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Executive Summary

Lawton RSVP will initially field 251 unduplicated volunteers across its 28 stations.

We are honored to select Veterans and Military Families as our primary focus area. We serve all uniformed members of the armed forces, be they active duty or veteran, and their family members.

Additional populations we have targeted for our continued assistance include the frail, disabled, hospitalized or homebound (especially the elderly), the economically disadvantaged and hungry, and school age children.

Since the program's inception in April 1973, Lawton RSVP volunteers have provided quality time and services to our fellow citizens, military and civilian alike, residing primarily in the Lawton-Fort Sill community, while also reaching out into the more rural areas of Comanche County. Our volunteers provide that essential human connection for many of our elderly who, without these visits, might be truly isolated. The volunteers bring nourishing meals and boxes of food, engage folks in conversation, play cards or board games with them, read aloud to them, write letters to loved ones for some of them.

The 24 members of our Vietnam Veterans of America RSVP station attend every Soldier departure or homecoming ceremony at Fort Sill, regardless of the time of day or the weather.

The new Lawton RSVP Director, a certified English teacher with a background in honors math and a minor in Spanish, is intrigued at the prospect of developing a pool of volunteers who will mentor and tutor school age children in order to improve their literacy and math skills. Further, she envisions the possibility of recruiting additional RSVP volunteers to serve this culturally-diverse community as translators -- be they Spanish, German, Tagalog or some other foreign language speakers.

Our budget estimate for the first year of this grant totals \$117,720.00, with \$22,456.00 in federal funds, and the remaining portion a combination of State of Oklahoma (\$28,012.00) and City of Lawton (\$67,252.00) dollars.

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Strengthening Communities

Lawton RSVP volunteers provide services and assistance via the program's 28 stations presently located across urban Lawton-Fort Sill, in the small rural town of Geronimo, and at The Holy City, nestled in the hillsides of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.

The fifth largest city in Oklahoma, Lawton is also the county seat for Comanche County. In the 1990s, the populations of Lawton and Fort Sill, the sprawling active Army military base along Lawton's north boundary, were merged. Today the Lawton-Fort Sill community (per 2010 Census figures) has a combined population of 107,863 -- which is 87% of the total 124,098 population for all of Comanche County.

The Lawton-Fort Sill community is the largest of ten cities and towns found across Comanche County. The smaller metropolitan areas of Cache, Chattanooga, Elgin, Faxon, Fletcher, Geronimo, Indianahoma, Medicine Park, and Sterling, along with unincorporated areas, make up the rest of the county.

Uniformed members of the Armed Forces and their family members who reside on Fort Sill proper total 10,996.

Lawton is truly a region, serving outlying cities and neighboring counties as an employment and retail center.

The local income outlook continues to be promising as a result of recent construction activity at Fort Sill. Over the past five years of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), the Department of the Army committed and spent approximately \$1.2 billion on the Fort Sill military installation to upgrade and expand facilities.

The Army's Air Defense Artillery branch has relocated from Fort Bliss, Texas, to Fort Sill. That move, over several years, was primarily responsible for the 4.4% increase in Lawton's population since 2000. Fort Sill, its Soldiers and Marines, their families, the veterans who in large part make up Fort Sill's

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Civil Service and contractor workforce, are all here to stay.

A 2010 American Community Survey revealed that 19.9% of Comanche County is comprised of veterans -- that's nearly 25,000 people who make up the "Veteran" portion of our chosen "Veterans and Military Families" primary focus area.

As in other communities across America, Lawton-Fort Sill is no stranger to homeless veterans. A recent community-wide survey was conducted and received considerable publicity in our local print and broadcast media outlets. "The Lawton Constitution," our daily newspaper, published an editorial very recently, asking community leaders and the various Veteran service organizations to provide a lasting solution to the situation. Some of these organizations are also active Lawton RSVP stations. Whenever large units of soldiers deploy, family members are left behind. Many times, those are young spouses, often unemployed, with toddlers or infants to care for. Lawton RSVP volunteers have stepped forward, providing assistance to those young spouses who may be new to Lawton, who may not speak English well (if at all), who feel alone and afraid for the safety of their children.

