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Executive Summary

Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is to encourage Otero county residents who are 55 years of age and older to use their time, talents and lifelong experiences to improve their community's critical needs. An estimated 397 unduplicated RSVP volunteers will serve in 75 worksites throughout the community. Some of their activities will include Healthy Futures, Veterans and Military Families and Economic Opportunities. The primary focus area of this project will be Healthy Futures, specifically food service, as this area will meet Otero County's most pressing community needs. New Mexico is currently 2nd in the nation for senior hunger. At the end of this three-year grant, more than 80% of our senior population will have a higher quality of life due to the services that RSVP volunteers fill throughout our community. Local surveys have shown that the senior population of Otero County is in high need of food services. The CNCS annual investment of \$42,914 will be supplemented by \$63,000 of anticipated non-federal funding. These non-federal funds include state funds, local grants and local city funds. Our volunteers strengthen communities by providing services that community budgets cannot afford and by building bridges across generations.

Strengthening Communities

There are 16 communities in Otero County, many of which are small and unincorporated. The City of Alamogordo (COA), which has a population of 30,403 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Population Estimates, still the most current official estimates), is the largest community in Otero County. It is located in south central New Mexico which is relatively isolated (the Mexican border is 100 miles to the south). COA is the county seat of Otero County which has 63,797 residents (2010 U.S. Census Bureau estimates). In Otero County, 20% of families and 20.3% of individuals are below the poverty level. The average household income is \$39,000 compared to the national average of \$44,000. Otero County is heavily dependent on federal, state and local government jobs, including Holloman Air Force Base (HAFB), White Sands Missile Range, the German Air Force Flying Training Center (defense), Otero County, Village of Cloudcroft, and Village of Tularosa (city/county government). With at least 20% of our population being below poverty level, the need for food services, especially in our senior population, is becoming a great need for our community. For seniors, protecting oneself from food insecurity and hunger is more difficult than for the general population. For example, a study that focused on the experience of food insecurity among the elderly population found that food insecure seniors sometimes had enough money to purchase food but did not have the resources to access or prepare food due to lack of transportation, functional limitations, or health problems. Our

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volunteers provide home delivered meals, food for the local food pantries through food drives, as well as meal preparation and serving meals from various meal sites and providing support to those who are in need of extra help. Volunteers record the hours served at worksites as well as the worksites record the number of those who are served. This information is then recorded into Volunteer Reporter. We are lucky to have HAFB in our area; veterans use the skills that they have learned in the service to help throughout our community. There has been an increase in veterans seeking out food assistance through the local food banks and through Grace United Methodist Shared Table, a worksite that serves meals to the less fortunate. SVP staff and worksites will work to collect data on those served through surveys, timesheets and worksite information. Our program will also track both veteran volunteers and veterans served.

Recruitment and Development

RSVP staff takes every opportunity that presents itself to convey the community's appreciation to the volunteers for their significant and positive impact on the community and for enriching their own lives through community service. Multiple studies on aging show that active seniors stay healthy longer than those who are inactive. Also, participating in a social environment prevents isolation and loneliness and mental activity preserves mental acuity. Staff uses many venues to share information about the benefits of the RSVP program, including local business meetings and volunteer fairs. By attending these meetings, staff opens the door for recruitment of volunteers. Volunteers are provided the opportunity to discuss other worksites and are provided training as well. There are several worksites offering training opportunities in the provision of specialized services such as Home Delivered Meals and Grace United Methodist Shared Table requirements and other food preparations trainings. The RSVP volunteers often have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills by experiencing increased responsibility at their assigned worksites. Many programs, such as the VITA Tax Aide Program, invite/encourage volunteers, especially veterans to return year-after-year because of their knowledge and expertise. This service provides volunteer opportunities for veterans to serve both active duty and retirees alike. At many worksites, experienced volunteers mentor newer volunteers and assume certain administrative functions, such as maintaining worksite time sheets, or play a primary role in the recruitment of new volunteers. The RSVP staff encourages volunteers to share positive worksite experiences during training sessions or to share uplifting stories in the Volunteer Horizon newsletter. RSVP staff visits with clubs, organizations and businesses which have proven to be effective in getting the word out and signing up new volunteers. RSVP staff provides training, encouragement, technical assistance and support to RSVP volunteers in many ways,

