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Executive Summary

Little Dixie Community Action Agency, Inc. (LDCAA) is requesting \$54,299 from the Corporation for National and Community Service to continue providing services under the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). For the last 44 years, LDCAA has worked to assist low-income families and individuals in attaining self-sufficiency. Today, the agency operates a wide range of programs, which deal with economic development, community service, affordable housing, or child and youth development. LDCAA serves the residents of Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha Counties in rural southeast Oklahoma. The agency's mission statement is "Helping People. Changing Lives." Since 1973, Little Dixie RSVP has channeled the talents and energies of people age 55 and over who would like to be of service in their community. An estimated 443 RSVP volunteers will serve the program. These volunteers will provide homebound adults, persons age 65 and over, and disabled individuals living within the service area with lunchtime meal deliveries, transportation for medical appointments, pharmacy visits, grocery shopping, etc., and companionship outreach. Volunteers will also assist at local food banks, which provide emergency food assistance, as well as work to distribute information to the public regarding health insurance, health care access, and health benefits programs. These activities will be accomplished through a network of 60 volunteer stations, such as food banks, family service centers, senior centers, and hospital auxiliaries. The Primary Focus Area of the project is Healthy Futures. At the end of the 12-month performance period, we expect that 825 individuals who received emergency food assistance from program food pantries will report increased food security of themselves and their children, as a result of CNCS-supported services. The CNCS federal investment of \$54,299 will be supplemented by \$62,159.

Strengthening Communities

Little Dixie Community Action Agency, Inc. (LDCAA) is a private, non-profit organization that operates numerous community programs; in particular, the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program

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(RSVP), was established in 1973. Little Dixie RSVP operates throughout the region served by LDCAA, comprised of the rural southeast Oklahoma counties of Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha.

Statistics from the 2010 Census provides the following population counts for this target area:

Choctaw County - 15,205, McCurtain County - 33,151, and Pushmataha County - 11,572. Of this combined population of 59,928 citizens, a total of 14,873 are children, aged zero through 17. Census 2010 data shows that 69% of the total population in this tri-county area is White, 16.4% is Native American, 6.8% is Black or African American, 3.3% Hispanic, .3% Asian, 1.3% Some Other Race, and 6.2% Two or More Races. Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha Counties are all part of the territory of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, a semi-autonomous Native American homeland comprising 12 tribal districts. All three target counties have a large Native American population. According to the American Diabetes Association, American Indians and Alaskan Natives are two times as likely to have diabetes as non-Hispanic Whites. In addition, reports from the Oklahoma State Board of Health show that Oklahoma's Native American population has a disproportionate number of diabetes-related deaths--twice that of the White population.

Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha Counties are all designated as Medically Underserved Areas, as well as primary care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) and mental health HSPAs.

McCurtain and Pushmataha Counties are also dental HPSAs. Altogether, the three counties encompass a land area of 4,016.21 square miles (an area twice the size of the State of Delaware). This region is sparsely populated, with an average of 14.9 persons per square mile. By comparison, the State of Oklahoma has an average of 54.7 persons per square mile. The largest city in the tri-county area is Idabel, which according to 2008 Census estimates has a population of 6,851. Most of the communities in the region are not incorporated.

Southeast Oklahoma, also known as "Kiamichi Country", is a beautiful, mountainous corner of Oklahoma filled with lush forests and pristine lakes and rivers. It is by far the most scenic area of

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Oklahoma. For tourists, Kiamichi Country makes a great vacation spot. But for many of the residents of this rural area, the rugged landscape proves to be a major barrier to accessing health care.

Pushmataha County is nestled between the Jack Fork Mountains and the Kiamichi Mountain Range. Northern McCurtain County includes part of the Kiamichi Mountain Range, which isolates this region from the rest of the county. In addition, many of our communities still have only dirt roads to travel. Roads and bridges in this area are often impassable in bad weather. Prior to 1995, even the main roads in northern McCurtain County would become blocked during times of heavy rain, and severe flooding would cause the bridges to be underwater, leaving the citizens in nearby communities stranded. As a result of these conditions, residents often face at least an hour-long drive to reach the nearest medical facility.

Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha counties have experienced long-term poverty. According to 2010 Census data from the U.S. Census Bureau, all three of the target counties have poverty levels much greater than the state rate of 16.2% of the population living below poverty and the National rate of 13.8%. In Choctaw County, 24.6% of the population is living below poverty. For McCurtain County, 27.7% of the population is living below poverty, and in Pushmataha County, 27.1% of the population is living below poverty. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services 2010 Annual Report shows that our rural service area also has a higher percentage of the population receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) than the state. Furthermore, U.S. Census Bureau 2010 data shows the median household incomes for these counties: in Choctaw County - \$29,476; McCurtain County - \$30,708; and Pushmataha County - \$30,070. All have median household incomes that are much lower than the state rate of \$42,076 and the National median household income of \$50,046. Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha counties have experienced long-term job deterioration as well. Most of the cities in these counties were established in early statehood because of the railroad running through the area. As the railroad industry has decreased in importance, these cities have struggled to

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remain in existence. Oklahoma Employment Security Commission data for 2010 shows that McCurtain County had some of the highest unemployment numbers in the state, with a rate of 11.1%. The unemployment rate for the State of Oklahoma for 2010 was 7.1%. The other two counties also had high unemployment levels, with a rate of 7.8% in Choctaw County and a rate of 8.7% in Pushmataha County. In addition, the tri-county service area has been hit extremely hard in the last few years due to the downturn in the economy. The lumber industry has provided income for the majority of local families during the last 100 years. Three mills, Weyerhaeuser, Huber and International Paper, have all had huge layoffs in the last few years due to the national downturn in the housing market. The Weyerhaeuser-Wright City mill in McCurtain County was closed permanently in March 2009, resulting in 165 direct job losses. The other two mills have shut down machines and slowed production, resulting in approximately 126 direct job losses. These direct losses are just a minor part of the picture; hundreds of families depend on the logging industry, which provides logs to these companies for production. Many other businesses are also seeing a huge impact due to the loss of local income.

According to the Oklahoma Literacy Resource Office, "Level 1" literacy is the lowest literacy level. Statistics from the Oklahoma Literacy Resource Office show that statewide, 18% of the adults in Oklahoma are at Level 1 literacy. The statistics for our tri-county area are much worse. The percent of adults at Level 1 literacy in McCurtain County is 26%, the percent in Pushmataha County is 25%, and the percent of adults at Level 1 literacy in Choctaw County is 28% -- the highest illiteracy rate in the state.

According to the Oklahoma Primary Care Association, 100% of the population in Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha Counties are underserved. In 2007, the American Medical Association reported that Oklahoma ranked last in the nation with the fewest number of patient care and primary care physicians per 100,000 in the population. The United Health Foundation ranks Oklahoma 47th

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in overall health status and the Commonwealth Fund ranked Oklahoma 50th in health system performance.

Based on the 2011 Oklahoma State of the State's Health Report (published by the Oklahoma State Department of Health), 28.1% of the population in Choctaw County is without insurance coverage, 28.0% in McCurtain County is without, and 22.1% of the population in Pushmataha County is without insurance. These percentages are much higher than the Oklahoma average of 19.8% and National level of 14.3%.

In addition to ranking among the poorest region in Oklahoma, the target counties for this project have some of the worst health rankings in the state as well. The 2011 Oklahoma State of the State's Health Report provides a ranking of Oklahoma's 77 counties on a number of health measures, with 1 being the best and 77 the worst. Choctaw County ranked 76th for rate of death for Heart Disease, 74th for Cancer, 64th for Influenza/Pneumonia, 74th for Low Birth Weight, 64th for No Insurance, 73rd in Poverty, and 75th for Preventable Hospitalizations. McCurtain County ranked 45th for rate of death for Heart Disease, 67th for Cancer, 68th for Stroke, 58th for Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease, 69th for Diabetes, 47th for No Insurance, and 75th for Poverty. Pushmataha County ranked 74th for rate of death for Heart Disease, 63rd for Stroke, 48th for Nephritis, 53rd for Asthma Prevalence, 76th in Poverty, and 74th for Preventable Hospitalizations. Clearly, positive change is needed in these communities to assist residents in maintaining their health, which is the ultimate goal of the Healthy Futures Primary Focus Area for this project.