Lawton RSVP volunteers have shown their support for these young military families by attending each departure and welcome home ceremony, by helping with minor home and vehicle repairs, mowing lawns, and assisting with tax return preparation.

The new Lawton RSVP Director was born at Fort Sill of two World War II combat Veterans and grew up a product of the Lawton Public Schools. She remembers how Lawton turned into a ghost town -- literally -- during the Vietnam War era. As Soldiers deployed, en masse, their young wives and children fled Lawton in droves, returning to the comforting arms of the warm and familiar -- their folks "back home."

The Lawton community leadership took a stand back then, as did the Lawton RSVP volunteers -- then and now -- we (those of us who are born and/or married into the military, those of us who have served in uniform, those of us who continue to serve the military as civilians) want our young spouses

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and children of deployed Soldiers to remain here: we are your family now.

No more "ghost town" as a result of military deployments. What we've done must have made an impact. Yet we can always do more.

While in but her second week on the job, the new Lawton RSVP Director drafted a two-page survey for distribution to every RSVP volunteer, station manager, city leaders, and support staff. This information will serve as her baseline, while giving her ideas of where the program can be expanded, in terms of stations, service activities, and additional volunteers.

Having retired from the Army after 28 years of uniformed military service, the new Lawton RSVP Director genuinely understands and appreciates the tremendous potential for expanded Lawton RSVP events and activities to support those veterans and military families who are, literally, in our own backyards.

Having served in the Army primarily in plans and operations, the new Director has the vision, tenacity, and talents to bring proposed projects to fruition. Further, her more than 25 years as an award-winning photojournalist suggest a boost in the number of published articles documenting Lawton RSVP events and service activities.

The Director has access to key leaders across Comanche County who recognize the value of our RSVP volunteers and who request them. Community partnerships exist with Fort Sill, the Veterans' Center and VA Clinic, and Vietnam Veterans of America, with additional partnerships in the offing.

Recruitment and Development

The Lawton RSVP currently has 251 unduplicated volunteers and 28 stations.

The new Lawton RSVP Director came on board October 1, 2012, and began thoroughly immersing herself in research -- not only that material pertaining to the Lawton program itself, but also that as detailed in this grant's various focus area outputs, service activities, and outcomes: what exciting new possibilities to explore! In but her second week, the new Director drafted a two-page RSVP volunteer

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survey -- among its questions are those pertaining to foreign language-speaking ability and tutoring skills in reading and math. The survey's administrative portion seeks each respondent's veteran status and race.

Wearing an RSVP sweatshirt out in town has created instant recruitment opportunities for the new Director. The receptionist at our local Salvation Army office wanted to follow our Director back to her office that very afternoon (October 2) to sign up as a volunteer! An invitation to a Community Dinner prepared and offered free to all by one of our local black churches, Galilee Missionary Baptist Church, resulted in a two-hour visit (during that meal on October 13) between our Director and the church leadership. Members of the church are interested in becoming RSVP volunteers; the church leadership is interested in learning more about the possibility of becoming an RSVP station. Galilee Baptist, with an extensive community network program already in place, may be an excellent candidate for consideration as a site.

There is always a need for mentoring and tutoring school children. As a certified English teacher, tutor and past mentor in the Lawton Public Schools, the Director plans to develop stations where improving student literacy and math skills would be the goal.

Both the Director and her assistant are retired Soldiers, and their combined military service totals 50 years. Each brings to the table a proven and extensive background in working through federal regulations; in thoroughly planning for and then documenting all that is required to substantiate compliance. They understand Soldiers and their families; they readily relate and look forward to recruiting Veterans and their family members as RSVP volunteers.

