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Executive Summary

An estimated 430 RSVP volunteers will serve. Some of their activities will include distributing food through community food pantries, training Community Emergency Response Team members, supporting community gardening, providing income tax preparation assistance, disseminating Affordable Care Act health insurance information, and providing services and support to veterans. The primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures. At the end of the three-year grant, North Coast Opportunities (NCO) anticipates that 75% of low-income people participating in food distribution and community gardening programs that are supported by RSVP volunteers will report increased food security for themselves and their children (Outcome H12). The CNCS federal investment of \$66,282 will be supplemented by \$50,830 in cash and in-kind matching contributions.

Through its Community Action programming, NCO focuses its efforts on a broad theme of self-empowerment and alleviation of poverty. In keeping with this theme, NCO will continue offering a wide range of volunteer opportunities for local seniors. Working with 430 volunteers, the Lake and Mendocino Counties RSVP 2014-2017 Project will address four national service focus areas (Healthy Futures, Veterans and Military Families, Economic Opportunity, and Disaster Services).

Strengthening Communities

1A. COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION. As the Community Action Agency for Lake and Mendocino Counties in rural Northern California, North Coast Opportunities (NCO) has managed the RSVP program since the 1970s. Together, Lake and Mendocino Counties cover a rugged mountainous area that exceeds 4,768 square miles. While this area is the size of the States of Delaware and Rhode Island combined, its 152,822 residents comprise a population density of only 32 persons/square mile (compared with the statewide population density of 234 persons/square mile). During the ten-year period between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, the population grew by 5.5% (compared with a statewide growth of 14.6%); the California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit predicts a population of 179,206 by 2030 [5]. Data sources for the following demographic, economic, and geographic details are listed in Section 1A-5.

1A-1. LAKE COUNTY

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING. Lake County is located a two-hour drive north of San Francisco. The county is 100 miles long by 50 miles wide, with Clear Lake, the largest natural lake lying entirely

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within California, at its center. Lake County's 64,531 residents occupy an area of 1,258 square miles with a population density of 51 persons/square mile [1]. Less than 10% of the county's largely mountainous terrain is developed. There are two incorporated cities: Lakeport (pop. 4,713), which is the County Seat of Government, and Clearlake (pop. 15,192). About 30% of all residents live in these two cities, which are situated 28 miles apart on opposite sides of Clear Lake. Scattered around the lake's 100-mile shoreline and in the surrounding foothills there are 16 small unincorporated communities and 7 American Indian reservations and rancherias [13]. The county's rugged rural geography, winding two-lane roads, and widely-separated towns limit access to services, including health care, recreation, social support, employment, and even food.

DEMOGRAPHICS. Lake County's population is ethnically diverse, with 74% White/non-Hispanic, 17% Hispanic, 5% American Indian, 2% African American, and 2% of other ethnicities [18]. Lake County's 7 Native American settlements are home to tribal people from at least 111 different tribes. Increasing diversity is reflected in the 2012-2013 class of kindergarten students, which was 33% Hispanic [4]. About 29% of Lake County residents are under the age of 25, while 17.6% are age 65 or older, well above the statewide rate of 11.4%. The California Department of Finance has projected that the senior age group will increase markedly over the next two decades. By 2030, one in four residents will be over 65 [5].

1A-2. MENDOCINO COUNTY

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING. Mendocino County lies on the Pacific coast two hours north of San Francisco. The county's vineyard-covered hillsides, towering redwoods, and rugged mountains cover 3,510 square miles, only 3% of which is flat. Although Mendocino County is the 15th largest of California's 58 counties, its 88,291 residents represent only 0.24% of the state's population; the population density is only 25 persons/square mile. The California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit predicts a population of 84,394 in Mendocino County by 2030 [5]. There are four incorporated cities in Mendocino County: Ukiah, Fort Bragg, Point Arena, and Willits, none of which is larger than 16,000 people. Approximately one-third of the county's population lives in these cities, leaving 68% in unincorporated areas [18]. In addition to unincorporated communities, there are also 11 Native American Indian settlements, the fourth most of any county in the US [17], and 4 federally-designated frontier communities [10].

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The Coastal Mountain Range, a formidable geographic barrier, divides the county and is crisscrossed by winding mountain roads that make travel hazardous and time consuming, especially in rainy winter months. Mendocino County is one of the most seismically active regions in the US, 1106% higher than the national average. Over the past 50 years, the area has accounted for 25% of California seismic activity, and there have been 5 earthquakes close to magnitude 7.0 since 1980 [15]. Any major disaster, seismic or otherwise, is likely to overwhelm emergency resources, given the ratio of 1,000 citizens for every emergency responder. For example, in 2008 a lightning complex started 129 fires in Mendocino County. Although 2,000 firefighters worked to contain the fires, more than 53,300 acres of forest were consumed before reinforcements arrived. Because an unprepared citizenry can obstruct emergency, law enforcement, and public safety response, Work Plan 6-1 utilizes 2 volunteers to conduct Community Emergency Response Trainings (CERT) to increase community disaster response capacity and Work Plan 7-1 coordinates 43 volunteers to respond to local disasters and similar events.

DEMOGRAPHICS. Ethnically, Mendocino County is 69% White/non-Hispanic, 22% Hispanic, 7% American Indian, and 2% of other ethnicities [18]. The county's increasing diversity is reflected in the 2012-2013 class of kindergarten students, which was 43% Hispanic [4]. The county's American Indian population is comprised primarily of indigenous Pomo tribes; the Round Valley reservation in Covelo, the county's northeasternmost community, is the second largest reservation in the state. About 30% of Mendocino County residents are under the age of 25, while slightly more than 15% are over the age of 65 (compared with 11.4% statewide); of this group, 2.2% are over the age of 85 [18]. The California Department of Finance has projected that seniors will increase markedly over the next two decades. By 2030, one in four residents will be in the senior age group [5].

