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Executive Summary

The United Way of Martin County Inc.'s mission is to provide leadership to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities. The best resource to mobilize caring people is through volunteering opportunities that are meaningful, challenging and demonstrate impact. United Way seeks to increase its investment in volunteerism by sponsoring RSVP Okeechobee County, FL. RSVP volunteers will serve the general population of Okeechobee County, with an emphasis on engaging veterans. Service activities will be performed at 20 stations aligned with the national performance measures addressing disaster services, healthy futures, capacity building, and other community need priorities.

Disaster services has been selected as the primary focus area since Florida is prone to and has experienced several hurricanes, flooding and fires and the county has identified this as a priority area of concern.

Volunteers will assist food pantry meal sites operated by the Treasure Coast Food Bank to provide access to food and meals for residents who are food insecure.

RSVP volunteers will coordinate the facilitation of the Florida Volunteer Managers Certificate Program, a six course curriculum designed to increase the effectiveness of volunteer program.

To meet the workplan performance measures, we are requesting a federal grant of \$72,000 with a non-federal match of \$8,000 to support 150 volunteers to address the focus areas that will lead to a stronger community and enhanced delivery systems, more residents and veterans engaged in challenging and rewarding volunteer service, and more volunteers helping the residents that are food insufficient. Volunteer Coordinators will be trained and have the tools and resources needed to effectively engage volunteers. Residents in the county will be better prepared in the event of a disaster, be able to manage unaffiliated volunteers and will provide volunteer service in other community-based programs including those that both serve veterans and improve the quality of life of veterans.

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Strengthening Communities

Okeechobee County is located in South-Central Florida on the north shore of big Lake Okeechobee. Okeechobee County has a total area of 769 square miles of which, 668 square miles of it is land and 101 square miles of it (13.19%) is water. The year round population of Okeechobee County is 39,996; however from November to May, there are an estimated 30,000 additional seasonal residents. The population of the market area within a 30 mile radius is 174,528. Approximately 6 million visitors per year come to enjoy the activities around Lake Okeechobee. Okeechobee County is within 2 hours drive of 75% of the State of Florida's population. There are hundreds of acres of cattle ranches located in this rural community with limited industry and employment opportunities.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the population of Okeechobee County is 39,996 and estimates it to have increased by .4% to 40,140. The estimated workforce as of 2010 is 18,987; and the Median Household Income is \$45,300. The unemployment rate in 2010 was 12.7%.

The Okeechobee populace includes; 87.9% White; 8.6% Black, 24.5% Hispanic; 1.3% American Indian; .9% Asian; 1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; and 24.5% White persons, not Hispanic.

Okeechobee County has been affected by -- and will always be at risk from -- tropical storms and hurricanes. The county is susceptible to flooding, severe storms and tornadoes. During the summer months and periodically throughout the year, the area is also susceptible to drought conditions and high winds resulting in raging fires.

During the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, Okeechobee County was affected by three Category II and above hurricanes.

Okeechobee County has a deep commitment to emergency management, taking the initiative to establish a Medical Reserve Corps, a community-based group of medical and non-medical volunteers ready to supplement existing local emergency and public health resources during the time of

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community need. The Okeechobee County Health Department is leading the initiative and is interested in being able to provide the county with the training and volunteer resources for a Volunteer Reception Center

Recruiting and placing volunteers in this primary focus area has proven to be a challenge with limited staff and resources and recruitment efforts. The attempts have been coordinated by county personnel who are already over tasked with reductions in staff and budgets.

The American Red Cross also helps the community prevent, prepare and cope with disasters through volunteer efforts.

Forty volunteers will be recruited to assist with the primary focus area of disaster services. Some of the volunteers recruited will be veterans who desire to continue to serve their county through volunteer service but who have not been afforded the opportunity.

Service activities will include the training of no less than two veterans as Project Leaders who will recruit and train other volunteers to operate a Volunteer Reception Center. Lead volunteers will secure a location and other resources to perform mock disaster exercises. The training for the operation of a Volunteer Reception Center will be provided through Volunteer Florida and RSVP of Martin County. Volunteers will be trained in registering the spontaneous volunteers, educating them on safety issues, identifying the volunteers for authorization into the affected areas, logging calls from residents and agencies asking for assistance, logging volunteer opportunities, and matching the skills of the volunteers with the emergent needs, and the overall management of the potential influx of volunteers.

By the end of the three year grant period, the forty volunteers will be properly trained and prepared for disaster including the efficient and effective management of a Volunteer Reception Center as exhibited by their participation in a mock disaster exercise led by veterans and where their training will be put into practice.

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Recruitment and Development

United Way has the resources and programs in place to help ensure that RSVP in Okeechobee County has the know-how it needs to provide high-quality volunteer experiences.