The Director was branched in the Army's Finance Corps, and her assistant, in the Army's Judge Advocate General Corps. While this Director may be new, her assistant has logged 14 years with the Lawton RSVP program -- thereby ensuring program continuity, adherence to policy, and that no suspenses are missed during the new Director's "train-up" period.

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The new Director has printed up the 2010 Census demographics of Comanche County -- in preparation for better determining ways to broaden our support base. 24,260 people (20% of the county's population) are aged 55 and older -- almost every one of these is a potential recruit for us! Lawton-Fort Sill has long been recognized for its cultural diversity -- and these demographics (to include a single Guamanian in the county) are furnished in the 2010 Census data. From that information, proposed new sites and projected numbers of new volunteers can follow, which would bring our overall program into better racial and ethnic harmony -- one where our volunteer and site percentages more closely mirror those of the communities we serve.

A proven method of training new volunteers is to assign each a mentor -- either an experienced RSVP volunteer or a staff member at the station, either or both of whom would coach the new volunteer. Documented feedback from the mentors to the RSVP staff would be essential.

On station, volunteers have the opportunity to be trained in several capacities. Volunteers are encouraged to perform varied tasks at their stations to ensure a well-rounded and diverse experience for not only themselves, but also for the agencies they serve. Volunteer station coordinators support them with training and technical assistance to assure a quality transition from one activity to another. As an example, a volunteer may learn typing on a keyboard and realize a newfound interest in computer operations. That same volunteer may be trained in answering the phones and improving their interpersonal skills by acquiring customer service experience. Monthly work plans could be developed to record each volunteer's duties/skills acquired -- to document tangible benefits for the volunteer as well as to record service activities.

The City of Lawton, the RSVP Advisory Council, and various community businesses sponsor the Lawton RSVP Annual Recognition Banquet, which honors our volunteers. All volunteer station coordinators, Oklahoma's state legislators, the City of Lawton's Major, City Manager, City Council members, and Parks and Recreation Department leaders are invited. The banquet features dinner,

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entertainment and awards. Program staff honor the eldest volunteer and the volunteer station coordinators. Also, each volunteer who has given at least 500 hours to the community is recognized. Not merely an opportunity to extend appreciation to the volunteers, the banquet shows civic and government leaders the impact the Lawton RSVP has on Comanche County.

Lawton's Major, Mr. Fred Fitch, speaks to the community at large and to civic groups about the importance of the RSVP program and its volunteers, and includes significant RSVP accomplishments in his annual "State of the City" address. He is our strongest advocate.

Program Management

The Lawton RSVP Director and Assistant (program staff) cultivate meaningful relationships between volunteers and their stations. Most RSVP volunteers know where they would like to volunteer. On occasion, they are already volunteering at a given RSVP station. In those cases, program staff gains a community partner by solidifying the relationship between volunteer and station. Volunteer concerns are intercepted at the site and communicated to program staff. Program staff then contacts the volunteer to remedy the situation by ensuring their contentment at their current station or relocating them to a site that is more suitable. Stations determine their community needs, and program staff ensures that this information is published in the local "RSVP News and Views" newsletter (published and mailed 10 times each year). Program staff also telephones volunteers who may be interested in a particular station. Regular reports, which include volunteer administrative information, hours, mileage, and the number of citizens impacted, are collected monthly.

In addition to collecting program information monthly and submitting quarterly reports where required, program staff compiles data collected throughout the year to reflect the program's impact. The annual compilation includes the number of RSVP volunteers and volunteer stations, the total number of volunteer hours, the number of citizens impacted, the nature of the volunteer work performed, and a list of sponsors and other community partners. The Program Assistant tracks all