1A-3. POVERTY AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS. The US Census American Community Survey's 5-year estimates for 2007-2011 poverty levels show 21.4% of Lake and 17.8% of Mendocino County residents living below the federal poverty level (FPL), compared with 14.4% statewide. Almost one-quarter (23.7%) of Lake and one in five (19.6%) Mendocino County families lives on incomes of \$25,000 or less, compared with 15.2% statewide. Among families with children, the poverty rate is 38%. The median household income is \$39,525 in Lake (64% of the state median) and \$44,527 in Mendocino [18]. The poverty rate for seniors over age 65 is 9.3% in Lake and 8.4% in Mendocino County. The FPL for a single person in California is \$14,268. The median Social Security payment for

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seniors is \$12,500 in both counties, and the maximum SSI Payment is \$9,965. Neither of these figures is enough to cover basic needs. According to the California Elder Economic Security Index, the minimum income necessary to cover all of a retired older adult's basic expenses (housing, food, health care, and transportation) is \$22,268 in Lake and \$23,459 in Mendocino County. Work Plan 1-1 addresses this need by using 200 volunteers to deliver meals to home-bound people.

In 2010, 23% of Lake County's 21,936 tax returns and 21% of Mendocino County's 33,159 returns were Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) returns that resulted in an aggregate claim of \$24,733,116. Of the total number of returns, only 3% in Lake County and 2% in Mendocino County were prepared by voluntary groups [3]. Work Plan 4-1 recruits and trains 12 volunteers to prepare EITC tax returns for low-income individuals through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. Issues related to Economic Development, such as VITA, were identified as a high priority through the community surveys and forums that NCO conducted in June 2013 as part of the bi-annual Community Needs Assessment that is required of Community Action Agencies.

Food stamp enrollment has risen markedly over the past five years, by 82% in Lake and 125% in Mendocino County. In April 2013, enrollment stood at 5,159 of Lake County's 26,548 households (19%) and 6,971 of Mendocino County's 34,945 households (20%), representing 23,235 individuals in all. By comparison, the state average is just over 15% [6]. Note, however, that an estimated 33% of eligible California households are not enrolled in the food stamp program [8].

In 2009, the California Health Interview Survey found that 34% of Lake and 38% of Mendocino County respondents were unable to afford enough food, compared with 35.8% statewide [9]. Although more recent county-level data are not available, the overall economic situation has worsened considerably since 2009, and the percentage is likely to be well above the 2009 level. At mild and moderate levels, food insecurity contributes to anxiety and worry, and often results in foregoing other basic needs to make sure that family members are fed. Very low food security results in the disruption of eating patterns and reduced food intake. To better understand the nature of hunger in the project area, NCO is currently working with Pacific Union College to conduct a comprehensive Food Stability Study; 700 surveys have been collected to date, and results of the study will be finalized by January 2014. In local schools, 73% of Lake and 65% of Mendocino County students participated in free and reduced price meal (FRPM) programs during the past school year, ranging as high as 100% in some communities [4]. It is worth noting that California Food Policy Advocates estimates that 31% of local

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students eligible for FRPM programs are not enrolled in the program [8]. Work Plan 2-1 utilizes 50 volunteers to distribute food through the local food pantry. Work Plan 3-1 addresses family food security by using 35 volunteers to assist families to grow their own food.

As of June 2013, local unemployment rates stood at 12% in Lake County and 7.4% in Mendocino County and remained as high as 18.3% in Clearlake Oaks and 16.6% in Laytonville [7]. County government is the largest Lake County employer, followed by large retailers such as Wal-Mart and Safeway. Lake County's economy is largely based on agriculture, tourism, and the geothermal power industry. Finding steady full-time work is an on-going challenge. Limited county resources require many residents to travel outside the county for jobs, health care, and other services.

Although Mendocino County once boasted a prime commercial fishery and was a major timber producer, over the past 15 years low-wage tourism and service jobs have replaced these industries. A local study released in 2007 pinpointed six areas of economic and workforce development as targets of opportunity for Northern California's coastal counties. In the report, specialty agriculture was identified as the third fastest growing opportunity, and as having the greatest potential for future growth. Along with the five other targeted opportunities, over the past ten years these sectors have grown in employment and real wages, and each includes elements that are export-oriented, population-driven, and offer career potential for local residents [13].

1A-4. HEALTH AND SOCIAL INDICATORS

Although Californians as a whole continue to be younger than the national average, 16.3% of local residents are in the senior age group, compared with 11.4% statewide. The California Department of Finance has projected that the senior age group will increase markedly over the next two decades. By 2030, seniors will comprise a full quarter of the population [5]. A local survey found that 60% of local seniors over the age of 60 live alone [2]. In the two-county area, 54% of the senior population over the age of 75 have a disability. The incidence of disabilities doubles between the ages of 65 and 75+, and those 75+ are more likely to suffer from multiple disabilities, indicating an increased need for in-home care and caregiver support services [1]. The need to support and maintain the independence of community seniors is addressed through two Work Plans: 1-1, the Meals on Wheels Program, and 9-1, which uses 100 volunteers to provide congregate meals at local senior centers.

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Rankings for 2013, both Lake and

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Mendocino County rank lower than most other California counties in many health indicators, including overall health outcomes (Lake County ranks 57 out of 58 counties, and Mendocino County ranks 43) and obesity, with Lake County again ranking 57, while Mendocino County ranks 31 [16]. About 65% of adults in Lake and 63% in Mendocino County are obese or overweight (compared with 57% statewide) and 8,000 people in the two counties have been diagnosed with Type II diabetes [8]. According to Children Now, 18% of Lake and 16% of Mendocino County children are overweight for their age, compared with 11% statewide [11]. Because so many health indicators are related to healthy eating, Work Plans 2-1 and 3-1 are included to improve nutrition and alleviate long-term hunger through food distributions and community gardening. Issues related to Nutrition, Food Security, and Hunger were identified as high priorities through the community surveys and community forums that NCO conducted in June 2013.

The Health Rankings also show that both Lake and Mendocino County rank lower than most other California counties in insurance coverage (Lake County ranks 47 out of 58 counties, and Mendocino County ranks 27), [16]. Work Plan 10-1 utilizes 3 volunteers to conduct outreach and education to inform low-income people about their health insurance options.

