

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Approximately 245 RSVP volunteers will serve within our organization and approximately 50 other nonprofit, governmental or educational organizations. Some of their activities will include: food delivery, providing financial education, building homes, income tax tutoring and assisting a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program. While the primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures, we will address all six focus areas to some degree: approximately 250 homebound and older adults will report having increased social ties and/or perceived social support; 75 elementary school children will be better prepared to learn and succeed as part of a weekend nutrition program; roughly 2,000 citizens will have received some form of financial literacy or housing service; 15 senior citizens will be trained in disaster preparedness through Red Cross or CERT; volunteers will aid 100 veterans by transporting them to and from the VA hospital; and we will offer services in conjunction with the Etowah County Drug Task Force and Sheriff's Department to dispose of 100 pounds of old or unused medications in an environmentally friendly manner. Also, all RSVP volunteers will have been placed in service positions that make use of their skills and that make them feel engaged and effective. The CNCS federal investment of \$38,805.00 will be supplemented by \$58,000.00 from non-federal resources.

The name of the legal sponsor of RSVP of Etowah County is the Etowah County Commission. The goal of the Commission is to provide highly effective government leadership for Etowah County. Our mission is to oversee the administration of Etowah County government in a manner that will provide the very best service possible to the citizens of Etowah County (within the financial constraints under which the Commission must work).

## Strengthening Communities

RSVP of Etowah County serves both Etowah and Cherokee Counties in Northeast Alabama which are situated in the foothills of the Appalachians. The Coosa River winds through both counties and is a major resource for public recreation and tourism events. The major industries in Etowah and Cherokee Counties are manufacturing, education, and health care followed by retail and government services. Both counties have a lot of diversity, including racial, ethnic, age and income diversity. The racial makeup of the two counties combined is 82% Caucasian, 14.6% African-American and 3.4% Hispanic (a very small number of people are Asian). An estimated 16% of our service area population lives in poverty. The U.S. Census Bureau's latest American Community Survey indicates that the percentage of population age 65 and older in Cherokee County is 19.3% and 16.4% in Etowah County.

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These areas have a higher proportion of seniors than the national average of 13.7%. Etowah County has a total population estimate of 104,392, which ranks it as the 11th most populated county in the state. Although the City of Gadsden is defined by the census as a Metropolitan Statistical Area, the outlying areas of the county are still quite rural. There are 26,021 residents in Cherokee County, ranking it 42nd out of 67 counties in the state. It has 553.1 sq. miles in land area, 47 sq. miles of water and is considered rural. Even though the county's population has increased 25.60% since 1990, its population density of 44.2 per square mile is less than half of the state's average of 92.8. There are fifteen municipalities in Etowah County and seven in Cherokee County and the county seats are Gadsden and Centre, respectively.

Alabama has had a long, visible history of racial and monetary conflict, but for the most part that is not the case any longer. Most of our communities are not segregated by race or income level. Education levels do mirror income levels to some degree. While almost 33% of our population has attained a high school diploma and slightly over 15% have a bachelor's degree or higher, that leaves 52% of the citizens here with less than a high school education. This fact has been the subject of debate for many years, and continues to put a drain on our economy.

Our Primary Focus Area is Healthy Futures, with an objective of aging in place, and outcome will be the number of homebound or older adults who report having increased social ties/perceived social support. Of the combined 22,142 people in both counties who are 65 or over, 5,879 of those people live alone. This puts these people at a very high risk of isolation and depression, which is common in seniors who spend most of their time alone. A shrinking circle of friends, lack of social contact, diminishing sensory abilities and some medications may cause depression among senior citizens. There are many factors that demonstrate the need for more focus on how to help seniors age in place in our service area. The major reason is that this is the biggest concern among seniors surveyed in our community needs assessment. Other factors are: the higher percentage of seniors in our area, the fact that baby boomers are becoming senior citizens on a daily basis, the fact that aging in place is less costly than living in a nursing home or assisted living home, and the fact that most senior citizens live longer and happier in their own homes.

