

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

An estimated 300 volunteers will serve in the RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties. Some of their activities will include (1) improving academic performance in literacy through the "THRIVE! Legacy of Literacy RSVP" public school tutoring program, (2) reduce childhood obesity and increase access to nutritious food through "Allies for Health RSVP" by providing support, services and education to alleviate long-term hunger, and (3) capacity building activities to increase the ability of CNCS supported nonprofit organizations in the areas of volunteer management and leveraging cash resources to enhance community-wide volunteerism efforts. The primary focus area of this project is education. At the end of the three-year grant, over 675 students in Muskegon and Oceana Counties will show improved academic performance in literacy on standardized reading skill level assessments. The three-year CNCS federal investment of \$252,429 year will be supplemented by \$75,726 grantee local match.

## Strengthening Communities

The communities served by RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana counties are located in West Michigan, on the shores of Lake Michigan. Muskegon County covers a land area of 499 square miles, bordering Lake Michigan on the west. The county is a mix of urban and rural, relying heavily on industrial manufacturing, tourism and health care for economic support. Oceana County is located just north of Muskegon County, also on the shores of Lake Michigan. Oceana County covers a land area of 512 square miles, with a largely rural population, relying heavily on agriculture and tourism for economic support.

The Primary Focus Area of RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties is Education, with 50% of unduplicated RSVP volunteers (150) placed in assignments in this area.

There is a great need in both counties to target K-5 grade students who are economically disadvantaged or who have special or exceptional needs with CNCS supported educational programs leading to measureable outcomes in the area of improved academic performance in literacy.

In Muskegon County, 35.5% (713 students) of students tested "not proficient" in reading on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) testing. This is higher than the state rate of 32.3% not proficient in reading. Specifically, in the Muskegon Heights Public Schools Academy

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System, 64% of fourth graders scored "not proficient" in reading on the MEAP test. In the Muskegon Public Schools, 56% of students in five elementary schools scored "not proficient" in fourth grade reading; and in Holton Public Schools, 46% of fourth grade students scored "not proficient" in reading on the MEAP test.

In Oceana County, 41.2% (93 students) tested "not proficient" in reading on the MEAP test. The greatest need exists in the Shelby Public Schools where 45 % of fourth graders scored "not proficient" in reading on the MEAP test.

Each year 150 volunteers "THRIVE! Legacy of Literacy RSVP" volunteers will provide CNCS supported educational programs through inter-generational tutoring and literacy support for 300 students per year at six station sites in Muskegon and Oceana Counties. Each RSVP volunteer will provide a minimum of one hour of service per week for a ten week session. There will be 2-3 sessions per year, depending upon the school location. The before mentioned output will result in the outcome of at least 225 students who demonstrate improved academic performance in literacy on a standardized pre/post evaluation.

Through a partnership with Muskegon Public Schools, Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System, Holton Public Schools, and Shelby Public Schools the RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana counties staff will ensure National Performance Measures for output ED2. and outcome ED5 are measured, collected, and managed. Each station site will use an attendance log on a daily basis to document the students participating in CNCS supported tutoring and literacy support. In addition, RSVP staff will receive the standardized pre and post data from each station partner documenting the Reading Skill Level Assessment; managing the data in an internal database to report program-wide outcomes.

### **Recruitment and Development**

Staff from the RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties and sponsor agency will provide high quality volunteer assignments and training to ensure effective RSVP engagement in activities that address identified community needs in education, healthy futures, and capacity building.

In order to ensure RSVP members have high quality assignment and opportunities such as sharing their experiences, abilities, and skills to improve their communities and themselves through service in

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their communities, the RSVP staff and sponsor agency will:

(1) Build on the strengths of the existing RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana County by developing work plans and volunteer assignments that result in minimal disruption to current RSVP volunteers, but ensure a greater level of community impact.

(2) Encouraging members to engage in new volunteer opportunities that support the greater community collaboration, including: local and national days of community service, participation in health and education activities, as well as capacity building with nonprofit organizations.

(3) Hold quarterly lunch and learn speaker series for volunteer managers and organizational leaders on the CNCS identified "8 Core Competencies: best practices" topics for community volunteerism, including but not limited to participant recruitment and development, volunteer leveraging, community engagement development, and evaluation.

