing services to seniors and the use of the RSVP model to reinitiate these services.

### **Recruitment and Development**

We recruit volunteers through monthly articles in the Beloit Daily News, Janesville Gazette, and Stateline Shopping News newspapers. All volunteers, stations, and friends receive a quarterly

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newsletter recognizing new volunteers, listing new volunteer positions, paying tribute to active volunteers who have died since the last newsletter, and providing other articles of interest to readers. Volunteers are also recruited by asking current volunteers for referrals, speaking engagements by staff at service clubs and other organizations with potential volunteers, and through community networking. We recognize our volunteers in a variety of ways. We send out birthday cards to all of our volunteers, sympathy, get well, and anniversary cards. We also have an annual recognition dinner and give out pins for years of service. Pins are given to volunteers at our annual dinner for 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, and 35 years of service. We also whenever we get an opportunity, simply say thank you to our volunteers. Volunteers select a site they would like to volunteer in from a list of sites and duties involved. They utilize their interests and skills in the way they choose. On occasion attempts are made to develop new sites based on expressed interests of new recruits. Many sites have a lead volunteer who helps to coordinate volunteer activities as well as serve as a conduit between the site and RSVP. Through newsletters and recognition events volunteers are made aware of the meaning and impact of service to the community. They also see the impact of their efforts first hand and derive intrinsic reinforcement from their activities. By their own report, the majority of volunteers express an enhanced quality of life through their volunteer experiences. If they wish, the volunteers can develop their leadership skills through their involvement in volunteer stations becoming team leaders or can expand their involvement to include participation in Boards, City and County government, or educational facilities. RSVP's volunteer retention rate is very good. 40% (288) of our volunteers have been with us for ten years or more. We attribute this success to our commitment to recognizing, supporting, and being responsive to their needs. We also remain flexible with our volunteers and when necessary or requested will provide placements which provides the desired experiences, recognizing that they may want to change their activities which often times renews their motivation. Staff receive ongoing training and maintain involvement in community agency functions, coalitions,

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and committees. Volunteer station supervisors and community groups receive information and resources regarding volunteer management through e-mails, newsletter articles, and discussions with staff. Staff attend conferences and local in-services which help them keep up to date with trends and information.

### Program Management

Volunteer stations are developed and managed to address specified community needs. Many stations are within non-profit organizations which have a specific mission of service to the community. In general, volunteer stations are developed and maintained to address ongoing needs of the community such as operation of food pantries, meal sites, and information services. These needs continue from year to year and in many cases the demand has increased. Sites are meaningful to the volunteer since they choose where they volunteer based on their interests and where they feel they can make the most impact. An annual survey is conducted of our volunteers and volunteer stations to determine if needs continue to be met and whether changes are needed. The latest survey of community partners revealed that 100% of the volunteers were satisfied with their RSVP volunteers and over 90% felt that RSVP volunteers had a positive impact on their agency. Also, the latest survey of volunteers indicated that nearly 100% of the volunteers were satisfied with their RSVP experience and felt they were contributing in a positive way. RSVP collects monthly data on hours of volunteering, number of people served, and maintains memos of understanding with the stations in order to demonstrate the impact of the project and volunteers. We use the Volunteer Reporter software to collect, maintain, and analyze data. Keeping MOU's current helps to insure that appropriate needs are being addressed and that as needs change, the memos reflect those changes through duties and assignments of the volunteers being modified. RSVP is highly efficient with regard to managing financial and in-kind resources, providing well over 100,000 hours of service per year for just over \$250,000 in total budget. Marketing, fundraising, and seeking community sponsorships are our primary ways of

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securing additional resources. The economic climate in Rock County continues to be among the worse in the State. This has had a prolonged negative impact on local funding sources like the United Way and has resulted in RSVP receiving less money. On an ongoing basis the executive director works with the Board of Directors in coming up with ways to lower expenses and maintain or increase revenues. After more than five consecutive years of doing this, there is little left to reduce in terms of costs. We continue to maintain the "Friends of RSVP" program in which individuals and groups can donate to RSVP. This is advertised in our newsletter and "friends" are listed in each edition of the newsletter. Program data is maintained using Volunteer Reporter software. This program allows us to monitor the number of volunteers and volunteer hours for all of our sites. As needs change and requests for new or additional volunteers come in, the software is used to identify volunteers since their interests and desired type of volunteering is listed in the Reporter. Staff are then able to identify volunteers to refer to a particular station.

