

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

An estimated 240 volunteers will serve under the RSVP program. Some of their activities will include transportation, education, health and nutrition, tax preparation, and disaster preparedness. The primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures. At the end of the three year grant, it is anticipated that the RSVP volunteers will gain a worthwhile, rewarding volunteer experience while helping to fill community needs. The CNCS federal investment of \$ 37,336 will be supplemented by \$ 20,522 of Saratoga County funds.

## Strengthening Communities

Saratoga County located north of the state capital of Albany is 812 square miles of urban, suburban and rural areas. Saratoga County is of one of the fastest growing "senior" (60+) populations in New York State. From 2000 to 2010 the census showed an increase of 43% of the age 60+ population. This translates into an increase of 13,415 seniors. This number of seniors generates a number of community needs that have to be addressed such as transportation, food delivery, insurance information and health education programs. The RSVP has chosen Healthy Futures as the primary focus area because of the need for seniors to age in place and to have access to care.

The service activities in Healthy Futures; transportation and food delivery will contribute to homebound individuals having increased social support and social ties. This in turn will lead to them being able to be sustained in their homes for a longer period. Such supports are crucial to the individual's independence and well-being. Data collection for this activity will include a survey sent to the individuals receiving the service to determine if the activity is beneficial.

Under the Healthy Futures Objective the grantee will provide trained volunteers to deliver access to health care by providing information on health insurance and health benefits programs. Data will be collected using counseling logs and post-surveys developed by the grantee to ensure that the clients are receiving the correct information.

The grantee will also be providing health education programs: Living Healthy Workshop and Osteobusters. Trained volunteers will facilitate the programs and collect the data using an attendance log.

All of the logs, records and surveys will be turned in to and reviewed by the Project Director periodically to ensure that the Performance Measures are being met. Changes will be made as determined by the information received by the Project Director.

## Recruitment and Development

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The strength of the RSVP program lies in its ability to recruit and retain volunteers. The process of recruiting volunteers with highly desirable skills and innovative ideas enables us to build the foundation for a strong and durable infrastructure. There are several recruitment methods that will be employed that will be used to maximize the number of volunteers participating. During the initial recruitment process, our energies will be directed at volunteers who will service our primary focus area which is Healthy Futures.

Our recruitment will be done by contacting presently enrolled RSVP volunteers to determine their interests and needs to correlate with our primary focus area. Additionally, presentations will be conducted and materials will be provided for distribution in retirement preparation packages of local employers. This will be done by both current volunteers and the RSVP Director. This process would also include contacting agencies and or organizations frequented by older persons, such as senior centers, senior nutrition sites, and the AARP. RSVP's Advisory Council and Project Director will pursue opportunities to host presentations and educate the public about RSVP and to recruit volunteers.

Other avenues of recruiting volunteers will include contacting the local press, RSVP Volunteer newsletters, Office for the Aging Newsletters, various community newsletters, church bulletins, volunteer fairs, and volunteer websites including Volunteermatch.com. New opportunities can exist within inactive volunteers. There can be many reasons for being inactive such as the volunteer was not completely satisfied with prior duties or assignment, personal responsibilities or health reasons. It is important to reconnect with them to see if they are interested in becoming an active participant in the RSVP of Saratoga County. It is important to include them in the RSVP mailings and recognition activities if there is potential for reactivation.

The internet is a valuable resource in disseminating information to the public and demonstrating the importance of volunteering. Though we are reaching out to a community that is not as tech savvy as the new and upcoming generations, seniors are becoming more technologically advanced for other reasons, maybe to keep in touch with family, reach out to old friends, or using online applications and researching data that was not readily available to them in the past. In addition, the baby boomer generation is now entering their senior years and not all, but most, are computer literate. Saratoga County RSVP has a plan to increase recruitment and maximize potential volunteer opportunities through using online resources to a greater capacity than in years passed. There are several websites that offer their services for free and are simple to navigate. Once you are on the website, they ask demographic questions that lead you to the Saratoga County RSVP. There, we are able to put what

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type of volunteers we are looking for and can post the opportunities that we have available. For example if the Osteoporosis prevention classes need more volunteers to teach due to an increase in number of participants, a job description would be posted detailing the duties of the position and contact information.

