

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

This is an application for funding (year 1 of a 3-year grant) for the Norfolk County RSVP senior volunteer program. The applicant is the board of Commissioners of the County of Norfolk, MA, an incorporated regional government agency which has sponsored this volunteer community service organization for more than 20 years.

The service area for Norfolk RSVP consists of 27 of the County's 28 cities and towns, communities mostly located to the south and west of the city of Boston. Incorporated in 1793, the County provides regional services including land records management, vocational education, Trial Court facilities, engineering, veterans services, conservation, and recreation, and fulfills additional statutory responsibilities.

Norfolk County RSVP's core mission is to recruit, place, and support volunteers age 55 and older in programs to help meet community needs. Goals of the program include increasing volunteerism and providing services to communities in the region.

An estimated 300 RSVP volunteers will serve. Some of their activities will include assisting veterans through transportation, benefits assistance and other community based activities to assist veterans, elementary school reading and tutoring, and work in food pantry and meals on wheels programs. The primary focus area of this project is service to veterans. At the end of the three year grant, goals include quantifiable assistance to veterans and their families in our service area, improved academic engagement of students in the reading and tutoring program, and improved social support and food security through the food service programs. In the first year, the CNCS federal investment of \$78,602 will be supplemented by applicant and other non-federal resources of \$107,694. In future years, applicant resources are expected to be similarly proportionate, or higher, with respect to the federal investment.

## Strengthening Communities

The service area of Norfolk County RSVP includes 27 of the 28 cities and towns which make up Norfolk County, Massachusetts. (One Norfolk County community, Wellesley, is in the service area of another RSVP program, SOAR - Service Opportunities after 55.) Located mostly to the South and West of Boston, Norfolk County was incorporated as a regional governmental entity in 1793, and has its county seat at the town of Dedham. The program service area has a population of approximately 640,000 people, and an area of approximately 400 square miles. Many Norfolk County communities are residential suburbs of Boston. They range from urban centers, such as the city of Quincy, to rural

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communities.

Census estimates (2010) show the population as predominately White (82.3%), with significant Asian (8.6%) and Black (5.7%) minorities. The census survey found that fifteen percent of the people living in Norfolk County are foreign born and that 17 percent speak a language other than English at home. Of those speaking a language other than English at home, 35 percent reported that they did not speak English "very well." Approximately 14.5% of the population is over 65, and in most areas of the County, seniors are increasing as a percentage of the population.

As throughout the United States, the effects of the recession adversely affected community resources and increased needs for assistance in many areas. Census estimates from 2010 showed 6.5 percent of all Norfolk County families with incomes below poverty level, rising to 15 percent among families with a female householder and no husband present, with greater concentrations in some communities.

Over 40,000 Norfolk county residents are veterans. The census shows that the bulk of those veterans range from service time in World War II through the Vietnam War. Among county residents age 65 or older, veterans comprise a large segment of the male population. This aging population has numerous challenges in living out their years with dignity and independence.

Another group of veterans are those who served in more recent conflicts, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This group makes up 9.6% of the veteran population of the county. The physical and mental challenges and needs of this group of veterans are in some ways different than those of the past.

Many veterans are unaware of the services available to them through Federal, State and local programs. Some veterans are in need of assistance with transportation for medical appointments and other appointments and grocery shopping and simple but necessary errands. A survey conducted by the office of the Norfolk County Veterans' Advocate has documented a need for outreach services to veterans.

Service to Veterans is the Primary Focus Area of this project. Norfolk County RSVP is well situated to provide volunteer coordination with the County Veterans Advocate and the 27 city and town Veterans' Agents within our service area. RSVP volunteers can assist veterans with transportation, access to state and federal benefits, and other community-based activities that help veterans and their families.

Two of Norfolk RSVP's Other Focus Areas, Meals on Wheels and Food Pantries, address food security needs. According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs, 16.2% of elders aged 60 or over and 48.3% of elders aged 85 or over in Massachusetts are living independently with

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mobility or self-care limitations. Many of these elders lack or may have limited ability or means to prepare adequate meals on a daily basis. These conditions can cause or exacerbate problems faced by many elders, including poor diet, health problems, food insecurity, and loneliness. Nutritional support through meals-on-wheels and other direct food security programs can help address these issues to help older people achieve and maintain optimal nutritional status and reduce social isolation.