In January 2013, Lake County conducted its first point-in-time Homeless Census, identifying 188 homeless individuals [12]. Of those surveyed, almost half (44%) reported that they were living in tents or trailers, while 21% were living outdoors without a roof, 17% were living in cars or on the street, 7% were living in motels, 5% were living in emergency shelters, and 5% were living in abandoned buildings. Furthermore, 15% of respondents were veterans. In Mendocino County, the homeless census counted 1,344 homeless people of whom 63 (5%) were veterans. About 175 (13%) were living in shelters while 1,169 (87%) were unsheltered. During the past two years, the County Offices of Education in the two counties reported a total of more than 1,000 homeless students (774 in Lake County and 234 in Mendocino). Through Work Plan 9-1, 60 volunteers will assist with conducting Lake County's annual homelessness census. Issues related to homelessness were identified as a high priority through the community surveys and community forums that NCO conducted in June 2013.

More than 14% of Lake and 1 of every 10 Mendocino County residents is a veteran, slightly higher than the national average of 9.6%. Furthermore, 15% of Lake County's homeless are veterans [12]. The needs of veterans are addressed through Work Plan 5-1, using 10 volunteers.

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The projects described in this proposal will enable RSVP to support the work of its partners by offering capacity building opportunities that help them to maximize the impact of their work, resulting in better quality of life for low-income families, at-risk youth, elders in need, and families in transition. Capacity Building is addressed through Work Plan 8-1 and will utilize 25 volunteers.

1A-5. CITATIONS

1. Area Agency on Aging of Lake and Mendocino Counties, 2012-2016 Area Plan Needs Assessment (http://www.co.lake.ca.us/government/directory/social_services/aaa.htm).
2. Area Agency on Aging, 2012 (www.co.lake.ca.us/Assets/Social+Services/AAA/Docs/12-16AP.pdf).
3. Brookings Institution EITC Series (<http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/eitc>).
4. California Department of Education, DataQuest (<http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>).
5. California Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit (www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/reports/estimates/e-1/view.php).
6. California Department of Social Services, Food Stamp Participation and Benefit Issuance Report DFA-256 for April 2013 (www.dss.cahwnet.gov/research/PG352.htm).
7. California Employment Development Department (<http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/>).
8. California Food Policy Advocates (<http://cfpa.net/>).
9. California Health Interview Survey (<http://www.chis.ucla.edu/>) (Lake and Mendocino Counties are grouped with other counties and are not reported separately in more recent surveys).
10. California Rural Health Policy Council. The definition of "Rural" is a Medical Service Study Area (MSSA) with a population 2,500 persons or less per square mile with no incorporated area greater than 50,000 persons. The definition of "Frontier" is a MSSA with a population density equal or less than 11 persons per square mile (www.oshpd.ca.gov/RHPC/Resources/northern.html).
11. Children Now 2012-2013 California County Scorecard (<http://scorecard.childrennow.org/2012/>).
12. Lake County Department of Social Services, Point In Time Homeless Count, 2013.
13. Lake County Tribal Health Consortium, 2011 Needs Assessment (www.lcthc.com/human_services.shtml).
14. Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency, 2013 Homeless Count Summary.
15. National Weather Service Forecast Office (<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/eka/misc/eqr.php>).
16. RWJF Health Rankings (<http://www.countyhealthrankings.org>).

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17. Tribes and Tribal Communities of the North Coast

(<http://fiesta.bren.ucsb.edu/~mlpa3/tribes.html>).

18. US Census Bureau (<http://factfinder2.census.gov>).

19. WIA Rapid Response Special Project (2007). Targets of Opportunity: The North Coast Counties of Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Siskiyou, and Trinity (www.mendowib.org).

1B. HOW SERVICE ACTIVITIES LEAD TO NATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1B-1. SERVICE ACTIVITIES. NCO has selected Healthy Futures as its Primary Focus Area. Within this Focus Area, NCO is proposing four Service Activities as well as the Veterans Focus Area. The following Theories of Change explain how each service activity will lead to National Performance Measures. THEORIES OF CHANGE:

* If homebound seniors have access to healthy home-delivered meals, they will be able live independently in their own homes while experiencing daily social contact that might not otherwise be available to them. NCO will partner with eight senior centers and the Plowshares Meals on Wheels program to deliver hot meals to 800 homebound seniors and disabled people, improving nutrition and facilitating independent living.

* If low-income people have access to nutritious supplementary food and nutrition and food preparation tips, they will be able to improve family health, reduce obesity, increase family food security, and alleviate long-term hunger. RSVP volunteers will assist with food distribution to 300 households through participating food pantries in both counties.

* If low-income people learn to plan, cultivate, and harvest their own food they will have greater family food security, improve family health, and alleviate long-term hunger. NCO's Gardens Project will coordinate volunteer work related to the planning, development, and maintenance of school and community gardens and will provide training workshops to strengthen gardening skills, helping at least 150 low-income families to increase their family's food security.

* If people have convenient access to accurate information about the health insurance options available to them, they will make timely choices and enroll in appropriate health insurance plans. NCO's Community Action will assign 3 volunteers to disseminate health insurance information to at least 100 people.

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* If veterans have access to support that is provided by fellow veterans, they will be more comfortable with accepting the support and participating in services. NCO will partner with VetConnect of Lake County to utilize 10 RSVP volunteers, who are also veterans, to conduct outreach and referral to at least 200 veterans. VetConnect offers services every month in two locations, Lakeport and Clearlake.