For this project, Little Dixie RSVP will oversee 443 active volunteers and 60 stations. Each volunteer station is considered a community partner with Little Dixie RSVP; the goal of the program, to improve the lives of residents in the three counties we serve, is accomplished through this collaboration. Local input into program design and evaluation is achieved by maintaining close communication with stations and community groups, as well as working with our Advisory Group of community

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representatives. Program stations must be nonprofit in nature and are eligible as long as volunteers can provide a benefit to the community. These stations, which include such institutions as food pantries, senior centers, and hospital auxiliaries, are provided with support by RSVP volunteers. Little Dixie RSVP also works to integrate senior service into the activities of community programs operated by our sponsoring agency, such as serving as court-appointed advocates for children. Although our volunteers do not replace employees within these organizations, this increase in manpower at program stations results in an enhanced capacity to serve the community effectively and efficiently. The Primary Focus Area for this project is Healthy Futures, which includes the following Objectives: Aging in Place, Obesity and Food, and Access to Care. The Service Activities to be undertaken include providing homebound adults, persons age 65 and over, and disabled individuals living within the service area with lunchtime meal deliveries, transportation for medical appointments, pharmacy visits, grocery shopping, etc., and companionship outreach. Volunteers will also assist at local food banks, which provide emergency food assistance, as well as work to distribute information to the public regarding health insurance, health care access, and health benefits programs. These service activities will lead to the following National Performance Measure outputs and outcomes: 1) a minimum of 215 homebound or older adults and individuals with disabilities will receive food, transportation, or companionship to allow them to live independently (Output H8); 2) 1,500 individuals will receive emergency food from food pantries (Output H10), and at least 825 will report increased food security of themselves and their children as a result (Outcome H12); and 3) 4,050 individuals will receive information on health insurance, health care access, and health benefits programs (Output H2). RSVP volunteers serving under the Primary Focus Area will receive direct supervision by station supervisors and the RSVP County Coordinator; the Program Director will oversee all activities as a whole. Little Dixie RSVP will also partner with the Southeast Oklahoma Rural Health Network and Project CORE (Community Outreach and Rural Education), as well as

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local insurance and health care providers, who will provide health information and materials for RSVP volunteers to distribute within the community at no cost to the program.

The service activities carried out by RSVP volunteers under the Healthy Futures Primary Focus Area will allow homebound or older adults, persons with disabilities, and low-income individuals with the ability to better manage their health. Transportation to medical appointments, shopping, and social and community events can greatly improve the chances that a person can remain living independently in their own home rather than face institutionalization in a nursing home. The companionship outreach offered by RSVP volunteers help enable residents to react and interact with their environment, to find new and satisfying social relationships, and to be self-directing. This program activity benefits homebound or older adults by addressing the issue of solitude often experienced by individuals who have a limited number of family members or those who lack a support system. In addition, the provision of healthy foods and health literacy information will work to improve the overall well-being of our service area, while also working to reduce food insecurity and improve access to primary and preventive health care.

In addition to service activities under the Primary Focus Area, RSVP volunteers will work to provide supportive services for veterans in our rural communities. Such activities will include assistance in filing VA claims, help in finding employment, and setting up/providing transportation to medical appointments. U.S. Census Bureau 2010 statistics shows that there are 1,416 veterans in Choctaw County, 2,856 veterans in McCurtain County, and 1,209 veterans in Pushmataha County. There are many local programs that can provide support to these veterans, but many veterans are not aware of the help available to them. RSVP volunteers will be an effective resource to mentor our local veterans and to connect them to resources to meet their needs, whether it is health services, counseling, housing, transportation, employment, or other needs.