In order to ensure RSVP volunteers are trained to be highly effective in the Primary Focus Area, Other Focus Areas, and Capacity Building, the RSVP staff and sponsor agency will:

(1) Station partners will train RSVP volunteers in Education focus area, Healthy Futures focus area and Capacity Building focus area. Training will include a general volunteer orientation, development of skills specific to the volunteer assignment, and cultural sensitivity/diversity training, etc.

(2) Developing leadership potential of RSVP members through involvement in training, participation on the Advisory Board, participation on community-wide committees for education, health, and Capacity Building of nonprofits, as well as and through specialized training provided at station partner sites to prepare RSVP volunteers for work in education, health, and capacity work plans.

(3) Plan, organize, and hold volunteerism fairs for the lakeshore region, allowing nonprofit organizations to inform community members about volunteer opportunities and membership in the RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties.

Muskegon County is a mix of urban and rural communities. The county economy is based on the expanding health care industry, industrial/advanced manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism. The median household income in the county is \$40,298, with 14.4% of the population below the poverty line. The county's total population is 170,182, with 25.6% (43,612) of the residents over age 55.

Muskegon County has a diverse population, with 77.3% White, 14.3% Black/African-American, .9% Native American, .6% Asian, and 5.1% Hispanic/Latino.

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Oceana County is a predominantly rural county. The county economy relies heavily up agriculture, and is home to many fruit and vegetable processors. There is a large migrant population working in the agriculture area who have varying degrees of English proficiency. The median household income in Oceana County is \$40,422, with 19.1% of the population below the poverty line. The county's total population is 26,310, with 30% (8,049) over age 55. Oceana County's diverse population includes 83% White, .6% Black/African-American, .4% Asian, 14.2% Hispanic/Latino, 1.6% other.

The RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties will work with staff tasked with the recently established Lakeshore Community Engagement Initiative lead by the sponsor agency, United Way of the Lakeshore. This initiative will serve as the 'missing link' for volunteerism in Muskegon and Oceana Counties by leading and facilitating the strategic planning process necessary to maximize local volunteer impact. This community engagement initiative will include (1) conducting a needs assessment for volunteerism, (2) strategic planning to maximize volunteer impact, (3) providing professional development/support for implementing best practice strategies in local nonprofits stations sites in the areas of recruitment, orienting and training, supervision and management, volunteer development, and the use of outcome-based evaluation, action planning and logic models as an ongoing management tools, etc.

An outcome of the Lakeshore Community Engagement Initiative is to create targeted recruitment plans with a variety of targeted community group,s including individuals from diverse races, ethnicity, gender, and degrees of English language proficiency. These targeted plans will focus on increased recruitment strategies for youth, adult, and senior volunteerism; including growing the Muskegon and Oceana County RSVP membership.

The RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties supports volunteers with disabilities through maintaining a variety of community-based service locations and activities in the Community Priority area entitled 'Cultural Preservation'. The variety of volunteer assignments available to RSVP volunteers through this work plan will enable members with specific needs to serve and fulfill a community need. The RSVP staff will work with the sponsor agency, United Way of the Lakeshore, who has a close partnership with several community organizations serving individuals with disabilities (including Disability Connection, Arc Muskegon, Goodwill Industries, Pioneer Resources, and Love

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INC); enabling the development of individualized volunteer assignments at locations that can meet the unique needs of a specific RSVP.

The RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties will retain volunteers through the expansion and development of a Lakeshore Community Engagement Initiative led by the sponsor agency, United Way of the Lakeshore. Volunteers will have access to the greater community volunteerism efforts and opportunities through the Hands On Connect volunteer website, and local and national days of service hosted by United Way of the Lakeshore. Other strategies include (1) periodic member check-in, (2) annual evaluation and improvement, (3) engagement and motivation of members through themed impact efforts including "THRIVE! Legacy of Literacy" (education focus area) and "Allies for Health" (Healthy futures area) RSVP volunteer programs.

The RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties will recognize volunteers through a quarterly newsletter, website 'volunteer impact stories,' an annual volunteer recognition event, and inclusion of RSVP member service in community-wide volunteerism efforts through the Lakeshore Community Engagement Initiative.