Food banks, food pantries and similar non-profit organizations offer emergency and short-term assistance to those in need. The economic challenges of recent years, increased numbers of individuals and families in need, and reduced resources of other programs have increased the role of non-profit food service programs. They are largely staffed by volunteers and are a contributing element of the social safety net in our service area, collecting and distributing food, providing related services and information, and helping improve overall food security in the community.

Norfolk RSVP is already partnered with meals on wheels programs and food pantries in our area, and will continue to recruit and place volunteers in those services.

Norfolk RSVP's reading and tutoring program for students in grades 1-3 addresses an identified community need throughout our the service area. The Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) NCLB sets a goal that all children in the United States being able to read at grade level. But funding constraints limit the staff resources available in area schools.

Within RSVP's service area, standardized test scores bear out this concern. In 2010's Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exams, of 7138 third grade students taking the Reading and English tests, 23% (1611) scored "needs improvement," and 3.8% (273) scored at the Failing/Warning level. In that MCAS series, only one of the four elementary schools in the RSVP district town of Dedham met the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards.

One area school superintendent told us that if schools are unable to help students get reading skills up to speed by the third grade, those students will likely remain behind for the remainder of their school education. Other educators in our service area concur.

Both academic research and the general experience of parents and educators find that extra assistance at the early elementary grades can help improve reading scores and academic engagement.

Norfolk RSVP will build on its existing partnerships with school districts and seek to recruit and place additional volunteers in participating schools. The program will continue to focus on providing volunteers in grades one through three. Norfolk RSVP volunteers will help support classroom efforts by providing extra one-on-one and small group reading work and other activities under direction of teachers and reading specialists.

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To monitor and report project progress and identify areas for improvement, RSVP uses volunteer and site partner reports and surveys, as well as other inputs, including project director site visits and guidance from Norfolk RSVP's volunteer Advisory Committee.

### **Recruitment and Development**

Norfolk County RSVP's core mission is to recruit, train, and place volunteers age 55 and older in programs where their services help meet community needs. This includes identifying program and site opportunities, recruiting and placing volunteers in roles which benefit both the participating program and the volunteer, and following through to assure continued improvement and success.

We are working to extend our existing network of site partners in the primary (service to veterans) and other focus areas (meals on wheels, food pantries, and elementary tutoring) of this project. These sites include agencies serving veterans, municipal veterans services offices, nutrition and food security programs, and public schools.

Volunteer recruitment efforts include direct contact with potential partners and volunteers, web site, press releases, brochures and newsletters, cable TV and other media opportunities, public speaking, orientations and trainings, and participation in community and regional initiatives. Current volunteers are an important help in recruiting new volunteers. Participating site managers provide RSVP volunteers with information, training, and tools that volunteers need to perform their assignments.

We have implemented a volunteer Advisory Committee, including RSVP volunteers and professionals working in relevant fields. Norfolk County RSVP Advisory Committee currently has fourteen members. The committee members reviewed a community stakeholder survey, and help assess volunteer satisfaction and overall effectiveness of the program.

The Advisory Committee has identified lack of diversity among our volunteer population, which we are attempting to address. We hope also to involve more veterans and family members as volunteers.

Individual volunteers have many reasons for participation: meeting new people, a sense of civic obligation, interest in a particular cause, or trying new challenges and opportunities. RSVP staff work with site managers to assure that volunteers are provided the chance for variety and responsibility within their assignments; in some instances, RSVP volunteers themselves have become site supervisors. We monitor placements on an ongoing basis, actively request comment and suggestions from participating programs, and address specific issues that arise.

Communication and recognition are important to Norfolk RSVP's recruitment and development efforts. We have created a brochure with an overview and descriptions of our program areas. We

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receive and respond to volunteer input on a regular basis, including an annual volunteer satisfaction and suggestions survey. RSVP will continue to host an annual recognition luncheon for volunteers, station representatives, and community leaders which has proven an enjoyable and well attended (300+) event.

### Program Management

Development and management of volunteer stations and assignments includes outreach to develop new partner agency relationships in our Focus Areas and build on existing ones. We try to assure that placements offer a quality experience for volunteers and contribute value to the site agency.

Sites for volunteer placement are enrolled through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the partner agency. As volunteers are recruited and placed with partner sites, we continue to monitor and evaluate the success of placements through contact with individual volunteers and the agencies.