Recruitment and Development

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As a person ages, some factors can improve their quality of life, such as physical activity, stress reduction, social interaction, and learning new things. RSVP participants are fortunate in that many of these are achieved when volunteering, even for those who serve at home. Little Dixie RSVP is committed to providing an enjoyable and fulfilling experience for all our volunteers. Our program staff work closely with volunteers to learn about their interests and abilities; this helps to ensure they are placed at a station where their skills can provide a benefit. In addition, RSVP volunteers are given a choice of volunteer activities, and are supported in taking the initiative to share ideas and concepts that will enhance their duties or station.

For many, volunteering is an opportunity to gain new skills and insight. Those that volunteer with the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Program, for example, are trained to advocate for abused and neglected children in the court system. Volunteers research each case and interview those involved. Facts provided by CASA volunteers allow the judge to make a more informed decision regarding the welfare of each child. Experiences such as this show our RSVP volunteers the impact they make in the lives of others. We encourage our participants to share how they have been touched by volunteering; it allows them to reflect on what it means to serve in their community, while raising program awareness.

Training is essential and ensures both volunteer retention and program success. When staff members are first hired, they are trained for their position by the Program Director. In addition, our sponsoring agency, LDCAA, holds an in-service training annually. The training consists of topics pertinent to all agency employees, including safety and health issues. There is also program-specific training, and the RSVP Director reviews the Field Guidance with the County Coordinator. When a new volunteer or station is enrolled in the program, program staff hold an orientation in order to explain the program in detail, along with each participant's responsibilities. Assistance and support from program staff is available at any time. Certain stations also offer in-depth training, specific to the type of volunteer

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work.

Although our best recruitment resource is word-of-mouth by our existing volunteers, other techniques are used as well. This includes speaking at community group meetings and placing flyers at various locations in the community. The flyers explain the program and list participating stations, so that prospective volunteers will have an idea of where they would like to serve. Also, articles about the program are frequently sent to local newspapers, including ethnic or minority publications, in order to further public awareness as well as cultivate diversity within the program. Our program staff are also successful recruiters because of their involvement within the community.

Since Little Dixie RSVP has been in operation for 39 years, the program is well-known throughout the service area. In addition, Little Dixie RSVP has such an outstanding reputation and rapport with area communities, groups frequently call the program office requesting placement of volunteers within their organizations. In fact, our volunteers are often recruited to help with community-wide activities, such as fairs, rodeos, and festivals. We continually strive to expand our areas of service by diversifying our volunteer pool, as well as the types of program stations in order to meet the needs of the area. In addition to recruiting individuals of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientation, and degrees of English language proficiency, we also work to recruit veterans, military family members, and those with disabilities. We have been fortunate in the last year to recruit two new stations that involve veterans -- the American Legion Post 8 and McCurtain County Veterans Memorial Museum -- and we hope to use these stations and volunteers as a stepping stone to other participants and sites.

We view diversity in volunteers--their level of education, ethnicity, socio-economic status--as an important aspect of our program. Each volunteer contributes a wealth of unique abilities and experiences when serving in the community. Little Dixie RSVP is able to bring together volunteers of diverse backgrounds by developing relationships with community leaders and organizations, as well as involving members from different groups in our program activities. With the help of these individuals

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and community organizations, valuable local input into the program design is gained, not to mention a valuable source for volunteer recruiting. In addition, the Little Dixie RSVP Advisory Council--which is comprised of representatives of community, business, public, and private agencies; volunteer station representatives; and specialists in the fields of aging or volunteerism--assists in program recruitment and volunteer development.

Recognition is an important aspect of Little Dixie RSVP, because it plays a large part in retaining volunteers. Public recognition of volunteer achievements in local publications and the program newsletter is a great motivator. The newsletter reinforces the feeling for each volunteer that they are an important part of the program. Since our program serves a large area, each county is specifically represented in the newsletter. The newsletter also contains information from our sponsoring agency and notices of volunteer opportunities. In addition, volunteers and stations are recognized periodically for outstanding service.