For our Primary Focus Area of Healthy Futures, aging in place, the output of volunteers delivering food to homebound seniors, transporting seniors to and from a congregate meal site or scheduled activity, educating and distributing information and/or services, and providing companionship to other seniors will result in the outcome of homebound or older adults reporting an increase in social ties or perceived social support because they will have the interaction with other people that is

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desperately needed by those who spend most of their days alone. Our community priority of Economic Opportunity will have outputs of volunteers building or assisting home building for the local Habitat for Humanity affiliate, which will result in the outcome of economically disadvantaged individuals transitioning into safe, healthy, affordable housing; other volunteers will have outputs of assisting in the VITA and TCE free tax preparation services and providing income tax tutoring, resulting in the outcome of clients retaining more of their tax return money; preventing elder abuse through a local coalition of service agencies and volunteers that will educate our community on how to be aware of and report possible abuse; and providing financial literacy education through several local nonprofit agencies who deal with low income or homeless individuals and families on a regular basis which will result in these clients becoming more self-sufficient.

RSVP of Etowah County has established a good working relationship with partnering agencies named in our work plans. All of these partners have worked with us to provide the most uncomplicated, compelling forms of data collection, and are committed to helping us measure outputs and outcomes. RSVP staff will be trained in what data collection tools to be used, how to use them and the results needing to be captured. Managing these results will be done through Volunteer Reporter software, and basic spreadsheets.

RSVP of Etowah County has a volunteer Advisory Council who plays a key role in the design, administration and evaluation of our program. The Council ensures that efforts aren't duplicated and the service gaps are identified and filled. Community partners are selected by their expressed need for RSVP volunteers, whether they fit within one of our focus areas and their capacity to carry out oversight responsibilities. Approximately 50 area nonprofit organizations facilitate vital volunteer opportunities that RSVP would not be able to offer alone. We are better able to serve the specific needs of our aging population by working with the Etowah Council on Aging and East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission/Area Agency on Aging.

While RSVP of Etowah County does not have activity in our Primary Focus Area that directly involves veterans or military families, approximately 10% of our volunteers are veterans and one volunteer activity in other focus areas is transporting veterans from the local VA Clinic to the VA Hospital, which is about 60 miles away.

### **Recruitment and Development**

RSVP of Etowah County proposes to continue working with local nonprofits, government agencies and schools so that together we can provide a diverse, exciting range of opportunities that will allow volunteers to use their skills and abilities to the fullest possible extent. RSVP is well known in Etowah

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and Cherokee Counties, and we have been working to better organize volunteer opportunities to more fully match CNCS focus areas and to enhance capacity building for us and our partners. We have a three-fold approach to developing volunteer opportunities: 1) We look at the needs of our community, plus the type of opportunities that volunteers are interested in when developing new ones or revising old ones. 2) We actively recruit stations that serve a wide variety of needs, and 3) we use surveys with current volunteers to find out if they are satisfied with their current level of volunteering, need more or less or different volunteer activities. New volunteers go through an informal screening process in our office to find out what areas they are interested in and we go from there to refer them to the most compatible station.

Through CNCS, the State of Alabama RSVP Association, and our community partners, we have access to a wide variety of training opportunities that benefit volunteers as well as staff. We have an established relationship with the Area Agency on Aging, Department of Public Health, Department of Human Resources, the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, Alabama State Treasury Dept., United Way and two local colleges who all offer free or very reasonable training events covering numerous topics that relate to volunteerism. Our infrastructure consists of three staff members who are skilled in working with volunteers and other agencies; and we are housed within a county government organization that allows us access to technology and meeting spaces that we might not otherwise be able to afford. We also survey current stations, partners and volunteers yearly to make sure that our efforts are being targeted correctly and to gauge what community needs are not being met. RSVP staff also works with volunteers and stations to ensure that volunteers have adequate training on the specifics of their assignment.

The Primary Focus Area for RSVP of Etowah County is Healthy Futures, Aging in Place. We currently partner with several agencies that offer volunteer opportunities in that area. We plan on:

- \* Visiting each station periodically to speak with volunteers and station managers, making sure everything is going well. This includes working with stations to keep opportunities and assignment descriptions as specific and relevant as possible, and working together to provide the best experience for all volunteers.
- \* Making regular phone calls to volunteers to discuss with them their volunteer efforts. If someone feels they are not being used to their fullest potential we will help to change that, either by placing them in another assignment or adding more responsibility to their current assignment.
- \* Recruiting different stations and partners that offer volunteer assignments or training opportunities that fit within our primary focus area, thus offering volunteers even more options.

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\* Continuing to work on our marketing plan which includes visits, phone calls, online recruitment options, newspaper, radio, social media and our RSVP Advisory Council members, who act as RSVP Ambassadors in the community.

