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Executive Summary

TOPS plans to continue and append services provided in the areas of Healthy Futures and Education. RSVP will recruit and place 180 senior volunteers to meet these needs and requests grant funds in the amount of \$34,641.

TOPS is a private non-profit corporation chartered by the State of Tennessee in 1973 which sponsors service programs funded by the U.S. Dept. of Labor and other Federal and State entities. We strive to serve a wide range of people across the state through quality programming, provide high level of services, and produce effective results.

According to the 2010 Census seniors make up 15.1% of the local population. As people age, the risk of developing conditions that limit their ability to perform routine tasks, have meaningful social interactions, physical exercise, and access to nutritious food increases. TOPS seeks to reduce nutritional and social risk among this age group through increased access to nutritious meals, fresh produce, and physical activity.

Research shows economically disadvantaged students are likely to begin school further behind and experience low educational achievement due to a lack of appropriate resources in their homes and communities. Working with local programs, volunteers will help target the needs of the students and increase student achievement through meaningful intergenerational learning experiences. Through teacher and parent survey's we will be able to note gains in student academic, behavior and social skills.

Strengthening Communities

Warren and Van Buren Counties are rural counties located in the heart of Middle TN halfway

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between Chattanooga and Nashville. Van Buren County has 103 farms and Warren is often referred to as the Nursery Capital of the World due to the abundance (over 200) of flower and tree nurseries in the county. With the collapse of the housing market and the construction industry, the nursery industry along with other industries in both counties have been facing difficult economic times. In Warren County seniors sixty-five years of age and older make up 15.1% of the population with a 21.1% county wide poverty rate, while in Van Buren 17.8% of the population are over 65 with a 24.6% poverty rate among all county residents. RSVP works with a variety of organizations on both a formal and informal basis. RSVP staff work to ensure that they recruit and place volunteers in needed work stations and continue to build new partnerships to bring in volunteers as needs are identified. Input from RSVP volunteers, community agencies, and program staff has been a vital part of shaping our program to best meet the needs of the seniors, children, and all members of our community. Specific community partners for the proposed activities, all of which have a vested interest in the RSVP program include: the Warren and Van Buren County Governments, The Upper Cumberland and Development District Area Agency on Aging and Disability, Red Cross, local municipalities' senior recreation programs, and senior community organizations to recruit and place senior volunteers. In addition, they will partner with the 21st Century Grant, the AIM after-school programs, and local libraries. TOPS has partnered with Warren County Schools to provide an afterschool program for at-risk economically disadvantaged students at seven schools. This program has been a high quality intensive targeted program to assist students to progress academically, physically, and nutritionally as well as provide a safe place for students after school. A strong partnership with RSVP will help the program work even more effectively to increase student achievement through meaningful intergenerational learning experiences among students and senior community members both in and outside of the classroom. Due to the diverse group of students served the program will be able to recruit new volunteers from family members into the program to help strengthen our volunteer base

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in the community. Through teacher, participant, and parent survey's we will be able to note gains in educational and behavioral outcomes as well as increased physical activity, improved nutrition in youth with the purpose of reducing childhood obesity, and increased access to nutritious food. During the SUCCESS library hour program, economically disadvantaged pre-school children and their parents or caregivers, under the guidance of RSVP volunteers, will explore stories and activities to encourage children along a lifelong path of literacy and learning while preparing them for kindergarten. The activities will also be designed to promote student language and listening skills and parental involvement as well as school readiness for economically disadvantaged young children. These free programs will enhance libraries service outreach and visibility to community members and provided needed targeted services to children. In addition, TOPS will continue to have work stations that partner with local churches and community organizations to provide meals to seniors in need in the areas of Warren and Van Buren Counties. This has been an identified need for the community for many years. To help provide food to younger students in schools we will continue our commitment to providing volunteers to help fill backpacks and get food for the FUEL program for economically disadvantaged students within the local school systems in both counties and work to increase the number of students served by this program.

