

Narratives

Executive Summary

The Blackstone Valley Community Action Program (BVCAP), Inc. is a private, non-profit organization whose mission is to assist socially and economically disadvantaged individuals to become self-reliant, responsible citizens. Founded in 1965, BVCAP services the Blackstone Valley area of Northern Rhode Island. The agency provides support and resources to Rhode Island's most distressed communities. As an RSVP grant applicant, BVCAP proposes a total number of 480 RSVP volunteers and respectfully requests \$75,965 in funds. BVCAP RSVP volunteers will provide service activities that promote wellbeing by directly addressing community needs across categories of Healthy Futures, Environmental Stewardship and Veteran services. BVCAP anticipates positive and measurable outcomes for the Northern Rhode Island community, including increased social support and improved food security for individuals and families. The services rendered through the proposed BVCAP RSVP programs directly align with BVCAP's mission and the values of the RSVP grant program, as the programs help empower and positively impact the wellbeing of individuals and families facing poverty, mal-nutrition, and limited access to services.

Strengthening Communities

Blackstone Valley Community Action Program, Inc. (BVCAP), for the purpose of this application, proposes to provide services to the residents of the cities of Burrillville, Cumberland, Gloucester, Lincoln, North Smithfield, Smithfield and Woonsocket, which comprises the Northern region of Rhode Island. The residents of this region face many complex and diverse socio-economic challenges that often threaten the healthy futures of its citizens. The primary concern for this population is the large number of unemployed and low-income individuals requiring improved support in areas related to access to care, aging in place, obesity and food.

According to the 2007-2011 American Community Survey, Woonsocket saw the highest number of residents, 8,998, or 22.2%, of the residents reporting an income level below the poverty limit. While the other communities didn't see as high numbers, these areas still had individuals living below poverty level upwards of 7.4% in Burrillville, 5.1% in Cumberland, 5.0% in Gloucester, 6.4% in Lincoln, 3.7% and 4.1% in North Smithfield and Smithfield, respectively (factfinder2.census.gov).

Unemployment:

The state of Rhode Island's unemployment rate of 8.9% is currently the third highest unemployment rate in the nation as reported by the RI Department of Labor and Training in July 2013. This is higher than the National Unemployment rate of 7.4% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 2013).

Narratives

Local unemployment statistics from the RI Department of Labor and Training reported Woonsocket's rate at 11.1%, Burrillville at 9.9% and Lincoln at 9.0%. Also, towns where unemployment is typically low still saw relatively high unemployment rates in comparison to the state. For example, Cumberland had a rate of 8.5%, 7.1% in Gloucester, and 8.3% and 8.1% in North Smithfield and Smithfield, respectively. This unemployment rate does not count the growing number of individuals who have exhausted benefits, new to the work force, or have dropped out of the workforce altogether. 85% of the total individuals sixty-five years of age or older, identified in the 2007-2011 American Community Survey, have not been employed over the past year and have identified as not looking for work.

Additionally, four of the seven cities and towns identified for this proposal have high school drop-out rates above the state and national averages. In 2010, RI KidsCount identified the national high school average drop-out rate to be at 7.4%, while the state of Rhode Island had a statewide average of 10%. Burrillville, Cumberland, Gloucester and Woonsocket all reported drop-out rates exceeding both state and national averages, at 10%, 12%, 11% and 17%, respectively in 2010, with Lincoln having an 8% drop-out rate. Such significant rates of unemployment increase the public demand for support and services from community agencies, such as BVCAP.

When compounded with unemployment rates, the communities' respective high school drop-out rates reflect a significant need for social and educational support. The influx of families and individuals in extreme economic crisis places additional strain on the capacity of area providers to supply the adequate support and counseling services needed for recovery. Real income is needed to meet housing obligations and this creates a snowball effect for vulnerable families who must choose on a daily basis between housing and other needs.

Veterans:

The 2007-2011 American Community Survey reported a total of 76,775 veterans living in Rhode Island. There are 12,867 veterans living in the identified service area, 72% of which are fifty-five years of age or older. Veterans also see higher unemployment rates in these communities as compared to the civilian population. For example, in Burrillville and Smithfield, veterans see an unemployment rate of 11.5% and 16.4%, which is 1.5% and 8.3% higher than their civilian counterparts respectively. Additionally, 62% of these individuals have only a high school diploma, some college, or an associate's degree, limiting their overall earning potential.

Obesity and Food:

According to the Economic Progress Institute's Cost of Living Calculator

Narratives

(www.economicprogressri.org/CostofLivingCalculator), as of 2012, it costs a single-parent family with two young children \$53,220 a year to pay basic living expenses, including housing, food, clothing, health care, child care and transportation. This family would need an annual income of \$63,000 to meet this budget without government subsidies.

Families to provide food for their families on a regular basis are using food cupboards in the area; food distribution is no longer simply an emergency support system. The 2013 KidsCount Factbook indicates that youth in Rhode Island who live in low-income conditions, have low educational attainment, and high unemployment are at increased risk of obesity, due to limited availability of nutritional food options and assistance. Additionally, children, who live in poverty especially during early childhood, are at higher risk of health, behavioral, educational, and social problems that carry through into adulthood. Between 2007 and 2011, 17.9% of all Rhode Island children lived in poverty, and 35.8% of children living in Woonsocket lived poverty (RI KidsCount Factbook, 2013).