Volunteers will always be encouraged to take on as much responsibility as they see fit. Within this primary focus area there are many tasks to be performed, such as delivering hot, nutritious meals, transporting seniors to and from volunteer jobs, and providing information needed to keep our senior citizens safe and aware. This information includes educating senior citizens on Medicare fraud, Medicare Part D plans, and on how to detect and prevent elder abuse. We also plan on working with the National Association of RSVP Directors (NARSVPD) in a new program for volunteers to help people understand current changes in health care laws. In other focus areas, volunteers provide financial literacy through our VITA/TCE programs and our financial literacy coalition; provide new housing services through Habitat for Humanity and housing renovation services through the Etowah County Community Action Agency.

The current demographics for RSVP of Etowah County closely resemble county demographics according to the latest census results. Our current volunteer roster is 84% white, 15% black & 1% either Asian or Hispanic; comparatively Etowah County is 81.4% white, 15.5% black, 3.6% Hispanic & .8% Asian. Nine percent of Etowah Countians are veterans, and 10% of our volunteers are veterans. The biggest difference in RSVP volunteers and census data is with disability. Only 3% of our current volunteers consider themselves disabled, while nationally 18% of the population has some form of disability. Part of this may be due to the fact that most people do not consider themselves disabled unless they need special equipment to function (walkers, wheelchairs, etc.). There are several RSVP volunteers who may be hard of hearing or have diminishing eyesight, but they do not consider themselves disabled.

Our recruitment strategy is to perform targeted recruitment for specific opportunities as they arise. If an opportunity becomes available or needs to be refilled for a specific task (providing transportation, tutoring/mentoring, insurance counseling, tax counseling) we go directly to a source that would probably attract these types of volunteers (retired teacher associations, CPA groups, faith based groups, college alumni groups). We work with station representatives to create Volunteer Assignment Descriptions for each of our opportunities that clearly state the position title, location and description of the typical activities, and responsibilities associated with this volunteer job. On a continuing basis RSVP staff and/or volunteers: attend events that support outreach, give presentations at meetings or conferences, provide short information sessions, distribute newsletters to

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select audiences, maintain an active online presence through a website ([www.etowahcounty.org/rsvp](http://www.etowahcounty.org/rsvp)), Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/rsvpofetowahcounty](http://www.facebook.com/rsvpofetowahcounty)), Twitter account ([www.twitter.com/rsvpetowah](http://www.twitter.com/rsvpetowah)), and market online through Volunteer Match and Volunteer Solutions. We also advertise with press releases, general interest articles and community calendar inserts in 4 local newspapers, distribute brochures at appropriate places, and place fliers in area businesses for special events.

RSVP of Etowah County will have one major recognition event each year, which will include a catered meal, entertainment and door prizes. We will also recognize individual volunteers quarterly through our newsletter, which is dispersed through direct mail and email and on our website. In the newsletters, we recognize one volunteer through a random drawing, and another volunteer through a station recommendation. These volunteers are also recognized on our Facebook page and Twitter feed. Recognition is a big part of our volunteer retention plan. Along with open communication, understanding what drives these individuals to help our community, and keeping a positive attitude in all of our communications, we also talk with volunteers who no longer serve with our organization to understand why they resigned. One of the simplest yet most effective measures we perform in the way of retention is to call all of our volunteers on their birthday. Even though this happens once a year for the volunteer, they love the attention, and at the same time we can find out how they are doing physically, how they are enjoying their volunteer work or if there are any problems that need to be addressed. RSVP staff also visits all of our stations at least once a year to get input from station management and volunteers.

### Program Management

The infrastructure for at RSVP of Etowah County will include three staff members who, while cross trained to carry out some basic duties of other staff, have very specific duties and assignments. These staff members will include: RSVP Director (responsible for program oversight, making sure all duties are carried out efficiently and properly, speaking with new volunteers and stations, and seeing that all reporting requirements are fulfilled in a timely manner); Volunteer Coordinator/Van Driver (corresponding with current volunteers and stations about volunteer needs and new opportunities, transporting some volunteers to their volunteer jobs); and Administrative Assistant (speaking with office visitors and callers, maintaining budget and expenses, and office supplies).

When communicating with a possible new station, we will go over all program regulations before signing a 3-year MOU. We will visit a station and the station supervisor to see exactly what volunteers will be doing, and at that time convey what is acceptable and not acceptable. This is

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usually performed by the RSVP Director.

At this point, if there is still an interest and need for RSVP volunteers, we continue with the process of signing the MOU and making sure everyone understands what is expected by each party. This involves the station supervisor and RSVP Director and Volunteer Coordinator.