1B-2. PROGRAM-WIDE STRATEGIES. RSVP's 430 volunteers will contribute at least 115,000 hours each year, working with 22 volunteer stations. In addition to the proposed service activities, NCO will also use a number of program-wide strategies to ensure successful achievement of the National Performance Measure outputs/outcomes. Each of the strategies described in the following paragraphs will support RSVP volunteers in meeting identified community needs.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS. One of NCO's Strategic Priorities is "to seek partnerships to better meet the needs of the community in providing sustainable, innovative, high-quality services." NCO Community Action has a long history of working with the 200+ nonprofits that serve low-income and at-risk groups in Lake and Mendocino Counties and RSVP maintains strong relationships with disaster preparedness and relief agencies, county and city government departments, providers of health and human services, and faith and community-based groups. Currently, RSVP members serve at 21 volunteer stations in Lake and Mendocino Counties; new partnerships are developed when new opportunities arise, new needs are identified, or a federal strategic initiative provides new guidance. Partners, and the activities with which they will be affiliated, are listed below:

- * American Red Cross chapters (CERT training and disaster response)
- * California Highway Patrol (disaster response)
- * County Departments of Social Services (homelessness census)
- * County Offices of Emergency Services (CERT training and disaster response)
- * Fire Departments (CERT training and disaster response)
- * Fort Bragg Food Bank (emergency food distribution)
- * Lake County AmeriCorps Program (Make A Difference Day, volunteer recruitment)
- * Lake County Hunger Task Force (gardening, gleaning, and food distribution)
- * Lake Family Resource Center (EITC tax assistance and health insurance information)
- * Lake County Sheriff Office (CERT training and disaster response)
- * Mendo-Lake Credit Union (EITC tax assistance program)

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- * Mendocino Coast District Hospital (community benefit activities)
- * Mendocino College (EITC tax assistance program)
- * Pacific Union College (homelessness research)
- * Plowshares Peace and Justice Center (Meals on Wheels)
- * Schools, preschools, senior centers, low-income neighborhoods, churches (community gardening)
- * Senior centers, Plowshares, and Departments of Social Services (Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals)
- * Thrive Lake County (homelessness census and time bank)
- * United Way (EITC tax assistance program)
- * VetConnect of Lake County (resource and referral for veterans)

ENSURING LOCAL INPUT. All of NCO's partner relationships yield feedback on the effectiveness and quality of RSVP's work in the community, as well as satisfaction with the work performed by RSVP volunteers. This input guides RSVP's efforts to meet community needs. Specific input and oversight for program planning and evaluation is provided through the following strategies:

- * The RSVP Program Director delivers quarterly RSVP updates to the NCO Board of Directors and is responsible for implementing any feedback or suggestions that the Board offers.
- * The Volunteer Network Managers conduct an Annual Survey of Station Managers to identify program strengths and challenges in the areas of communication, oversight, volunteer preparation (orientation and training), retention, etc.
- * On a biannual basis, NCO conducts a comprehensive needs assessment that encompasses a full data review as well as community forums and surveys. This exercise helps to identify the greatest needs, which are then compared with the services being provided by RSVP volunteers to ensure that the RSVP program is addressing local needs. For example, RSVP has developed volunteer stations to address unmet community needs such as disaster preparedness, the isolation and health needs of homebound seniors, and the low number of EITC filings.

RAISING COMMUNITY AWARENESS. Public awareness is raised through networking and relationships with local media, community groups, and nonprofits. Strategies also include NCO's Volunteer Center website (<http://volunteer.ncoinc.org/>), a quarterly electronic newsletter for volunteers and stations, volunteer recognition events, radio and newspaper PSAs, news articles featuring volunteer stories and opportunities, presentations to service clubs (often made by RSVP

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volunteers), email blasts, Facebook, and community events such as the Human Race, which brings together more than 45 nonprofits and 500 participants every year and raises more than \$50,000. In fact, a recent survey of callers to the Volunteer Network found that 35% had learned about the Volunteer Network through the Human Race. NCO also educates the community through participation on boards such as the Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency Advisory Board, Mendocino County Disaster Preparedness Planning Advisory Council, Economic Development and Financing Corporation Board, Lake County Healthy Start, Lake County Health Leadership Network, Lake County Hunger Task Force, and Mendocino County Homeless Services Planning Group. RSVP volunteers also serve on planning committees, advisory boards, and boards of directors.

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY EVENTS. RSVP volunteers lead and participate in a wide range of community activities, which further raises community awareness. These events include the Human Race, the United Way Day of Caring, National Make A Difference Day, National Fire Prevention Month, National Volunteer Week, National Family Volunteer Day, and community festivals and health fairs. During these events, volunteers assist with planning, registration, ticketing, tabling, set up and clean up, parking, security, distributing information, and more.

ENHANCEMENT OF COMMUNITY CAPACITY. Since 1996, NCO has provided training and technical assistance for staff, board members, and volunteers of local organizations. Trainings include critical elements of nonprofit development such as leadership development, funding development, organizational development, and program development as well as volunteer-related topics (volunteer recruitment, training and orientation, management, and retention) and 1:1 technical assistance in these areas. Beneficiaries have included local non-profits, county agencies, faith and community-based organizations, and individuals interested in becoming volunteers themselves.

INTEGRATION WITH OTHER NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMS. RSVP is an integral part of NCO's Volunteer Network, recruiting, training, placing, and supporting senior volunteers. Because RSVP recruitment, application, and placement are accomplished through the Volunteer Network website (<http://volunteer.ncoinc.org/>), RSVP is fully integrated with NCO's other volunteer programs, such as the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP). RSVP Network Managers and the FGP Director make cross-referrals to best meet volunteer and program needs, and hold regular coordination meetings. Where appropriate, NCO invites volunteers from both programs to participate

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in trainings and volunteer recognition events. Potential volunteers who are younger are connected with AmeriCorps, VISTA, HealthCorps, FoodCorps, and other programs.

1C. PLAN AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT DATA COLLECTION. NCO uses Salesforce volunteer management software to track and manage volunteer station data and opportunities as well as information on individual volunteers (hours of service, awards, skills, and placements). These data are readily accessible when potential volunteers are looking for suitable opportunities, and when partner agencies are seeking volunteers to meet their organizational needs. NCO also uses Microsoft Word and Excel as data management tools, enabling the development of charts and graphs depicting volunteerism trends and tracking progress toward achievement of National Performance Measures. All confidential information is secured by locked entryways, locked file cabinets, and password protection, and all data are backed up on a regular schedule.

To assess the extent to which the RSVP volunteers are meeting local needs, NCO ensures that all programs include strategies for self-assessment and continuous improvement and have the capability and infrastructure to track outputs (volunteers recruited, hours served, individuals receiving services, etc.) and outcomes (client perception of increased food security). For training activities, NCO collects and reviews post-training assessments to improve future training efforts. Annual surveys of volunteers and volunteer stations enable NCO to identify program strengths and address any challenges or weaknesses. To ensure staff and partner input in program planning and development, NCO will host an annual retreat for discussion of accomplishments and challenges and development of goals and objectives for the coming year.