The United Way of Martin County has sponsored a successful RSVP program for more than 23 years. The RSVP Director, with 22 years of experience, has served as a Peer Mentor for the past several years and will give guidance to the new Project Director including training on the effective recruitment, placement, training, supervision and recognition of volunteers in Okeechobee County. Traditional recruitment vehicles will include newspaper ads, periodic television and radio exposure, press releases, flyers, posters, web sites, visibility at community events, speaking engagements and relationships with companies able to identify employees approaching retirement age. Targeted recruitment will include veterans and military families, persons with disabilities, persons receiving services from identified stations, and will be inclusive of all ages, races, backgrounds, sexual orientation and degrees of English proficiency. Neighborhoods where services are provided and veterans will be the focus of the first year recruitment plan.

Volunteer retention will be promoted in several ways. An increasing number of agencies are recognizing the added value of volunteer involvement. RSVP will actively encourage agencies to provide volunteers with more sophisticated service opportunities.

RSVP assignments will be monitored by the RSVP Advisory Board which will be formed to ensure that volunteers are participating in meaningful and enriching activities that provide opportunities for social interaction while learning new skills. Other more traditional retention methods include follow-up calls, newsletters, station visits and media coverage.

RSVP volunteers will be collectively and individually recognized at various events, including an annual recognition luncheon where years of service awards will be presented. Additional public recognition will take place at the sponsor and agency celebrations, Presidential Service Award

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presentations at the Board of County Commissioners, and periodic official proclamations issued by the City of Okeechobee and the Board of County Commissioners. During National Volunteer Week, local businesses with marquees will be encouraged to post messages thanking RSVP volunteers. Volunteers will also be recognized in press releases, newsletters and on the RSVP web page. Agencies will be strongly encouraged to interview volunteers to capture their experiences and volunteers are likewise encouraged to record their experiences in journals to share with clients, staff and young people on the RSVP web page and newsletter.

Staff training is offered through national, state and local affiliations and the United Way whenever possible. The staff and lead volunteers will provide technical assistance to volunteer managers as they develop leadership opportunities and short-term projects. RSVP staff members will participate in Florida's Volunteer Management Certificate Program designed to give volunteer coordinators the tools needed to engage and empower volunteers. The training is facilitated by the RSVP Director of Martin County and RSVP volunteers. These resources are supplemented by Project Leader training whereby volunteers with leadership skills are trained to lead with minimal oversight. Agencies will receive senior sensitivity training to further understand the struggles faced by some senior volunteers.

Program Management

United Way of Martin County (UW) has sponsored RSVP for close to 23 years. This continuity, together with the active involvement of the Advisory Board, has helped RSVP to develop meaningful volunteer experiences throughout Martin County. This is reinforced by the fact that UW board members are routinely invited to join the RSVP Advisory Board, participate on committees and provide direct volunteer service. Accordingly, the United Way strategic plan encourages volunteerism for all ages with guidance from RSVP volunteer leaders.

Since adopting the United Way's new volunteer engagement strategy, all RSVP activities are tied to clear community impact goals. RSVP staff and Advisory Board members continue to assist with UW

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focus groups to assess community and agency needs. Staff and Advisory Board members also participate in community meetings and other initiatives with non-United Way agencies, including local government. This synergy between the UW and RSVP is instrumental in developing meaningful volunteer assignments that address identified community needs. These are identified in the workplans addressing healthy futures, disaster, capacity building and other priority needs.

As an unbiased advocate for community needs, United Way of Martin County will work closely with the small volunteer driven United Way of Okeechobee County and other social service providers, clients and community leaders in Okeechobee to identify community needs and program design to address the issues. For purposes of this grant the primary focus area will be disaster services.

The primary bridge between RSVP and the community it serves will be the Advisory Board, comprised of agency representatives, business leaders, volunteers and community leaders.

Incumbent Advisory Board members will be invited to continue their service in this capacity. The RSVP Director of Martin County will be the liaison representative for the Advisory Board and the United Way of Martin County Board of Directors. Volunteerism is a topic of discussion at every United Way of Martin County Board meeting.

Residents in Okeechobee County will be made aware of the program through several media outlets including radio, newsprint, brochures, participation at community events such as the annual Okeechobee Family Health and Safety Expo, and speaking engagements. In addition, a web page will be added to the United Way website until one can be created for Okeechobee County. Volunteer opportunities will be posted on the webpage and in local newspapers.

The RSVP program engages people from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds by identifying appropriate volunteer opportunities for targeted groups and includes group members in recruitment efforts. Depending on circumstances, specific recruitment campaigns will be devised to reach a broader audience. The emphasis will be on the primary focus area of disaster services with the

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recruitment of veterans who will be trained to operate the Volunteer Reception Center and to perform outreach to the residents on disaster preparedness.

Training and clear communication are other important management tools. Well over 70 volunteer coordinators at agencies along the Treasure Coast have completed Florida's Volunteer Managers Certificate program and are now equipped with the resources they need to effectively manage their volunteer programs. Executing memoranda of understanding with participating agencies prior to recruiting volunteers is also a simple but effective method of ensuring that all assignments meet the unique needs of both volunteer and community. Stations that are able and willing to demonstrate reliable results that are in line with the national performance measure will be required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

A retired consultant with extensive grants experience will conduct the annual RSVP assessment and review all aspects of the program including performance measurement and community impact. This is submitted in year two of the grant. The Advisory Board will take an aggressive role in monitoring national performance measures and making changes as needed and will be reflected by the establishment of a committee for this purpose. All volunteer assignments, including training sessions, will be assessed quantitatively and each work plan is likewise specific regarding anticipated impacts on client populations.