At that point, RSVP and the station supervisor will lay out the volunteer activity, the need for this activity and what the inputs and outcomes will be in a Volunteer Assignment Description.

Then, the RSVP Volunteer Coordinator will take over to recruit existing or new RSVP volunteers to fulfill the need.

RSVP of Etowah County will visit stations and volunteers periodically to ensure that volunteers are performing their assigned service activities. We also keep up to date with station personnel, since staff changes frequently at some places. When this does occur, we schedule a meeting with new supervisors to make sure they know about RSVP policies and procedures.

We assess community needs on a yearly basis. While needs change sometimes, usually that does not imply that current volunteer activities are not needed. In the event that a station needs to be graduated, we communicate this with station management to begin with. Then we communicate with volunteers at that station, either by phone or in person. We encourage these volunteers to dedicate some of their time at a different station that is currently meeting a community need or to devote time towards capacity building at the station where they currently serve.

Our primary focus area is Healthy Futures, specifically Aging in Place. RSVP of Etowah County has a long & distinguished track record in this area mainly because we have such strong relationships with our Area Agency on Aging, Senior Nutrition Centers in our coverage area, MANNNA (the local Meals on Wheels program), and we have an in-house program in this area. These working relationships have afforded us numerous training opportunities and volunteer opportunities that focus on helping to keep senior citizens active, healthy and vital, thus keeping them independent longer. Measuring performance in this area has been successful due in large part to the support of station management and their efforts in helping RSVP with volunteer timesheets and sharing data for our reporting needs. RSVP staff is always welcome to visit stations and/or volunteers and conduct surveys or monitor volunteer activity if need be. Stations also have been compliant with sharing their own information and with sharing client information when appropriate.

RSVP of Etowah County has established an Advisory Council that includes people from the following groups: community leaders, volunteers, representatives from current stations, the private corporate sector, the Etowah County Commission (current sponsor of RSVP of Etowah County) and the current

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RSVP Director. These individuals are competent in their fields, are knowledgeable of older adults and our community, and have a desire to help our community through service and volunteerism. They help the sponsor and the program with administrative needs and with fund raising and publicity. This group is on a rotating basis, and referrals for new members to replace members who must take leave are received from volunteers, stations, community leaders and the sponsoring agency. We operate with up-to-date software and records that allow us to make sure all stations have a current MOU and that volunteers are working within RSVP regulations and focus areas. Stations are evaluated in an ongoing process, so there is never a time when MOU's become expired. When volunteers enroll with RSVP we verify the fact that they are 55 or older and that they reside within Etowah or Cherokee County, which is our coverage area. They sign an enrollment form stating that they agree to serve without compensation and that also states that they are not restricted on the basis of education, experience, race, religion, color, national origin, sex, age (except for the 55 limit), handicap or political affiliation.

### **Organizational Capability**

Our plan is to follow all requirements and regulations set forth by CNCS to ensure that this RSVP is in compliance and operating at the most efficient level possible. To do that, the RSVP Director will become well versed in the correct way to conduct this program and make sure that other staff members act accordingly. RSVP of Etowah County is currently under the sponsorship of the Etowah County Commission, which helps us tremendously in this endeavor. We follow all of the rules and regulations of the Commission, which are at a level equivalent to CNCS guidelines, especially in regards to fiscal oversight and day-to-day operations. All purchases and expenditures are monitored by purchasing and bookkeeping departments to make sure they are in line with grant requirements and budgetary limitations. We only use vendors who have registered with the Commission and get quotes when necessary. Our grant expenditures are subject to an A-133 audit which is performed every year by State of Alabama personnel. If there are concerns about expenses or needs, Commission personnel also are readily available to provide support.

RSVP of Etowah County has 3 staff positions: RSVP Director (full-time), Volunteer Coordinator (full-time) and Administrative Assistant (part-time). The current staff assigned to these positions and their responsibilities are:

\* RSVP Director Traci Pondick

Mrs. Pondick has been in this position for 5 years.

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Duties are:

Conducts monthly staff meetings; trains, assigns, directs, supervises, evaluates, and disciplines personnel; verifies time sheets for accuracy.

Develops and administers the department budget.

Maintains department supply inventory.

Recruits and trains volunteers; provides orientation session for staff and volunteers; plans and coordinates the annual volunteer recognition banquet; assesses community needs through information from non-profit, social service, and public service agencies.