At the beginning of the project, Volunteer Network Managers will develop data collection forms and procedures and review them with Station Managers. On a monthly schedule, Volunteer Network Managers will collect data from Stations and generate reports that enable them to track progress in addressing objectives. Data will be reviewed and discussed during regular team coordination meetings and reviewed by the RSVP Advisory Group and the NCO Board of Directors.

1D. ACTIVITIES INVOLVING VETERANS. More than 8,000 Lake County residents are veterans, including 15% of the homeless. VetConnect of Lake County, established in 2011, helps veterans by providing information, services, and assistance in finding and qualifying for those services. NCO will

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partner with VetConnect, which will utilize 10 volunteers to distribute food and provide support, information, and referral services to veterans, assisting at least 200 veterans/year.

Recruitment and Development

2A. ASSURING HIGH QUALITY VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS

2A-1. DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH-QUALITY ASSIGNMENTS. RSVP believes that the quality of a volunteer's experience influences both the quality of the work they perform and the longevity of their commitment. NCO develops volunteer opportunities to meet community needs and interests, based on data collected through a variety of strategies. Through their assignments, volunteers have ample opportunity to hone and exercise their skills as they mentor, train, teach, or support the people with whom they work. Specific strategies for creating engaging assignments include:

- * Developing opportunities for volunteers to serve on local councils, committees, and boards.
- * Conducting 1:1 intake interviews to learn about each individual and his/her interests and needs, volunteerism goals, and scheduling flexibility, as well as any limitations.
- * Incorporating a checklist in the Volunteer Intake Form to identify volunteer interests and skills.
- * Matching volunteer assignments with passions and interests.
- * Providing learning opportunities that allow a volunteer to learn a new skill, acquire new knowledge, and/or make new connections that strengthen their employment potential.
- * Encouraging volunteers to share their experiences with new volunteers in 1:1 or group settings.
- * Cross recruiting for Foster Grandparents and other National and Community Service programs.

RSVP volunteers have numerous opportunities to strengthen their leadership potential and use leadership skills and are encouraged to apply for positions on advisory boards and committees. For volunteers interested in these opportunities, NCO provides a letter of recommendation. At their stations, RSVP volunteers may offer to take on increasingly responsible tasks as they become more familiar with the organization. RSVP offers technical assistance to help the volunteer identify these opportunities. To assess the impact of the volunteer experience on participating RSVP volunteers, NCO will conduct an annual survey that asks volunteers to consider such questions as: Has volunteering with RSVP increased your social connections? Increased specific skills, such as time management or communication? Increased your sense of well being and your ability to contribute to your community? Surveys will also ask volunteers to identify any weaknesses in the program and offer suggestions for improvement. In addition to the survey, Network Managers will conduct at least two volunteer focus groups each year, asking similar questions.

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2A-2. RECRUITING. Last year, NCO and its partners recruited 156 new volunteers (70 in Mendocino and 86 in Lake County) who contributed 115,000 hours, working with more than 50 agencies. NCO will recruit at least 20 new volunteers during each year of this grant, and will work with 430 RSVP volunteers annually. A survey conducted by NCO found that 50% of local residents were ready and willing to volunteer, but that there was no easy, streamlined way to become involved. This inspired NCO to create the Volunteer Network, which provides a single point-of-entry process for volunteer application, processing, and referral. NCO has found that the most effective recruitment strategies center on networking and cultivating relationships. Within this framework, RSVP conducts general as well as targeted outreach and recruitment to senior centers, faith-based groups, service clubs, ethnic service organizations, current volunteers, etc. Strategies include:

- * Recruitment of termed-out AmeriCorps members, as well as AmeriCorps applicants who are not able to make the full time commitment that is required of AmeriCorps members.
- * VISTA members working with the Gardens Project are in an ideal position to demonstrate the value of volunteerism and encourage community gardeners to become RSVP volunteers.
- * Volunteer Network website (<http://volunteer.ncoinc.org/>).
- * NCO website (<http://www.ncoinc.org/>), including a video of interviews with current volunteers.
- * PSAs, news articles and press releases, brochures and posters.
- * Tabling at community events.
- * Newsletter articles that provide ideas for volunteers to use to recruit their friends and relatives.
- * Presentations to service clubs and other community-based organizations.
- * Special recruitment events, such as the Human Race and Volunteer Fairs.

2A-3. TRAINING. NCO maintains a quarterly training calendar for staff, volunteers, station supervisors, and the RSVP Advisory Group, as detailed below.

- * **RSVP STAFF.** To build capacity within the organization, RSVP staff attend and participate in numerous training events, including the Corporation for National and Community Service Conference, webinars, listservs, and local classes and trainings. During the past year, RSVP staff participated in the National Community Action Partnership Convention, the Cal-Neva Community Action Partnership Conference, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance training, Facilitation training, Time Bank training, and Volunteer Center Management training.
- * **VOLUNTEER STATION SUPERVISORS.** On-going training for station supervisors is provided

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through the quarterly electronic newsletters, which discuss best practice volunteer management strategies and upcoming training events and presentations. Information is also disseminated by email and written correspondence. One-to-one technical assistance with volunteer issues is provided during site visits and is also available to the station supervisor at any time.

* VOLUNTEERS. NCO offers quarterly orientation and training for potential, new, or current volunteers that covers: finding opportunities that match skills and interests; tracking volunteering time; confidentiality and boundaries; and volunteer roles and responsibilities. Training specific to RSVP is provided during the initial interview process and covers time tracking and other policies and procedures. Volunteers also participate in relevant individual and/or group trainings at their assigned stations, such as VITA training for income tax return preparation. One-to-one support is available to volunteers at any time. Finally, in partnership with other agencies, RSVP volunteers have access to a variety of community-based trainings, such as first aid, CPR, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), etc. For each topic, NCO maintains written curricula and training outlines. At the completion of trainings, volunteers are asked to complete brief assessments that are used to improve the delivery of future trainings.