### **Organizational Capability**

RSVP of Rock County is an incorporated non-profit agency. 2013 marks our 40th anniversary. In those 40 years we have gained extensive experience in recruiting, placing, and recognizing volunteers. We also are very effective in managing and assisting community partners with regard to their volunteer needs. Our Board has a maximum of 15 members who meet monthly. The treasurer reviews financial statements monthly and reports to the Board at each meeting. New Board members receive orientation in the form of reviewing by-laws, policy manuals, program descriptions, funding streams, and have an opportunity to ask specific questions about programs or other operation guidelines. In addition to CNCS funding we currently receive funding from the State of Wisconsin, Rock County, Stateline United Way, United Way of North Rock County, Council on Aging, and various foundations, businesses, and individuals. RSVP continues to be involved in fundraising activities and securing sponsorships. We continue our donations page on our website as well as ad

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sales for our newsletter. Unless donors do not want to be recognized, names of "friends" are listed each quarter in our newsletter and on our website. We continue to have a raffle and silent auction at our annual recognition event. On an ongoing basis, management seeks both financial and other resources by reviewing requests for proposals and maintaining involvement with various agencies and organizations. Community perceptions of RSVP's organizational capacity are perhaps best illustrated by the recent development of a new program. In June of 2010 a local Senior Companion program was discontinued in Rock County. This program provided services to seniors in the form of assisted transportation, friendly visitation, phone assurance, and respite relief. RSVP was contacted by several local funders to see if RSVP would take over this program, stating that RSVP's mission, history of success, and management capabilities made it a perfect match for continuing this much needed service. Since starting the "Seniors Volunteering for Seniors" program (SVS) in September of 2010 we have enlisted nearly 90 volunteers who are serving just under 500 people. More recently, the two United Ways in Rock County merged. With this merger the Volunteer Network was discontinued. RSVP was once again asked to take a lead role in following up with volunteers from this program and providing options for them to continue in their volunteering. RSVP is working with the Voluntary Action Center in completing this task. Our financial management is conducted through the use of Quickbooks and audit reports reflect that our system is effective and thorough from an accountability standpoint. Our bookkeeper has been with us for nearly 15 years and is very knowledgeable in providing funders, including our federal funder with appropriate and timely financial reports. RSVP has 40 years of experience in recruiting, managing, and recognizing volunteers. Our program staff have been with us for ten or more years. The Intergenerational Program Coordinator manages our America Reads, Intergenerational Heroes, BABES, and Folk Fair programs. Our Community Referral and In-Home/Groups coordinator manages the in-home and group project volunteers and non school volunteer stations. She also serves as office manager. Our SVS program coordinator manages the

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activities of this new program. Our bookkeeper maintains financial records, compiles financial reports, and processes checks. The Executive Director has over 30 years of non-profit experience and is responsible for fund development, managing staff, and community relations. The Executive Director has prior experience in managing federal funding, specifically Community Development Block Grant funding and accreditation standards for residential treatment facilities, sheltered workshops, and private rehabilitation. The Executive Director also has a history of fiscal management, being responsible for budgets exceeding two million dollars. We have extensive experience managing and reporting on federal, state, county, and local funding. We also have a healthy track record in managing volunteer programs, services, and impact programming. Many of our volunteers have been with us for twenty or more years and we continue to recruit younger volunteers as well as volunteers from diverse backgrounds. Our latest survey, conducted in June of 2012 revealed that over 90% of the volunteers responding to the survey felt that they were contributing in meaningful ways to meet the needs of the community. Over 80% of the stations responding to the survey indicated that RSVP volunteers are critical to the success of their operations. The Executive Director, Board of Directors, and staff continually assess our facilities, equipment, and supplies to insure that these systems are adequate and appropriate for program needs and within our financial capabilities. We have policy and program manuals which clearly define roles and procedures for such things as purchasing, personnel management, and travel. Staff meetings, annual surveys, feedback from volunteers and stations, and involvement of staff in coalitions and committees allow us to continually self-assess, evaluate, and improve our services.

**Other**

N/A

**PNS Amendment (if applicable)**

N/A