Volunteer records will be maintained on-site and through the Volunteer Reporter database program that allows for customized reporting. This upgraded web-based database enables us to match volunteer skills with opportunities, document volunteer hours and track outcome measures. Backed up nightly, the objective of the database is to promote the enhancement of volunteer lives through productive civic engagement.

Volunteers not enrolled in the new workplans will be transitioned into community volunteers managed by RSVP volunteers who will recruit volunteers for all agencies in Okeechobee County.

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Some of the graduating volunteers will be strategically integrated into agencies and workplans designed to make a difference in service delivery and social outcomes.

The graduating stations will be invited to participate in the capacity building workplan activities for the volunteer management training. All stations will be inspired to make volunteerism a core strategic function and to leverage volunteers more fully in their core operations in an effort to address other community priorities.

Donated office space has been secured pending the grant award and Okeechobee County business leaders and social service providers have expressed enthusiasm and a willingness to assist us in meeting the performance measures.

Our 22 years of grants management experience has provided the RSVP program and its Director with unique and relevant resource management expertise. The Advisory Board, the UW Finance Committee and the UW Board of Directors review financial information monthly or quarterly. Monthly reports regarding all volunteer activities and other pertinent information are generated by staff and reviewed by the RSVP Advisory Board and UW's Board of Directors.

Participating stations will also play an active role in managing project resources. Periodically, agency executive directors are introduced to the Executive Service Corps through round table discussions. Customized learning series are offered for executive directors and volunteer coordinators to ensure agencies are equipped for success and able to make full use of the expertise available to them through the RSVP program.

Staff and Advisory Board members will promote program sustainability by seeking support from private funding sources, including gifts, foundation grants and in-kind resources. Additional resources to expand the project will be identified and pursued by the Advisory Board whenever possible.

Organizational Capability

Given the United Way's mission is to provide leadership to improve lives by mobilizing the caring

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power of our community. The UW has successfully sponsored the RSVP program for over 23 years in Martin County. The RSVP program promotes this mission by placing volunteers and is at the very core of the UW's strategic implementation strategy. This long-standing relationship enables both the UW and RSVP to tap the expertise of knowledgeable professionals and implement meaningful, inter-generational projects that cross organizational boundaries.

In her position for over 22 years, the RSVP Director has a consistent track record of managing successful volunteer projects. She is a graduate of the Corporation for National Service (CNS) National Service Executive Leadership Institute where she was trained as a Learning Group facilitator. A former bank vice president, her volunteer achievements include local and regional leadership roles as president of the Florida Association of Senior Service Corps Directors and district director of Soroptimist International of Stuart. Since its inception she has been selected as a national peer mentor with the CNS Peer Mentoring Program. The RSVP Director will be responsible for the selection process for the Project Director in Okeechobee County and will serve as the staff liaison for the Okeechobee County RSVP Advisory Board.

Financial oversight is the responsibility of the Project Director, the UW Finance Committee and the UW Board of Directors. The UW contracts with an independent accounting firm to audit the financial system and occasionally examine the programmatic aspects of RSVP. As part of its close working relationship with the UW, RSVP makes ample use of the resources provided by other CNCS programs. A CNCS Projects of National Significance grant was successfully administered by the UW and was augmented into the grant. United Way of Martin County recently received an augmentation grant to support veterans and military families. Additionally, a portion of an AmeriCorps Vista Program was managed through UW and Volunteer Florida.

At the policy level, the RSVP program will benefit from a strong Advisory Board including a broad spectrum of diverse volunteers. Community leaders with a demonstrated commitment to the

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program are typically invited to participate. The Board will meet monthly to: (1) Provide input and guidance regarding the program's goals; (2) as-needed direction with respect to day-to-day issues; and (3) program evaluation to ensure continuous improvement.

The United Way Worldwide has a new volunteer engagement strategy that places a high priority on organizational commitment, adequate staffing and the requisite technology and infrastructure needed to implement effective volunteer programming. RSVP in Okeechobee County will be provided with additional personnel time for communications and finance as part of the United Way's contribution to the program. All staff are UW employees, have written job descriptions and receive continual feedback with respect to performance. Staff meetings are held at least bi-weekly to review progress and relevant local, state and national trainings are attended whenever possible. All UW and RSVP policies and procedures are strictly adhered to.

Self-assessments using a modified version of the RSVP Self-Assessment Checklist are facilitated by Executive Service Corps volunteers working hand-in-glove with staff. A Community Stakeholder Survey will be conducted and will be incorporated into the self-assessment process to ensure continuous improvement.

Donated office space has been secured in the event the grant is awarded and is located at a local community bank with high visibility.

Relationships will be built within the community and attempts will be made to secure matching funds from the United Way of Okeechobee County and other sources within that community.

However, if the attempts are not successful, the United Way of Martin County will provide the match as required by the grant award.

Other

Not applicable

PNS Amendment (if applicable)