2B. DEMOGRAPHICS. Local ethnicity is primarily white/non-Hispanic (71%), with 20% Hispanic, 6% Native American, 1% African American, and 2% other. RSVP volunteers are also diverse: approximately 86% are white/non-Hispanic, 10% are Hispanic, 2% are Native American, and 2% are of other ethnicities. By gender, approximately two-thirds of volunteers are female. About 10% of volunteers are veterans and about 10% are disabled. RSVP strives to provide programming that is inclusive in terms of volunteers recruited. Diversity is broadly defined, incorporating age, race, culture, religion, gender and sexual identification, socio-economic background, education, and abilities.

Although already working with a diverse group of RSVP volunteers, NCO recognizes the need to have a volunteer base that is more diverse than the general population, because community needs are often more severe in some minority groups. Strategies to further strengthen diversity include the following:

* Ability: Ensuring that all volunteer station facilities are ADA compliant to facilitate the participation of disabled volunteers and service recipients, and making it clear through promotional messages that volunteer opportunities are available to all, regardless of any disabilities they may have.

* Language: providing Spanish translation materials and Spanish interpretation for trainings. In some cases, such as the VITA program, support is provided for other languages as well.

* Age: Reviewing recruiting messages and materials, as well as activities and volunteer assignments,

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for age appropriateness. NCO has made a special effort to reach out to the Baby Boomer population, recognizing this age group as a largely underutilized volunteer pool. In addition to developing PSAs and news stories that highlight the work of volunteer boomers, Mendocino College and Leadership Mendocino are especially targeted in the effort to recruit boomer professionals interested in sharing their expertise with the community, as are churches, service clubs, and faith-based organizations. NCO also coordinates with large employers to contact employees who are retiring and tailors volunteer opportunities to allow volunteers to use their skills and feed their interests.

* Sexual Orientation: Trainings cover respect, being nonjudgmental, and adjusting strategies in accordance with individual characteristics, including sexual orientation.

* Race and ethnicity: Trainings for volunteers and staff include cultural sensitivity and cultural competence. This training is provided by NCO staff who have been trained as trainers in this topic. Ethnicity is considered in making volunteer assignments, whenever appropriate. Targeted recruitment reaches out to ethnic service organizations (Nuestra Casa Family Resource Center, Nuestra Alianza, Lake County Tribal Health, and Consolidated Tribal Health Project, for example) as well as organizations serving the disabled, such as Mayacama Industries, Ukiah Valley Association for Habilitation, and Lake County People Services.

* Veterans: Partnering with VetConnect will facilitate recruitment of veterans to work not only with VetConnect but also with other Service Activities.

2C. RETENTION AND RECOGNITION

RECOGNITION. In a large geographic area such as Lake and Mendocino Counties, hosting a single event is not a feasible approach to volunteer recognition. Instead, NCO collaborates with stations to organize volunteer recognition events specific to each community, such as ice cream socials and volunteer teas, and supports recognition efforts by providing presidential and congressional certificates, tokens of appreciation such as service hour pins, printing costs, etc. However, these strategies are not the only ways in which volunteer contributions are acknowledged. At every contact with program staff, volunteers hear the words, "thank you." Frequent contact is maintained with volunteers through the electronic newsletter, thank you notes, and a first-month check in call. Volunteers are also recognized in feature news articles. The NCO Facebook page (<http://snipurl.com/27ktfab>) is also a means of recognizing volunteers.

RETENTION. The preceding discussions on recruitment, training, and providing high quality

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volunteer experiences are also applicable to volunteer retention. At the time of intake, volunteers are provided with detailed information about RSVP policies and procedures (e.g., insurance, time tracking, job description, contact information) because volunteers are more likely to be contented and retained when they have clear information on station expectations and are given specific job assignments. RSVP's training for partner agencies covers these topics. Station retention is supported by providing partners with centralized volunteer recruitment and community awareness-raising, offering training programs for staff and volunteers, and supporting volunteer recognition efforts.

Reflection on the value of the volunteer experience supports volunteer retention because it highlights the volunteer's contribution and the ways in which the volunteer herself benefits. These include not only the recognized health benefits of volunteering, but also opportunities to build new social networks, learn new skills, and become informed about community events. To encourage volunteers to reflect on the meaning of their contribution, NCO offers on-going training opportunities and quarterly newsletter articles, conducts an annual volunteer satisfaction survey to support retention efforts, and encourages volunteers to make presentations to local service clubs and other groups.

Program Management

3A. MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEER STATIONS. NCO has a long history of managing and developing RSVP volunteer stations. NCO's years of experience have reinforced the importance of clear and frequent communication to the success of volunteer stations, and NCO has developed a monitoring rotation to ensure that every station is in compliance with its agreements. The RSVP Coordinator visits each station at least once each quarter, using a locally-developed checklist to assess compliance with specific RSVP regulations, policies, and procedures, including tracking volunteers time and service activities, and to ensure that stations are not engaged in any prohibited activities.

3B. DEVELOPMENT AND OVERSIGHT OF VOLUNTEER STATIONS. Potential new volunteer stations are identified first through an assessment of community needs and organizational priorities and then through community outreach, word-of-mouth, and networking. NCO has ample experience with monitoring project implementation and reports on several impact-based projects on a semi-annual basis. Community Action programs that incorporate impact-based programming include, among others, the Community Services Block Grant, disaster response programming, and the Gardens Project, which is funded by the USDA Community Foods Program.

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To monitor program effectiveness, RSVP staff develop annual goals and objectives during an annual retreat. NCO uses a variety of strategies to assess the extent to which these are achieved, including: volunteer surveys, volunteer station surveys, comparison of service data with annual plans and targets, and survey of participants in the food distribution and community gardening Service Activities. Data collected through these strategies provide formative guidance by identifying needs for program review or adjustment. Survey results are also shared with the NCO Board of Directors and with staff and volunteers through NCO's quarterly newsletter. Surveys of volunteers and volunteer stations also seek to identify any unmet needs that might be met by the program in the future.