Recruitment and Development

People give their time and resources to organizations in which they are invested and which provide them benefits in return that enhance the quality of their own lives. A diverse volunteer base can open up a larger pool of potential volunteers and donors, and contribute to a more comfortable experience for the community benefiting from service. Recruitment and training of volunteers will be made easier with the collaboration and support of community and faith-based organizations, utilizing existing RSVP volunteers for logistical support and to encourage partnerships, and by offering a wide range of activities. TOPS will actively recruit a diverse group of volunteers through tools such as

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maintaining an active online presence through our website and social media; distributing mailings; advertising in newspapers, on the radio, and television; and submitting press releases and general interest articles to newsletters and local papers to increase local interest and participation. TOPS is committed to serving our partner programs in sustainable ways that positively affect the community. The relationships we develop within the community are essential to the success of our programs for both the community and the volunteers. In order to ensure both a meaningful experience for volunteers and high quality volunteer services for the programs we serve, we keep a singular focus on the effectiveness of our volunteers and matching our volunteers' skills, interests, and abilities to our various partner programs. Prior to placement in any volunteer experience, using a simple form, participants' skills, preferences, and interests will be assessed for most appropriate matches within the program. This will serve to ensure both program and volunteer needs are met and the work provided by the volunteer is directed and meaningful. A database will be maintained that will highlight each senior volunteer's area of interest and associated area of strength. TOPS will maintain frequent and open communication with our partner programs throughout the year to ensure that volunteers are working effectively and the impact is both positive and meaningful to them. Our staff will visit most partner programs weekly and check in with the staff of the organization about once a month. We also conduct an annual survey on the impact of our volunteer work to identify areas of improvement, and hold an annual workshop with all of our partner programs in each community to review best practices and cover important topics, such as: * Designing placements that are as productive as possible * Managing expectations of volunteer work on both sides * Communication methods * Ensuring safety at the partner program * Understanding our volunteers * Helping volunteers to be productive In addition to checking in with our partner programs to ensure the effectiveness of our volunteers, our staff will help to ensure that the organizations are not burdened by the care and logistics of our volunteers. Individual sites and programs will determine their volunteer needs in

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coordination with the RSVP program staff in order to best place senior volunteers who will provide supplemental, yet essential, assistance to programs while working under the supervision of a program staff member. Professional development will also be conducted related to specific areas to enhance instruction and coordination of the program. In addition we will be ready to provide any additional professional development or technical assistance on an on-going basis. TOPS will hold an annual banquet to recognize the volunteer efforts which have been so critical to programs' success with volunteers receiving recognition with certificates, a volunteer neck lanyard and nametag, with specialty recognition pins acknowledging volunteers' hours of service and years of service. Such visibility and recognition helps spread the word about the positive contributions RSVP volunteers make in their communities.

Program Management

In order for volunteer service to be successful in communities, the need must arise from the community, not solely the proclivities or desires of the volunteer. We have conducted needs assessment by gathering program staff, volunteers, and/or other community members to brainstorm community issues and needs. By including diverse backgrounds among our partners, volunteer stations, funders and volunteers, we are able to identify unmet needs and solve problems together. As a group, we discussed pressing issues in the community, examined the causes and effects of the issues, and brainstormed potential projects to address the needs identified and help ensure community buy-in and support for our program's service efforts by matching the interests, experience, and talents of individuals' age with volunteer opportunities. To better do so, RSVP will implement a program to easily allow area volunteer stations to request volunteers for short term community activities by sending a notice to RSVP staff when they have an upcoming activity and need volunteers. The short term assignment description will then be shared on social media and in our weekly email that is distributed to volunteers. Short term volunteers can then easily register for the activity through the

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RSVP website, phone, social media, or by email. This allows volunteers to easily take on a new community activity on a trial basis. In addition, notices about community social activities that might appeal to RSVP volunteers (ex. community gardening classes, free movie nights at a library, free concerts, and other events) will be listed in the monthly e-newsletter. Evaluation will be a collaborative, ongoing activity involving people working at all levels in the volunteer organization, ex. volunteers, paid staff, volunteer coordinator, administrative decision makers, community representatives, board members, and partner programs; allowing them to become more familiar with the volunteer program and fostering a sense of belonging and unity, while also increasing morale among paid staff and volunteers. Evaluation will be done through formal and informal means in order to form a more holistic picture of the volunteer program. Formal evaluation methods will include such techniques as surveys, interviews, focus groups and audits of budget accounting systems. Surveys may include, personal, mail, or telephone contact with all or a sample of volunteers or recipients of our volunteer services or before and after designs using questionnaires or interviews to solicit information from our volunteers or organizations before and after program participation. Data reporting may include reviewing, summarizing, and/or comparing information such as numbers of volunteers, hours, money (spent or saved), number served. Informal evaluation methods will involve paid staff members and volunteers talking with each other on a regular basis and discussing how things are going. Periodic contact with clients to inquire how well the service is being received and if anything could be done differently will be crucial to the evaluation process. Our staff will be engaged in actively identifying outcomes, measuring results based on outcomes desired and using results for program improvement. Will demonstrate the value of the volunteer program and the worth volunteers have to the organization and those being served, enhance the credibility of the program, and provide a tool for volunteer motivation and program growth and improvement. RSVP has worked diligently to partner with others in the community to mobilize resources and leverage more volunteers