The project director maintains current MOUs for all sites. The project director visits each site with active volunteer placements to assess the success of the program with respect to that site and the volunteers placed there, as well as to assure consistency of assignments with project workplans, compliance with prohibited activities regulations, eligibility of volunteers, and other program requirements.

The project director contacts site partners that do not have current volunteers to determine means of increasing participation or whether the site should be moved to an inactive or other status.

RSVP uses Volunteer Reporter database software to track stations, volunteers, placements, MOUs, site visits, and other relevant information.

Differences between the Focus Areas under this project and prior Norfolk RSVP plans will require limited changes in volunteer recruitment and management. Our Primary Focus area, Service to Veterans, is already part of Norfolk RSVP's workplans under the most recent grant, as are Meals on Wheels, Food Pantries, and Elementary Education.

We do not expect to graduate any sites with active volunteers in the coming year, although recognizing that may result in having some volunteers in the "other community activity" category who will not be countable towards recruitment targets. We believe that these volunteers, many with long service in RSVP, are valuable to the program and the community.

Assessment of project performance includes annual surveys and questionnaires to partner organizations and a self review conducted with the assistance of the volunteer Norfolk RSVP Advisory Committee, which has been in place for several years. We also use other forms of written feedback (including volunteer logs and surveys) and verbal comments to track progress and identify issues.

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Staff members regularly meet to compare outcomes against performance goals set forth in our grant applications and work plans, and to assure timely filing of required reports.

### Organizational Capability

Norfolk County RSVP is a department within the County Commissioners' Office of the County of Norfolk, Massachusetts, an incorporated regional government agency. In addition to its Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) participation, Norfolk County's past experience managing Federal grants includes funding awards to the Norfolk County Agricultural High School and, prior to the reorganization of Massachusetts' county sheriffs' departments to become State agencies, grant awards to the Norfolk County Sheriff's Office.

Norfolk County RSVP has a record of more than twenty years' successful experience as a senior volunteer community service organization. In calendar 2012, over 280 volunteers provided over 33,000 hours of service through Norfolk RSVP.

RSVP staff includes the program Director (full time), Recruitment Coordinator (full time), and Information Specialist (part time).

Program Director Jean McLeish has more than twenty-five years' experience in community and volunteer service. During that time she has been actively involved in programs of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Council on Aging, and other civic organizations in her hometown of Dedham. Jean first joined the County Commissioners' staff in 2002, was appointed Acting RSVP director in August of 2009, and has been Director since February of 2010. As Director, Jean oversees program operations and participates in the work of affiliated organizations including the Massachusetts Association of RSVP Directors.

The position of Recruitment Coordinator is currently vacant. An outreach and hiring process is in progress at this writing. From initial responses, we expect a strong field of candidates with the necessary range of skills, experience, and commitment to contribute to the success of this project.

Information Specialist Sally O'Connell is a retired administrative staff employee of the Norfolk County Sheriff's Office. Subject to Massachusetts' annual hours restrictions for retirees, Sally manages Norfolk RSVP's volunteer information and office operations requirements.

As a County department, Norfolk RSVP is able to draw on support from other County staff and agencies, including the County's Regional Services Coordinator and the Norfolk County Veterans' Advocate. RSVP's staff is assisted by volunteers on specific projects. The program has an active volunteer Advisory Committee.

The support of the County Commissioners helps assure that the program has adequate resources

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and facilities. RSVP has dedicated office space in the County Administration Building, information technology and Internet access, and the use of office equipment, meeting spaces, and other resources.

Filings of RSVP's required reports, including the Federal Financial Reports and Project Progress Reports, are supervised by the County Director. The County Director reviews and evaluates program performance, meets with staff on a regular basis, and reports to the Commissioners.

RSVP's financial management is under the jurisdiction of the County Commissioners and the County Treasurer. Budgeting, income, and expenditures are tracked using UniFund BudgetSense accounting software supervised by the Treasurer. Norfolk RVSP follows State law and regulations and County purchasing and personnel policies and controls, including those for reimbursement of travel and expenses. Budget and planning for RSVP is coordinated as part of the County's annual fiscal cycle. County financials are subject to annual independent audit.

### **Other**

NA

### **PNS Amendment (if applicable)**

NA