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including increasing responsibilities, enhancing their skills, and by recognizing and rewarding volunteers with praise and incentives. Volunteers are recognized through the Annual Recognition Banquet, ice cream socials, and special cards for birthdays, by placing their pictures in the Volunteer Horizon newsletter and on the Senior Volunteer Programs bulletin board in the Alamo Senior Center. Staff attends and participates in regular training sessions, conferences and teleconferences provided by Federal and State agencies. The local RSVP's Federal and State program support staff have an "open-door" policy, allowing staff to contact them for technical assistance as needed. Monthly RSVP training sessions are held for volunteers to review the operations handbook, update application forms, and answer any questions. Additionally, RSVP staff visits with the volunteers and their supervisors at their worksites. Staff holds RSVP training for worksite supervisors as needed. When a worksite first enrolls in the RSVP program, the agency enters into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with RSVP in which specific responsibilities are outlined. Staff periodically visits worksites to ensure a safe environment for volunteers, and to see if supervisors have any questions that may need to be addressed. The RSVP program provides information to community groups by inviting them to monthly Senior Advisory Council (SAC) meetings, encouraging citizens who are interested to attend any meeting or forum, sending the Volunteer Horizon newsletter to community agencies, and by keeping them informed about activities being carried out by major worksite partners in terms of recruitment and the type of training being offered at their worksites.

Program Management

RSVP volunteers serve in 75 worksites. When worksite enrolls in the RSVP program, the agency enters into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with RSVP in which specific responsibilities are outlined. This MOU is usually for a three- year period with annual updates after that. Staff periodically visits worksites to ensure a safe environment for volunteers, and to see if supervisors have any questions that may need to be addressed. The SAC is comprised of 11 members from the community. One member from each of the three Senior Corp groups; RSVP, FGP and SCP along with professionals from throughout the community. The council is a very diverse group with varying backgrounds to include veterans. The SAC members use their expertise to help oversee the programs. Council meetings are held monthly with staff and are open to the public, per COA meeting rules. Staff meets with local organizations to see if they are in need of additional volunteers for extra support. Local non-profit and governmental organizations help shape the program by indicating their volunteer needs through written requests for volunteers such as e-mails, by phone, or through personal field visits. To maximize efficiency, multiple COA worksites are consolidated into one MOU,

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resulting in less paperwork and maximizing staff time for making worksite visits, placing volunteers, and meeting with potential worksites. Volunteer stations conduct an annual assessment of the program and their volunteers. Volunteers keep in close contact with the RSVP staff, often letting staff know about worksites that are in need of help. SAC members and staff periodically review the continued requirement for requested services. RSVP staff manages and continually updates the Volunteer Reporter database that identifies volunteers and work stations, the skills of volunteers, hours, jobs/clients, placements, schedules and reports. When a volunteer station is looking for a volunteer with a particular skill, staff can run a report to find a volunteer qualified for that particular job. Conversely, staffs often download reports to match volunteers with a particular work station. Program staff is always striving to provide senior volunteers with opportunities that appeal to them, that match their current interests and abilities, and that may help them develop new skills. The Senior Volunteer Programs (SVP) Director produces a semi-annual report regarding grant activities and progress of the program. The report compiles information based on timesheet data collected from the Volunteer Reporter database. This report is reviewed and commented on by various city, county, state and federal agencies. The SVP staff also produces a quarterly accomplishment report to the COA in terms of hours volunteered, number of worksites served and monetary value of services provided. The SVP Program Director also reports quarterly hours, volunteers and worksites to the state agency. Program accomplishments are measured through annual surveys of worksites and volunteers which are thoroughly analyzed by staff in terms of volunteer satisfaction and community needs, as well as accomplishments and community impact. The results of this analysis aids in the planning and development of volunteer placements to ensure an effective and viable program. The RSVP program utilizes the Volunteer Reporter database which keeps track of volunteer hours and worksite information.