In reviewing our recruitment process for new volunteers, there are some procedures that have to be changed or enhanced. RSVP needs to meet the challenges of providing interesting, stimulating satisfying, and flexible opportunities to attract volunteers. In order to have a successful program it is essential that certain actions be taken.

After showing interest in volunteering through RSVP, potential volunteers will be scheduled for an initial interview with the project staff. This interview will be private and confidential, allowing adequate time for discussion. This is the time to become acquainted with and establish a friendly, mutually supportive relationship with the prospective RSVP volunteer. The interview topics that will be discussed include interests of the applicant and their motivation to serve, background information on the potential volunteer including work and volunteer history, roles, assignments, and types of activities. The volunteer would be made aware of the specific types of assignments currently available. Then it is important to make sure that the applicant is confident that he or she is able to perform available assignments with, or without reasonable accommodation.

Volunteers would then be given an orientation specific to the RSVP program. This would include the benefits of RSVP and procedures for reporting hours, along with the RSVP handbook. Once they are assigned to a station, that station is responsible for training the volunteer for that specific assignment. Follow up is then done to ensure the success of the placement and that both the volunteer and the station are satisfied with the assignment. Volunteers will have an open line of communication with the RSVP Director and are kept up to date on RSVP activities, issues, and volunteer opportunities. They will also be asked for their input and suggestions via a quarterly newsletter.

The RSVP Director is initiating a plan to reach out to more veterans and provide more volunteer opportunities for them to become a part of this RSVP. With the lack of current opportunities for veterans, the RSVP Director will partner with the Veterans Affairs Office of Saratoga County. Their office is in need of volunteers to answer phones, complete mailings, and to do outreach to other veterans to inform them of the benefits available to them.

Unfortunately, Saratoga County is not a very diverse community with 94% of the population being white. The RSVP Director will actively recruit all races and ethnicities as it strives to be inclusive of all those that are interested in volunteering. RSVP will partner with Office for the Aging to attend all

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outreach events and trainings relative to diversity, sexual orientations and limited English proficiency to ensure that the RSVP Director is knowledgeable in those areas and sensitive to those individuals.

Finally, in order to retain volunteers, the RSVP recognizes expressions of thanks are not just polite. There needs to be an ongoing effort to show appreciation for the RSVP volunteers. One of the best ways to recognize the volunteers is to treat them with respect and give them support and praise throughout the year. On an annual basis, the RSVP in conjunction and with support from the Office for the Aging holds a recognition dinner. This event is planned by the Advisory Council who play a significant role in this occasion. In addition, the quarterly RSVP newsletter that is mailed to all volunteers identifies all new volunteers and volunteer service anniversaries.

### **Program Management**

It is the job of the RSVP Director to manage the volunteers and give them the support they need to perform their duties. It is critical that they have someone that they can turn to for advice, guidance, and feedback. Once the volunteer is placed at an assignment, the station needs to provide the materials, training, direction, and encouragement to enable volunteers to perform their assigned tasks. Each station is responsible to create an environment that empowers and fosters volunteers to perform their duties. Vested volunteers are willing to take responsibility for what they are doing, contribute more than expected, and perceive themselves as an important part of the organization. Volunteers who are held accountable perform better. An effective station should encourage confidence in volunteers, assess their level of satisfaction and encourage personal and professional growth. The station will also provide the orientation, review expectations, and arrange for training and equipment. Once there is success in the establishment of the stations, it is imperative to keep routine and automatic contact with them as well as the volunteers. The station needs to develop positive relationships with the volunteers and convey that the organization needs and values their contribution. In addition to sharing information with volunteers, the station needs to take the time to gather the volunteers' input. By seeking information from these volunteers regularly, stations can get information that will help the RSVP maximize volunteers and service to their community. Evaluation and feedback is necessary to ensure the RSVP is being optimally managed. This affords the volunteers the opportunity to discuss their assignment. The evaluation for Saratoga County RSVP will include a review of past performance, discussion about the present, and plans for the future. This is also a good time to review the volunteers' job description to see if it correctly describes his or her work. Evaluation of the programs that the Saratoga County RSVP directly sponsors will be more in-depth. This is the key to finding out if what the RSVP is doing works and if everyone is satisfied.