### **Program Management**

The RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties will ensure management of volunteer stations in compliance with program regulations through two staff positions dedicated to implementing the program at the community level. A full time RSVP Project Manager supported by a part-time Coordinator of RSVP Volunteers will work closely with station partner locations. Additionally, the RSVP staff will be supported by the United Way Director of Community Engagement, who will manage fiscal and programmatic reporting, and provide professional support to the implementation of the RSVP program. Each station partner will participate in a one-on-one program orientation that covers program regulations including the role of the station partner, RSVP volunteers, RSVP program staff, and the sponsor agency. Each station partner receives a station partner folder and works directly with the RSVP Project Manager and Coordinator to develop volunteer job descriptions detailing service activities.

The RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana County staff will implement several strategies to develop and oversee volunteer stations. In addition to enabling station sites to participate in capacity building professional development on effective volunteer engagement strategies, the RSVP project staff will

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deliver RSVP member newsletters to the station sites to ensure regular contact. On a monthly basis RSVP project staff will conduct on-site support visits to support RSVP members and ensure that volunteers are performing their assigned service activities.

The sponsor agency United Way of the Lakeshore has been playing a critical role in redefining, planning and building infrastructure to meet the changing community needs with regard to volunteerism in Muskegon and Oceana Counties. Through the mutual partnership with the existing RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties, the United Way has assisted in the process of building on the strengths of the existing RSVP program. The United Way of the Lakeshore has been a key supporter in the development of new impact/outcome-based work plans and volunteer assignments that result in minimal disruption to current RSVP volunteers, but ensure a greater level of community impact. As a whole, there is a shift in providing support for volunteerism in the two county area from 'recruiting and matching volunteers to nonprofits' to a Lakeshore Engagement Initiative that focuses on building the capacity and infrastructure of individual nonprofits and their staff to recruit, place, train, and manage volunteer using best practice strategies -- an initiative founded on the use of evaluation as a daily tool to maximize volunteer impact, improve nonprofit capacity, improve the experience of the volunteer, and increasing the value of volunteers with in nonprofits.

The majority of the station partner sites in this project plan are part of the current RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties. For the minimal number of stations that were graduated before the start of the 2012-2013 program year, few RSVP volunteers were disrupted, as many were involved in multiple activities. Individual members were coached through a process of encouraging the continued involvement in 'other' volunteerism in the community while concurrently continuing as a member of the RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana County by selecting an activity in the current work plans. The sponsor agency United Way of the Lakeshore has a long track record in the Education focus area in both Muskegon and Oceana Counties, including a strong history with area school districts. The United Way's overall philosophy is to advance the common good by focusing on education, income and health - the building blocks to a good life. A quality education that leads to a stable job, enough income to support a family and good life - these are our goals for the residents of Muskegon and Oceana Counties.

In 2008 the United Way of the Lakeshore set 10-year goals. In Education, the goal is to cut the

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number of students who drop out by half. This requires closer attention to students as they move through the school system, ensuring they are achieving academically. Based on recent achievement data reviewed by the THRIVE team, a collaborative of businesses, educators and community leaders, a focus was established to implement community-wide programs ensuring all students are proficient in reading by 4th grade. The THRIVE team for this community-wide education goal is being led by staff at the United Way of the Lakeshore who envision the connected role of RSVP members serving as "THRIVE! Legacy of Literacy" volunteers as critical to achieving this goal. Currently the sponsor agency is working with the existing RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties to enable the establishment and implementation of necessary processes to measure performance in the 2012-2013 RSVP project work plans. The United Way of the Lakeshore is critical in creating the collaborative partnerships with schools in the education focus area for obtaining pre and post assessment data from standardized reading skill level assessments at multiple school sites as well as putting in place instruments for measuring and tracking progress toward the project outputs.

In addition, the United Way of the Lakeshore has experience in the area of education through collaborating with nonprofits, businesses and individuals in the community. The United Way supports and advocates for early childhood education through the Born Learning campaign, works with the Great Start Collaborative, supports safe educational opportunities after school through Lights On Afterschool and support of 21st Century grants; and is working to increase the high school graduation rate and college readiness through work in the Muskegon Opportunity college access efforts.

The RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana County Advisory Council consists of members of the current Board of Directors from the existing RSVP program, in coordination with other community volunteerism partners to be identified including station partner representatives and RSVP member representatives. The RSVP staff and Advisory Council will use the logic models and action plans in an ongoing manner to ensure all goals and objectives are met.

The RSVP Advisory Council will be supported by the sponsor agency's Lakeshore Impact Council, a committee of the Board of Directors which monitors community needs, manages resources -- both financial and human -- and oversees community engagement activities. Additionally, the Community Engagement Director will oversee grant management (fiscal/programmatic reporting) and provide support to RSVP staff, and report regularly to the Lakeshore Impact Council about changing needs.

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The current staff of the RSVP of Muskegon and Oceana Counties have MOUs on file for all existing partner stations. In order to ensure regular communication, renewal of MOUs is part of an annual re-enrollment process in June of each year. Current RSVP staff follow CNCS requirements to ensuring all volunteers are eligible to serve in RSVP, including maintaining required member files and documentation.

### **Organizational Capability**

United Way of the Lakeshore has been in Muskegon County since 1918. In 2006, the former United Way of Muskegon County merged with United Way of Oceana County and became United Way of the Lakeshore. Since its inception, United Way has relied on volunteers in all aspects of its work. The organization is governed by a 30-member volunteer Board of Directors, which meets monthly. The Finance Committee of the board includes volunteers with significant financial expertise. It meets quarterly to provide thorough fiscal oversight, with reports given at monthly board and executive committee meetings by the board treasurer. The Finance Committee is responsible for setting finance and audit policy based on General Accounting Standards Practice.

United Way of the Lakeshore is the project sponsor in Muskegon and Oceana counties and serves as the financial agent for the RSVP program, as well as maintaining proper documentation for all financial activities relating to the project. All expenditures are reviewed by the Community Engagement Director, Vice President Community Impact and the Finance Director. United Way will provide the RSVP manager with a monthly transaction report of revenues and expenses for proper allocation, as well as copies of all receipts, purchase orders, checks, etc., for expenses and income relating to the program. United Way of the Lakeshore runs an annual campaign of \$2.8 million, manages several corporate grants and has a history with other federally and state-funded grants. The staff of United Way, including administrative support, is also available to assist with day-to-day operational support for RSVP.

Staffing: Project Manager has a Master's Degree and five years experience managing volunteers within United Way and in the community, as well as grant management. Project Manager will ensure compliance with RSVP program requirements and ensure accountability and efficient and effective use of resources. Project Coordinator has overseen the volunteer component of RSVP for 18 months and has a Bachelor's Degree in Human Service; she will maintain all volunteer records and ensure they are accomplishing program objectives. The Community Engagement Director is newly hired and

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has several years experience with volunteerism and grant management. The Vice President Community Impact has a Bachelor's Degree, 23 years of experience with United Way and oversees all grant processes at United Way, as well as overseeing large-scale volunteer projects and working with all school districts in the area. The VP supervises all outcomes-related work at United Way and leads large teams of volunteers in that work. The President has a Master's Degree in Social Work with more than 20 years of United Way experience leading community organizations in volunteerism, program results, resource development and community engagement.

United Way of the Lakeshore has clear internal policies and operating procedures to provide governance and manage risk, including accounting, purchasing and personnel management. The Finance and Personnel committees of the board meet regularly to review policies, audits, financial policies, etc. In 2011, United Way was gifted two buildings and ran a capital campaign to renovate them; they now house six nonprofit organizations. United Way staff and volunteers manage the buildings, equipment and supplies. Prior to 2011, we co-owned a building with another nonprofit for 40 years.

In addition to several local grants, we have managed a US Department of Justice Weed and Seed grant. We have managed the federal Emergency Food and Shelter Program for Muskegon and Oceana counties. We have several layers of financial management which ensure that no one person can complete a financial transaction. Checks are required to have two signatures, including one by a volunteer board member such as the treasurer. Financial statements are opened by someone other than the finance director. The Finance Committee reviews all statements regularly; our audits have always been unqualified. Our 990 is accessible on our website for public viewing. Transparency is a hallmark of United Way of the Lakeshore.

### Other

N/A

### PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A