Organizational Capability

The Senior Volunteer Programs office consists of three staff that is experienced in volunteer management, recruitment, training and other administrative duties. The COA's seven City Commissioners and the City Manager provide guidance, leadership and direction to the successful implementation of the RSVP of Otero County. Professional and qualified staff from the COA departments assists project staff in ensuring a satisfying experience by the senior volunteers. City staffs involved are from the Finance Office, which has received a "Budget Excellence" award the past 16 years, Human Resources office, IT, and Fleet/Facility Maintenance. The SVP Director plans, develops, coordinates and directs the RSVP program, and trains and supervises staff, SAC members, and

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volunteer station supervisors. The SVP Director works with Federal and State officials, completing grants and submitting reports to them. The SVP director is also responsible for public relations for the program and maintenance of program records. The RSVP Volunteer Coordinator's responsibilities include coordinating and monitoring RSVP volunteer assignments, conducting in-service training, making supervisory arrangements, and participating in other activities involving volunteer station staff. The coordinator also makes periodic visits to the volunteer stations to monitor the satisfaction of the RSVP volunteers with their assignments and progress toward achieving expected outcomes and to monitor the impact of their assignments. Margaret Lucero, SVP Director, has worked with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, both City and Federal governments. She is involved with grant writing, budgets and finance. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Business Management from the University of Phoenix and has held a top secret security clearance from her position with the Federal government. Jessica Ott, RSVP Volunteer Coordinator, has a background in finance and customer service. She has a degree in Business Management from St. John Fisher College. Karen Groves, Foster Grandparent/Senior Companion Coordinator, has over 12 years of experience in senior issues. The COA is the sponsor of the Senior Volunteer Programs office and uses the "HTE" financial management software management system to track expenses. The COA has a qualified and professional staff in its finance department that has, over the past 27 years, provided oversight and supervision of Federal and State grants used by the RSVP office. The Finance Office follows established procedures and policies of accountability set by the City Commission and have received awards for excellence for a number of years. The COA has been in existence for the past 100 years. Volunteerism was the lifeblood in old western communities. Formalized volunteer programs (e.g. fire departments, medical and public school volunteers) have been successfully managed for almost as long as the city has been in existence. A formal senior program was founded in the mid-1970s with the opening of its first Senior Center. Since that time, the program has evolved from a small, basic operation to the current, expansive services being provided to seniors of the community, which includes transportation, meals on wheels and daily meals at the center, exercise programs, entertainment and hobbies, wellness programs, sports activities, and many others programs. RSVP has been an integral part of the city since its inception 27 years ago. However, the process was formalized in 1996 through the Programming for Impact Program. RSVP has always been concerned with the satisfaction of senior volunteers and meeting community needs. The semi-annual "Project Progress Report" provides specific data on impacts. The SVP Director prepares an annual budget based on projected grant and other funding sources. The COA provides accounting, facilities, transportation

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and other necessary in-kind support. As the sponsoring agency, COA has policies and procedures in place that have been adopted and approved by the City Commission that must be met by the RSVP and other senior volunteer programs. RSVP staff has policies and procedures in place that are governed by COA Ordinances. In addition, RSVP staff is required to abide by both the COA personnel policies and procedures and, when arranging travel plans, the COA travel policy and procedures. The Senior Advisory Council provides assessment of program and an evaluation of staff annually. RSVP staff is also required to have an annual employee evaluation of their performance.

Other

1. Otero County is a military community, the population is not only comprised of people from around the country, but also from around the world. Hence, RSVP volunteers are from all walks of life and have a variety of skills and talents. The RSVP program provides volunteers with diverse backgrounds the opportunity to interact with one another at trainings and at worksites.

2. The federal, state and local governments and, most importantly, the taxpayers all save money because of the volunteer service provided by senior volunteers. Millions of dollars have been saved, and continue to be saved, because of the services provided by talented, experienced and caring senior volunteers throughout Otero County. The senior volunteers also benefit by gaining a sense of satisfaction by "giving back" to the community. RSVP has assisted in keeping senior citizens productive, active and healthier than they otherwise might be, thereby contributing to society for a longer period of time, which is a positive impact to everyone.

3. The RSVP program operates with Federal, State, County and local funding. Additionally, some cash contributions and donations, such as donations from fundraisers by the SAC members, are sometimes used for volunteer conferences. They are receipted in the RSVP office and sent to the COA finance office for deposit. In-kind contributions, such as rent-free office space, utilities, and transportation are all provided by the COA and tracked by the appropriate city departments.

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A