3C. MINIMIZING DISRUPTION TO STATIONS. The proposed plan includes 3 new stations and "graduates" 2 stations. This means that NCO will not be collecting data or providing station oversight. It does not mean, however, that the stations will no longer be using volunteers to provide services. The decision to graduate a station is based on a number of criteria, including the station's past level of activity (whether they were able to meet target numbers); the station's compliance with data collection and reporting responsibilities; the services provided by the station (whether they support a national service measure); and the extent to which the station provides services that are in alignment with NCO's current program design. NCO's plans for minimizing disruption to the stations and their volunteers include opening service opportunities in other stations or inviting the volunteers who have been working with graduating stations to become active in community volunteer opportunities outside the RSVP purview. These strategies will be implemented on an individual basis with volunteers who are currently working with the graduating stations. Graduating stations and the reasons for their graduation follow:

- * Lake County Senior Peer Counseling Program: This is no longer an active program, meaning there will be no disruption of volunteers, since there are none currently serving.
- * NCO Head Start: Most volunteers currently working with Head Start are not in the RSVP age group. Those that are in the RSVP age group will be encouraged to continue working with Head Start as community volunteers or transferring to one of the RSVP volunteer stations.

New stations to be added in the coming year are listed below:

- * VetConnect Lake County: RSVP volunteers will assist local veterans by distributing emergency food and providing resource and referral information and other types of support.
- * Thrive Lake County: RSVP volunteers will work with the Thrive Time Bank to assist with local

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projects and generate time bank hours.

* Live Oak Senior Center: The Live Oak center, located in Clearlake Oaks, provides congregate meals as well as home delivery through a Meals on Wheels program.

3D. ORGANIZATIONAL TRACK RECORD IN PRIMARY FOCUS AREA. NCO has been developing volunteer programs since 1973, beginning with the Foster Grandparent and RSVP programs. In 1999, the Senior Companion program was initiated, and the Volunteer Network was created in 2003. Together, these programs have provided NCO with ample opportunity to become familiar with community resources and strengths and the unmet needs of older adults. NCO also operates Head Start, Early Head Start, Rural Communities Child Care, Redwood Caregiver Resource Center, and the Volunteer Resource Center. Through these and other programs, NCO has extensive experience in all phases of working with volunteers, including recruitment, orientation and training, technical assistance, ongoing supervision and support, and recognition of volunteer contributions. Descriptions of NCO's various volunteer service programs follow.

* Meals on Wheels. Meal distribution to homebound people has been part of NCO's RSVP program for decades. There are now 8 stations and 231 volunteers assisting with Meals on Wheels. NCO tracks the number of meals served and the number of meal recipients (outputs). Tracked outcomes have included the percentage of clients that ate at least 4 of 5 weekly meals (65% in 2012), measured through a weekly inventory of meals delivered and meals consumed, and the percentage of clients who maintained or improved their Nutritional Risk Score (48% in 2012), measured through administration of the Client Nutritional Risk Assessment.

* Food Pantry Food Distribution. NCO began managing the Clearlake Community Food Pantry in 2011 and, in partnership with volunteers from the Lake County Hunger Task Force, is currently distributing food to 300 families per month.

* Community Garden Development. NCO's Gardens Project creates access to local produce by organizing and supporting school and community gardens. NCO partners with more than 70 low-income neighborhoods, schools, and senior housing developments, working with them to increase food production, develop new community gardens, and strengthen leadership skills. Community and school gardens contribute to community food security while tackling issues of nutrition and obesity. Currently, more than 30 volunteers work with the program.

* Disaster Preparedness. Although not in the Primary Focus Area, Disaster Preparedness plays a significant role in NCO's RSVP Program. NCO began its focus on disaster preparedness in 2002 by

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conducting Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainings in collaboration with local law enforcement and emergency response agencies. Since then, more than 2,500 people have completed CERT training, which has been conducted 58 times; 12 trainings were conducted last year alone. NCO's CERT program has been recognized as a model for rural communities, and there are currently about 60 active CERT members. CERT training educates people about disaster preparedness and teaches them basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using this training, CERT volunteers can assist in their neighborhood or workplace when professional responders are not immediately available. Local CERTs have responded to a forest fire emergency and other emergency situations by manning command posts, answering phone inquiries, providing crowd control, posting evacuation notices, etc. For this service activity, NCO has collected training attendance sheets to track the number of community members completing CERT training (output) as well as the percentage of training participants that passed the CERT certification exam (outcome), which was 98% in 2012, and the percentage of trained individuals that reported participating in at least one disaster response activity (outcome), which was 95% in 2012.

3E. ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REGULATIONS. The RSVP Advisory Group includes representatives of RSVP stations (Plowshares, Thrive Lake County, Ukiah Senior Center, and VetConnect) and other partners (Lake Family Resource Center, Friedman's Home Improvements, and Mendo-Lake Credit Union). It meets quarterly to review progress, challenges, plans, reports on volunteer recruitment, assignments, service activities, survey results, and progress in meeting Performance Measures. This group helps to plan volunteer recognition strategies and assists with assessing community needs and resource development. The Volunteer Network Managers are responsible for developing and tracking the renewal dates for volunteer station Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), which specify the target number of volunteers to be placed at the station, service activities to be performed by RSVP volunteers, target numbers for service activities, communication plans, data collection and reporting requirements, and the effective dates of the MOU. NCO uses a comprehensive volunteer intake form to ensure that RSVP volunteers are eligible, in terms of age, community of residence, commitment and willingness to abide by RSVP regulations and requirements, and background, to serve as volunteers with the program.

Organizational Capability

4A. PROGRAMMATIC AND FISCAL OVERSIGHT

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PROGRAMMATIC OVERSIGHT. Incorporated in 1968, NCO is the Community Action Agency for Lake and Mendocino Counties. NCO's 12-member Board includes low-income residents and community members as well as representatives of local governments and organizations. Effective programmatic oversight is provided through the chain of command, with NCO's Executive Director providing general direction and the RSVP Program Director responsible for supervising staff and providing effective management of the project. The RSVP Program Director holds scheduled supervisory meetings with staff on a monthly basis or more frequently as needed.