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aspects of the program with the help of the volunteer station coordinators and manages the data used for assessments. During these assessments, the RSVP Director and her Supervisor discuss performance as it relates to program expenses; the City of Lawton's Finance Division reviews the request and releases funds after determining that the expense is within compliance. The Director logs all expenses, with the exception of personnel costs, to ensure funds are spent appropriately and accurately. Any expenditure the Director makes for volunteer support is logged. The City also supports the program by supplying office space, and shares the costs of telephone, postage, supplies, and personnel expenses. During the annual recognition banquet, in-kind donations are secured for door prizes by the RSVP Advisory Board. The Advisory Board also determines ways for the program's growth and sustainability. On occasion, volunteers are served a meal by volunteer stations as part of their service. All reports are supported in a timely manner to ensure that the program adheres to all federal regulations and guidelines. All City of Lawton rules and regulations must be followed as well. The city affords the RSVP Staff the same benefits that any other city employee is eligible for. Yearly evaluations based on work performance are given to the RSVP Assistant by the RSVP Director. The evaluation of the Director is completed by the Parks and Recreation Department's Leisure Services Supervisor.

In order to monitor and assure compliance across the board, across the spectrum of all that is required, Lawton's new RSVP Director initially plans to visit all of the volunteer stations to learn what each provides, how each RSVP volunteer on any given station contributes to the station, how all of that is documented, and what the station does with that information.

Then, the Director plans to hold a sort of Open House, whereby any or all of our 251 volunteers may stop by for a personal chat and perhaps some light refreshment -- let's get to know each other, on a person-to-person level.

The Director will follow the Open House up with personal contacts with those volunteers who stopped

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by -- to get their input on their participation in the program, and how it could (from their perspective) be better; how it can be expanded into perhaps new service activities.

Bit by bit, all this information, all the ensuing and ongoing research, will culminate in a plan -- but one that is do-able, given the parameters of various regulations, where we are today, where we want to be at various benchmarks, and what we have to accomplish along the way between benchmarks.

Organizational Capability

The Lawton RSVP program will observe its 40th anniversary in April 2013, and has been supported by the City of Lawton for most of that time thorough personnel costs and an in-kind contribution of office space, equipment, and technical assistance. The Program Staff is comprised of a Program Director and a Senior Clerical Assistant. The Director is a member of the RSVP Advisory Board. The Director makes all requisitions for program expenditures and ensures that requests are in compliance with grant requirements. She completes reporting in a timely manner to state and federal agencies. She conducts the Assistant's annual appraisal. The Director is also primarily responsible for speaking engagements and community outreach. The Assistant has served with the Lawton RSVP program for more than 14 years. She came to RSVP with a military background as a Paralegal. She retired from the Army after 22 years of service in a variety of duties such as logistics, criminal law, defense, legal assistance, claims, and supervisor. The assistant is also involved with the program community outreach. Both staff members have the knowledge and skills to implement the program and oversee its growth. Staff continuously seeks innovative ways to improve the program. The City of Lawton ensures that staff is adequately trained to perform program duties.

The City of Lawton's Finance Division has extensive knowledge administering the finances associated with federal grants. Program heads submit requisitions which are reviewed to ensure they are in compliance before requests are approved and the money is drawn down. The Finance Division also tracks funds spent in program areas and is able to supply available balances for various project areas.

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The Finance Division and RSVP Director keep their lines of communication open to ensure that funds are spent appropriately.

The RSVP program receives in-kind support through office space, equipment, and technical support from their sponsor within the City of Lawton's Parks and Recreation Department. The program has strong support from the highest levels of City government administration. Program staff is employed by the City and must adhere to all City policies (as an example: expenditures associated with travel must adhere to the City's travel policy).

To ensure adequate self-assessment and continuous improvement, program staff is appraised annually by their respective supervisors. In the appraisal process, the program is evaluated as well as the role program staff plays in the program's overall success. The Program Director prepares updates and meets weekly with department staff. Program staff has also developed a survey which has been administered community-wide to those who may be affected by the program. The feedback in these surveys is analyzed and used to enhance the program.

Other

Nothing else to consider.

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

Not applicable.