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through recruiting placements. New monetary supports for our program will be sought on an as-needed basis. Staff continue to work on garnering additional funds from all sources, Federal and nonfederal, including grants, cash and in-kind with a formal recognition and thank you letter to donors.

Organizational Capability

Tennessee Opportunity Programs, Inc. (TOPS) is a private non-profit corporation chartered by the State of Tennessee in 1973. The agency sponsors a wide variety of service and impact based programs funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Department of Education, and other Federal and State Entities. TOPS has successfully run RSVP volunteer programs for over a decade and our organization is well respected within the community. Over the past decade TOPS RSVP volunteers have served and contributed to the success of numerous local non-profit organizations. Volunteers have helped older and disabled Tennesseans to maintain their independence and dignity by delivering "meals-on-wheels"; providing respite care, friendly visiting and telephone reassurances; conducting exercise classes, and helped provide low income people with affordable clothing by washing, sorting, and selling clothing in thrift shops. RSVP volunteers helped to feed people through soup kitchens, food shelves and distribution of surplus food. Volunteers also serve in area libraries, allowing many of them to extend their hours and enabling staff to provide more direct services to local residents. Quarterly surveys and program-generated reports will be gathered to ensure that the program is adequately assessing program strengths and weaknesses. Data will be analyzed and compared with program objectives and previous scores and data. If the data does not show improvement in targeted areas staff will look into finding out why progress is not being made. Corrective actions will be made to ensure that community and volunteer needs are better targeted or that a reasonable explanation can be made of why outcomes weren't made. Professional development will also be conducted related to specific areas to enhance volunteer participation and coordination of the program and additional professional

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development will be provided on an on-going basis for any issues identified as possible weak areas of the program, any areas of overall program concern, local program services, and individual volunteer performance. The end of year performance report will be made available to community partners, volunteers, and program staff. The project staff will work with TOPS Executive Director and Fiscal Director to properly budget, manage, document, record, and report the project's financial and in-kind resources. Annually, each budget item will be examined to ensure that it reflects the project's most current needs and expenses. Expenses are submitted by the Project Director to the Supervising Director for approval. Once approved, they are given to the Fiscal Director for payment. The Fiscal Director prepares the checks for payment, which are then signed by the Executive Director. There is policy in place that separates the duties between those who prepare the checks and those who sign them. TOPS Directors and Finance Committee meet monthly to provide sound fiscal oversight for the entire agency. In-kind vouchers are prepared by the Project Director and signed for by the person or organization providing the good or service. The value of the item is determined by fair market value and when possible the value of an item or service is verified on the internet, printed out, and attached to the voucher. The in-kind voucher is submitted to the Fiscal Director, who tracks the in-kind amounts in the budget. This budget is provided monthly to the Executive Director, Supervising Director, and Project Director who discuss the match amounts quarterly to ensure that the required match is being met. TOPS always ensures we have clear job descriptions and specified duties for all grant positions. There are set policies and procedures that staff must follow in relation to travel, supervising staff, providing technical assistance to staff, evaluation, purchasing, etc. All of these procedures will be in place for RSVP programming.

Other

Cost Effectiveness/Budget Adequacy TOPS will provide each volunteer with CNS Accident Insurance, Volunteer Liability coverage and Excess Auto Liability. A criminal background check has been

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completed on the Project Director and we will work with Volunteer Stations on costs associated with background checks when placing volunteers in positions with this requirement. The budget includes adequate local travel for the Project Director to actively recruit volunteers, meet with current stations and develop additional volunteer opportunities. TOPS' recognizes the importance of Volunteer Appreciation Awards and the annual Recognition Banquet. It is important to recognize the efforts of our volunteers and at the same time promote our program and it's accomplishments for the year.

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

none