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Saratoga County RSVP has a very well-known and successful Osteoporosis Prevention Exercise Program. These classes are taught by trained volunteer leaders, men and women aged 55 and older. The programs focus is to help participants maintain independence through exercise, safety, nutrition and strength training. The program is low impact and uses repetitive movements. A combination of both leg and hand weights are used. The program also features balance exercises aimed at preventing falls and fractures. Stretching exercises are included at the beginning and end of each session. There are currently 10 classes throughout the county which are reaching over 200 individuals age 55 and over. These volunteer leaders are not only gaining the knowledge needed for this program but are developing relationships and are very enthusiastic about what they are doing in order to help out their local community. They remain dedicated and positive as they learn and grow with their participants. The number of participants continues to grow along with the demand of more classes. In order to keep this program as successful as it is, there is a need for more Osteo leaders, which also means more recruiting. It is very important for the RSVP director to regularly visit the sites in which these classes are taking place. This gives a chance for the Director to meet with leaders and participants to determine if their needs are being met.

Another leadership opportunity for the RSVP volunteers is the Living Healthy Program. Volunteers attend a four day training to become certified "peer leaders". They are then qualified to lead their own group of up to 18 participants in a six week workshop series. The Living Healthy workshop series empowers participants to self-manage the ups and downs of living with chronic conditions like arthritis, heart disease, osteoporosis, and diabetes. This is an evidence based program that provides techniques, improving communication skills, as well as establishing nutritional goals, and exercise. The RSVP Program will continue to promote the Living Healthy Program by reaching out to the county by attending as many local service groups, senior centers, senior housing and utilizing community news publication. The Living Healthy program is one that continues to thrive, and as more people become aware of it and the positive outcomes, more people living with a chronic condition are interested in taking the six-week class. As the programs grows, so will the need for more for more peer leaders.

The RSVP Senior Transportation has been in operation for approximately fifteen years. The purpose of this program is to support the continuity of independent living by ensuring that seniors have the ability to get to medical appointments. Many of the appointments are out of county which for some individuals would be cost prohibitive with private transportation. This service is critical to those who use it and the volunteers realize how important their role is as well. Although a RSVP volunteer is

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responsible for setting up the pick-up schedule for appointments, each driver has the flexibility to make changes as needed. This volunteer opportunity appeals to those who do not like stationary assignments and like to directly connect with others. A bond has been known to form between our drivers and riders, especially when it is someone who uses transportation on a regular basis. In order to make sure that RSVP is fulfilling their duties, a yearly survey is distributed and returned back to the RSVP Director.

The RSVP Senior Transportation is very popular, especially in the sense that it gives homebound seniors the opportunity to still feel like they have some sort of independence. Within the past few months, Saratoga County Office for the Aging has received more requests for this service. This will necessitate the need to recruit additional drivers.

Saratoga County RSVP has established an RSVP Advisory Council which functions in a capacity to the sponsor, Saratoga County Office for the Aging. The Advisory Council assists the project staff in matters affecting planning support, significant program and personnel staffing decisions including the formation of basic and local policies for the project. New potential members of the Advisory Council will be given an application which indicates that they have met the minimum age requirement of 55 with specificity that they are interested in being a part of the Council. New members of the Council will be given copies of the established bylaws which state when meetings will take place, specify adequate representation, and how the meetings are to be conducted. The council will include officers such as a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Secretary which will be elected annually from the Membership of the Advisory Council. Once established, regular meetings shall be held at least three times per calendar year. With the exception of the Membership Representative of the County Supervisor, unexcused absence from three (3) consecutive meetings will require a review of membership status by the Advisory Council.

A notice of meetings shall be indicated by written notice with mailing of the minutes of each regular meeting. Notice of special meetings shall be by mail or telephone to all Council members specifying the hour, date, place and items of business to be discussed at least one (1) week in advance.