Researches and remains informed of Corporation of National and Community Service policies and procedures.

Prepares narratives and reports.

Develops surveys to use in gathering information to measure program process and impact.

Prepares and submits project profile reports, progress reports, grant draw downs, financial status reports.

Develops and maintains financial records.

Makes reports to the RSVP Advisory Board.

Performs public relations functions to promote and support program efforts.

Performs other related duties as assigned.

\* RSVP Volunteer Coordinator Faye Russell

Mrs. Russell has been in this position for 7 years and her duties include:

Schedule volunteer activities and assist in carrying out activity.

Assist in station building where direction is assigned.

Mail time sheets to volunteers and pick up time sheets from work station where applicable.

Assist in volunteer orientation.

Participate in program activities where assigned.

Transport volunteers from residences to work stations and return as assigned.

Attend staff meetings for RSVP.

Assist with office procedures (mail-outs, filing, telephone communication, etc.).

\* The RSVP Administrative Assistant is Ms. Samantha Harrison. Ms. Harrison has been in this position for 1 year and her duties include:

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Greets public in professional manner (phone & office visitors).

Greets volunteers and screens prospective volunteers.

Answers phone; screens calls.

Takes messages; delivers to appropriate staff personnel.

Uses general knowledge of program to give information to prospective volunteers, the public, and county officials.

Receives and follows up on requests from volunteers and workstations.

Monitors office supplies and equipment needs; requisitions same with supervisor's approval.

Maintains awareness of supervisor's calendar; reminds him/ her of meetings and appointments; maintains calendar of official meetings/ travel/ appointments.

Maintains filing system enabling quick retrieval of pertinent information upon request. Includes special projects such as TCE program, grant information, expenses, funds received, correspondence, volunteer and station information.

Prepares necessary documents, letters, memos, faxes, report forms, invoices, county reimbursement forms, etc.

Collects incoming mail and handles outgoing mail.

Posts to program software & ledgers programmatic data for reporting purposes.

Checks invoices, requests payments, and calculates travel and mileage.

Tabulates volunteer hours and maintains files/ records of hours/reimbursements.

Reviews, completes, & issues vouchers to submit to Purchasing for payment.

Receive & receipt contributions/ deposits.

Compiles information & figures from state/local/federal funding to assure accurate, on-time reporting.

Monitors each line item budgeted & reviews with Director. Projects cash request figures using PMS (Payment Management System) when applicable.

Monitors special program spending (recognition, TCE grant, etc.).

Determines line item amounts for federal/ state budgets, when applicable.

Tracks staff attendance, notes on time sheet weekly, secures proper signatures, & returns to personnel in timely manner.

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RSVP of Etowah County has several years of experience in obtaining and managing capital assets and in implementing internal and operating policies that provide the best possible program to our senior volunteers. We have a system in place that allows our work to be completed by the staff member best able to perform the required tasks, and all of our staff functions well together as a cohesive group. Partly because we are such a small agency, with only three paid staff, we communicate well with each other and with our volunteers. The current staff brings strong assets to their respective positions, thus making the total package one of honesty and reliability. Our capital assets are managed efficiently, and there is seldom a surprise in store involving replacement assets or equipment. Since the Etowah County Commission is our local sponsor, we have a superior accounting and financial management system in place to help govern all of our accounting, purchasing and personnel management activities. We follow all items of the Etowah County Commission Employee Handbook; all purchases are routed through the Commission Purchasing and Bookkeeping Departments and are subject to all of their rules and regulations.

The RSVP Director has been in this position for over 5 years, during which grant management and reporting has always been a top priority. All grant reports, local, state and federal, have been submitted in a timely fashion, and we have never had to ask for an extension. We have experience in managing more than one grant simultaneously and have the knowledge and experience to understand how to delegate grant funds in the most efficient way possible. Grants received previously include: CNCS grants for the RSVP program, IRS grants for VITA/TCE programs, Community Development grants, state grants through the Alabama Association of RSVP Directors, Wal-Mart grants and United Way grants. The RSVP Administrative Assistant is knowledgeable of how we keep track of expenses for each of our funding sources, and is dependable in matching expenses to the funding source and also making sure the Director knows where we stand on funding issues at any given time.

With the help of the Etowah County Commission, we have the financial management capacity and the systems in place to support strong financial management. All processes include more than one person, so there is a strong system of checks and balances in place.

### **Other**

N/A

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### PNS Amendment (if applicable)

Not applicable.