Little Dixie RSVP also hosts an annual Volunteer Recognition Day in each county to show appreciation to all volunteers for their contributions and hard work. These separate county Recognition Events include refreshments, entertainment, door prizes, and guest speakers.

Program Management

RSVP staff monitor each station at least once a month, surveying volunteers to determine their placement satisfaction level, as well as what can be done to enrich their experience. Program staff are provided with training in order to manage RSVP participants effectively. Our volunteers are encouraged to offer suggestions for the program, and have influence in developing their roles. Community feedback is also a valid tool in assessing program performance.

The RSVP Advisory Council plays an important role in the planning and operation of Little Dixie RSVP. The Council meets at least four times per year in order to fulfill the objectives of the program, which include: development of volunteer stations; meeting the needs of volunteers; assistance with

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recruitment of volunteers; coordination with community organizations and agencies; instituting sound community and financial support sources; developing in-service activities for volunteers and stations, as well as recognition and social activities; preparation of an annual program evaluation survey; and financial management and administration.

Staff meetings are held monthly and include evaluation of performance as it relates to volunteer recruitment, retention, and program activities. In addition, Little Dixie RSVP prepares annual progress reports and utilizes the RSVP Reporter software to maintain client information, track volunteers, their involvement in the program, and hours. These tools provide an ongoing evaluation of program activities, and aids in assessing individual volunteer achievement as well as comparing overall outcomes with planned goals and objectives. On an annual basis, a programmatic review is held; program evaluation surveys are disbursed to volunteers, stations, and within the community.

Feedback is compiled and presented to the Advisory Council. LDCAA programs also conduct annual community needs assessments. Using these tools, the accomplishments and impact of Little Dixie RSVP on the community can be determined.

In 2009, LDCAA began the process of developing a new, three-year strategic plan. First, individualized planning sessions with each program (including Little Dixie RSVP) helped ensure that the overall agency plan for growth and sustainability contained program-specific goals. In January 2010, a community survey was conducted throughout the service area. The community survey showed that Education is the most important service/need in our service area followed by Employment/Jobs and Health Care. LDCAA then held meetings with partner agencies in each service county to discuss survey results and see how we could work together to meet community needs. Since completion of the strategic plan in July 2010, each program has begun implementing strategies detailed in the plan to meet identified goals. Little Dixie RSVP is focused on meeting the community needs identified through this strategic planning process.

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When developing volunteer stations, Little Dixie RSVP considers the needs of the community along with the expertise and experience of the volunteers. This includes the goals of the program as well as those of the volunteers themselves. In addition to the Primary Focus Area, Little Dixie RSVP will work with existing volunteers and stations to further diversify services by recruiting stations that fall under the Focus Areas of Veterans and Military Families and Disaster Services, since supportive services under these categories are large unmet needs in our communities. We feel that our current capacity and past experience will ensure success in these endeavors.

To meet changing community needs, it has been necessary to graduate volunteer stations; however, program staff have been able to consolidate some stations as well as move volunteers into other, similar assignments to minimize disruptions to current volunteers. Since most of the stations that were graduated no longer had active volunteers, the transition was seamless. We have found that the responsible graduation of these stations has improved the quality of our volunteer services as well. LDCAA and Little Dixie RSVP has a strong track record of successfully evaluating and reporting on project outputs and outcome measures. RSVP volunteers will provide tracking of service activities, outputs and outcomes through specific measurement instruments. Tracking will be overseen by the station directors, then compiled by the County Coordinator and checked for accuracy and completeness. The Program Director will then enter the output/outcome data into the program database, which will be able to further organize and trend the data. Once entered in the database, the Program Director will have the ability to easily recall the outputs and outcomes for the National Performance Measures for reporting purposes, as well as print reports for Advisory Council review. The LDCAA Accounting Department manages all Little Dixie RSVP project resources. The Accounting Department maintains records in compliance with State and Federal regulations as detailed in OMB Circulars A-122 and A-110, and generally accepted accounting principles. Since Little Dixie RSVP has been in operation for 39 years, the program has a positive reputation for service in the community. As

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a result, many organizations make annual contributions, both monetary and in-kind, to the program. This makes securing added resources in order to sustain and expand the program much easier. For example, local businesses and community groups contribute to our Recognition Day events, and hospital stations offer meals at no cost to volunteers when the assignment is during a mealtime.