FISCAL OVERSIGHT. NCO manages an annual budget of \$12 million and maintains a fiscal management system that: accurately reflects fiscal transactions, with all necessary controls and safeguards; provides good audit trails; and provides accounting data so that cost effectiveness of projects can be readily determined. Accounts are maintained in accordance with the principles of fund accounting, through which resources are classified according to the objectives specified by donors, officials, and governing boards. Separate accounts are maintained for each fund and funds are restricted for particular operating purposes in accordance with the conditions specified in each contract or grant award. All transactions require at least two signatures, with larger amounts requiring prior administrative approval. Each year, NCO's Chief Financial Officer oversees the development of fiscal reports for 52 contracts; prepares 270 fiscal accounting reports, including monthly income and expense reports and quarterly budget comparisons; issues 6,000 checks for the organization's 250 employees (through a payroll service); issues 25,000 accounts payable checks; and prepares for an annual agency audit. NCO's most recent audit (reported December 2012) expressed the opinion that NCO's financial statements provided, in all material respects, the financial position of NCO in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles.

RSVP's annual budget is prepared in coordination with the Accounting Department, with the oversight of NCO administration. RSVP receives a monthly accounting to facilitate budget monitoring. The Accounting Department processes RSVP financial transactions, guided by State and Federal regulations to maintain checks and balances, and all financial records are subject to annual audit.

The RSVP program seeks cash and in-kind contributions through plea letters, personal requests, press releases, informal networking, and collaborative projects with program partners. In-kind donations

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support volunteer recognition and other events by providing space for meetings and trainings. Cash and in-kind contributions have been donated by local governments, American Red Cross chapters, local business sponsors, and Community Foundations, among others. Continued funding research, recruiting, training, promotion, and capacity building are essential duties of the RSVP Director.

4B. KEY STAFF POSITIONS

RSVP staff are experienced and receive professional training (as detailed in Section 2A-3 above) to ensure the necessary skills to carry out their assignments. Furthermore, they have developed strong connections with community partners that will facilitate oversight of volunteer stations and volunteer coordination. Job descriptions for each position detail staff responsibilities to ensure that all tasks are carried out. NCO uses a team approach for managing RSVP, and all staff meet for coordination meetings each month to ensure clear communication and responsibilities.

RSVP PROGRAM DIRECTOR. The Program Director will administer the grant and supervise staff. Patty Bruder, the NCO Community Action Director, has worked for NCO for 27 years and has been the CAA Director since 1996. She holds a BA in Community Development and excels in partnership building.

VOLUNTEER NETWORK MANAGERS. Volunteer Network Managers are responsible for coordinating outreach, recruitment, station assignments, training, monitoring, identification of volunteer needs, and assisting with recognition activities. Job qualifications include an Associate Degree and/or a minimum of two years experience in the nonprofit sector or equivalent skills. The Lake County Volunteer Network Manager, Tammy Alakszay, has worked with NCO Community Action since early 2012. Previously, she worked with the Lake County Office of Education and the Lake County AmeriCorps Program, among others. Ms. Alakszay has attended Mendocino College and has volunteered with multiple Lake County programs. Rebecca Enberg has worked with NCO since 2005 and became the Mendocino County Volunteer Network Manager in 2013. Previous experience includes working with a variety of nonprofits, hospitals, and faith-based groups. She holds an AA degree in Behavior Sciences from De Anza Community College.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITER. A part-time VISTA member (20% FTE) will assist with volunteer recruitment as an in-kind contribution from First FIVE Mendocino. Following the conclusion of the

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VISTA's term of service, NCO will assign a new VISTA to continue recruitment activities.

4C. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

At the organizational level, NCO maintains comprehensive policies and procedures for all requirements and tasks, including personnel policies and travel and expense procedures. Project personnel are managed through NCO's Human Resources Department, which provides each staff person with an employee handbook. Policies and procedures outlined in the employee handbook are designed to facilitate an efficient and productive workforce and ensure equitable personnel management for all current and future employees. The handbook covers: payroll processing, grievance procedure, vacation and sick leave, industrial injury and illness, family care leave, jury duty, and subpoenaed absence. Internal policies, including a travel policy, guide payment and reimbursement of expenses. Employees receive orientation, job descriptions, annual evaluations, and benefits through the Human Resources Department. Human Resources also provides mandatory trainings in sexual harassment, cultural sensitivity, etc. Updates or revisions to policies are communicated to employees through paycheck inserts, written memos, and/or email.

NCO is a stable and well-funded organization with well-kept facilities that are ADA compliant. Office and other equipment is maintained through private contracts and can be utilized by staff for RSVP activities. NCO's Information Technology Department maintains computers and networks, including providing training and support to staff and ensuring that systems are up-to-date and virus-free. Capital assets are managed through a straightforward inventory process that identifies each asset with an inventory number and follows a maintenance schedule.

4D. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

NCO Community Action has the capacity, the relationships, and the resources to coordinate and manage the RSVP Program. NCO Community Action manages \$501,000 in Community Service Block Grant funds each year and has successfully competed for and managed major grants from federal, state, and foundation funders. Many projects are planned and coordinated with a wide number of like-minded organizations, community groups, businesses, and governmental agencies that deal with the reduction of poverty. Representative grants are listed below:

* RSVP funding, beginning in the 1970s and continuing through the present.

* California Department of Public Health (\$255,000) for the Better Education And Nutrition for

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Students (BEANS) Project, which trains teen peer educators to provide nutrition education to students. Although this grant has ended, project activities are continuing through funding from the County Departments of Public Health and Social Services.

* USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (\$97,629). MCGROW: Mendocino County Grows new farmers, Renews agricultural skills, Organizes training and capacity building for farmers and market managers, and Works to increase production capacity.

* FoodCorps. In 2013 NCO was assigned a FoodCorps member to work at both micro and macro levels, focusing on individual schools and at the system level to build farm-to-school capacity.

* USDA Community Food Project (\$300,000). The Gardens Project works to increase food production, develop new community gardens, and strengthen garden leadership skills.

* California Dept. of Community Services and Development, Targeted Food Initiative (\$100,000). NCO is working with Ford Street Project (FSP) to strengthen individual- and community-level food self-reliance while addressing the needs of FSP's homeless clients by providing trainings covering nutrition and family and institutional cooking skills; market testing a food product; and developing market gardens on the FSP campus.

* Redwood Health Care District (\$15,000). In Lake County, the Redwood Health Care District provides funding for purchasing produce from food banks and local farmers for distribution through Clearlake Community Food Pantry.

Other

NOT APPLICABLE

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

NOT APPLICABLE