The Advisory Council shall enact and amend all necessary by-laws for its governance subject to the provisions of the contract governing the operation of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program. By-laws shall be adopted, amended or repealed by majority vote of the members present at duly constituted meeting of the Advisory Council given a minimum of seven (7) days written notice of the substance of those changes.

Memorandums of Understanding will be negotiated prior to placing volunteers and describe program

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requirements, working relationships, and mutual responsibilities. The MOU will include general conditions applicable to all projects and volunteer stations and special conditions applicable to the local volunteer station. The MOU must be reviewed and renegotiated at least every three years. The MOU may be amended at any time by mutual agreement. Projects are encouraged to require volunteer stations to notify them as soon as any circumstances arise which could affect or require changing the provisions of MOU, such as the volunteer station's ability to meet the commitments for providing specified contributions toward project costs, changes in the sites where volunteers serve, or other conditions which have a bearing on volunteer assignments.

The Memorandum of Understanding will include:

1. The name of the volunteer, street and email addresses, telephone and fax numbers of the volunteer station
2. Number of volunteer's assignments projected to be available with or through the volunteer station.
3. The name of the primary volunteer station staff member responsible for day-to-day supervision of RSVP volunteers and a description of supervisory arrangements.
4. Volunteer station and sponsor contributions to support RSVP Volunteers (meals, insurance, transportation, and recognition and/or other project costs.
5. The volunteer station's responsibilities in relation to implementing Programming for Impact and performance measurement, as applicable.
6. Volunteer station agreement to provide required reports.
7. Provision for the safety of the RSVP volunteers while on assignment
8. Provision for a Letter of Agreement for in-home assignment
9. A listing of geographic locations/sites, other than private homes.

Regular and consistent oversight of the stations as well as being available to volunteers is the key to success of the RSVP.

### **Organizational Capability**

Carmella Marozzi, the new Director will be responsible for RSVP grants as well as monitoring the program, volunteers, volunteer supervisors, and stations. She started with this position August 2013 and is looking to enhance the Saratoga County RSVP by increasing the number of volunteers, effectively managing the volunteers and stations, as well as adding new programs and marketing techniques. She graduated from Siena College located in Loudonville, New York in August of 2013 with a degree in Marketing Management. She will be putting a new twist on the way the whole

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program is marketed and increasing outreach into the community to recruit more volunteers with the best potential.

Saratoga County Office for the Aging has proven to be both a supportive and encouraging sponsor for RSVP. In addition to providing space for the RSVP program, Office for the Aging offers support through the Director of the Office for the Aging as well as a fiscal person to oversee the budget of the RSVP program.

The Director for Office for the Aging, Sandra Cross, is the direct supervisor of the RSVP Director and supplies support and guidance as needed. She has much experience and knowledge with issues facing seniors and connections with many resources. Director Cross has been with Saratoga County for over 25 years. Sandra started in the field with Adult Services and then advanced to the supervisor position. In 1999 she was made Director of Office for the Aging. She also returned to school receiving her MBA. With Director Cross's longevity in Saratoga County she has many contacts and resources at her ready. She can easily enact knowledge, secure information, and resources through her network of advisories. Christine Sokol is a principal account clerk within Office for the Aging. She is responsible for budgeting, purchasing, and vouchering for State and Federal programs. Her competence at managing multiple funding streams and supervising a \$2.8 million budget makes her a perfect for overseeing and monitoring the RSVP budget. She is responsible for preparing the RSVP budget and requesting funds quarterly. In addition, she completes all fiscal reports as required. She and the RSVP Project Director work closely to ensure that the funds serve the needs of the project.

Being sponsored by Office for the Aging, which is a County agency, means that the RSVP must follow the same procedures, guidelines and protocols as set forth by Saratoga County. Fiscal management, personal management and purchasing guidelines are already in place at the County level and will be followed. Specific guidelines are already in place regarding vouchering and reporting. Although this is the first year of a competitive grant for the RSVP, Office for the Aging, has been managing Federal and State grants for many years including previous RSVP grants.

### Other

N/A

### PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A