Organizational Capability

In 1973, Little Dixie RSVP was established to help meet the needs of the community. Since then, LDCAA has successfully provided personnel, materials, and facilities with which to carry out the responsibilities and services of the program. As a sound fiscal and programmatic administrator, LDCAA provides RSVP with training and technical assistance, as well as administrative support. This includes financial management, public relations, grant writing, purchasing, record keeping, and internal guidelines, such as travel policies and operating procedures. LDCAA maintains a financial management system which provides for operational efficiency and adequate internal control of funds. Our records easily identify the source and application of funds for grant activities. The Accounting Department maintains records in compliance with State and Federal regulations, and generally accepted accounting principles. An independent Certified Public Accountant performs annual agency-wide audits.

LDCAA has 44 years of experience in operating Federal and state grant programs dealing with volunteers, senior citizens, and impact-based outcomes; therefore, LDCAA has the capacity needed to implement RSVP successfully. All agency programs work to address the needs of the area served. Many of our programs depend on volunteers, such as CASA, Mentoring Children of Prisoners, Head Start, and Early Head Start. In addition, we operate programs involving seniors, including the Child and Adult Care Food Program, Transit, and Section 202 Supportive Housing. With the wide range of programs described above, it is evident that LDCAA is a multi-faceted agency, with extensive management experience.

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The diverse governing Board of LDCAA is made up of 27 members representing the service area. The Executive Director, Brenda Needham, oversees agency operations as a whole and supervises a select group of programs, including RSVP. The RSVP Director, Barbara Moffitt, is in charge of the program and staff, and the Fiscal Officer is responsible for financial oversight. The RSVP Director has been with LDCAA for 11 years, working in various capacities before becoming Director in 2006. She has a vast knowledge of LDCAA and the management of different programs, as well as extensive experience conducting training workshops. The RSVP Director also worked in a nursing home; as part of her responsibilities, she recruited volunteers and then coordinated their help with various center activities. The RSVP Director is accountable for reporting and monitoring all operations, including volunteers, stations, and staff involved. There is one part-time County Coordinator assigned to assist the Director with program activities, including the monitoring of all three service counties. County Coordinator Barbara Beesley has worked for Little Dixie RSVP over four years. The County Coordinator has a range of experience in working with the public, especially senior citizens, due in large part to the many years spent volunteering at area nursing homes. As a result, she has quite a rapport built with the populace we serve.

The RSVP Advisory Council plays an important role in the planning and operation of Little Dixie RSVP. The Council meets at least four times per year in order to fulfill the objectives of the program, which include: development of volunteer stations; meeting the needs of volunteers; assistance with recruitment of volunteers; coordination with community organizations and agencies; instituting sound community and financial support sources; developing in-service activities for volunteers and stations, as well as recognition and social activities; preparation of an annual program evaluation survey; and financial management and administration.

In addition to program tracking, LDCAA uses CAPTAIN to track RSVP outcomes. Factors such as the number of volunteers enrolled and hours will be tracked through ROMA. Annual surveys, progress

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reporting, station monitoring, and needs assessments will also be used to gauge the program; improvements will be made as needed. For 2012, program evaluation showed that RSVP had a positive impact on our volunteers, and they were satisfied with their experience. In fact, 100% of volunteers reported they were either Extremely or Somewhat Satisfied with their RSVP experience, with RSVP Program staff, with their current assignment, and Station Supervisor.

Other

N/A

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A