Individuals without employment or reliable income are also at greater risk of hunger, as they lack the financial resources needed to access healthy food options. The 2013 RI KidsCount Factbook also suggests that low-income neighborhoods frequently lack full-service grocery stores and markets where residents can purchase fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Such limited access to healthy foods and food education has long-term detrimental effects on the community, as limited access and information compromises the eating choices and therefore, nutrition, of the public. In order to ensure that residents receive adequate nutrition, local agencies must maintain vital community resources such as food delivery services and fully stocked food pantries.

Aging in Place:

The 2010 United States Census reported that there are 151,881 individuals sixty-five years of age or older living in Rhode Island. Additionally, the 2007-2011 America Community Survey identifies the population of individuals sixty-five years of age or older and who are living in poverty 11.6% in Burrillville, 6.5% in Cumberland, 7.3% in Gloucester, 7.6% in Lincoln, 4.3% and 8.9% for in North Smithfield and Smithfield, respectively. 30% of the individuals sixty-five years of age or older, and living in the Northern communities of Rhode Island identified in this grant proposal, are living alone and maintaining a household independently.

The estimated percentage of individuals ages 65 and over with an independent living difficulty is 15.7% in Providence County, which includes all of Northern Rhode Island and 14.8% across the state of Rhode Island. Given the large number of senior citizens and the aging baby-boom generation, the organizations in the Northern part of Rhode Island must be prepared to meet the challenges posed by

Narratives

elderly populations living independently. Without social services that consistently integrate the senior populations within the local community, elderly individuals are at risk of depression and social isolation.

BVCAP's RSVP volunteers will address the agency's mission by donating their time and skills to community organizations that focus on providing services to low-income individuals and families. RSVP volunteers will address the need for auxiliary services to provide assistance in meeting patient needs and providing enhanced care. Non-profit organizations that provide food and social services to low-income, at risk individuals and families will utilize RSVP volunteers to expand organization capacity and will therefore be able to provide better service to a larger scope of people. In addition, support services for senior citizens are an important community need in Northern Rhode Island. The older residents, particularly those in congregate subsidized housing, have aged in place and are extremely vulnerable. BVCAP RSVP volunteers will assist these individuals by donating their time and skills to various elderly programs, which address the needs for social support including a network of friends, involvement in community activities and assistance to maintain their independence.

Recruitment and Development

In order to improve the community and the overall wellbeing of our volunteers, BVCAP aims to create high quality RSVP volunteer assignments with opportunities to foster volunteers' skills and abilities. BVCAP will utilize the Volunteer Center at Serve Rhode Island and Volunteer Match to recruit prospective volunteers. Recruitment efforts will be community-centric in order to ensure that volunteers accurately represent the communities that live and serve in, Northern Rhode Island seniors are primarily Caucasian, English speaking, and women. Local recruitment efforts will include but are not limited to: publishing volunteer opportunities on local community boards, at Senior centers, Libraries, Social Service organizations, Community Health Centers and on the Cable Public Access Channel. BVCAP will post volunteer opportunities in local newspapers such as The Valley Breeze, The Woonsocket Call, and The Senior Digest as well as on Woonsocket's local radio station WNRI, which services Northern Rhode Island. In addition, the RSVP Program Director will coordinate and facilitate outreach and recruitment presentations involving current RSVP volunteers; these presentations will take place at local senior centers, housing authorities, Health and Wellness Fairs and local community events.

In an effort to match volunteers to RSVP stations, the RSVP Program Director will conduct one-on-one interviews with prospective volunteers. The interview process will include a volunteer interest survey, through which the Program Director will identify volunteer sites most conducive to the skills

Narratives

of the respective volunteer. Prior to beginning any volunteer work, BVCAP RSVP volunteers will be completely trained in the services specific to their assigned station whether it be in the area of healthcare, nutrition, veterans or environmental stewardship, these trainings will include review of policies, and procedures as well as specific program information as it relates to their primary focus group. Trainings would include but are not limited to: Department of Human Services workshops on Food Stamps and Medical Assistance programs, Department of Health Access to Care, Department of Elderly Affairs services and Veteran Affairs Benefits. Once placed it will be the responsibility of the station managers to report back to the RSVP Director to address any deficiencies with current volunteers, which may require further training. On-going trainings will be offered to all volunteers on topics related, but not limited, to: food safety, nutrition, financial literacy, and health care access. For example an RSVP volunteer interested in volunteering in Access to Health Care may attend a patient navigator workshop so that they have a better understanding of the resources clients need and how to connect to them.

In order to address any volunteer or supervisory concerns in a timely fashion, BVCAP will encourage open communication between the Program Director and volunteers. To assist in this open form of communication BVCAP will maintain an additional office in downtown Woonsocket, which is in the center of Northern Rhode Island. Also all staff affiliated with BVCAP's RSVP program will be provided with telephone, voicemail and email and will disseminate this information to all RSVP volunteers.

The BVCAP RSVP program desires to maintain a high volunteer retention rate across RSVP stations. To aid in retention for purpose of this proposal BVCAP is collaborating with Senior Services Inc. based in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. BVCAP currently manages a successful RSVP program in the Pawtucket/Central Falls area of Rhode Island. Additionally, Senior Services Inc. maintains the daily operations of the Woonsocket Senior Center and a Health and Wellness program in Northern Rhode Island and will be providing office space if BVCAP is awarded this grant. Together these two agencies currently have 13 active volunteer sites and a 153 active volunteers in Burrillville, Cumberland, Woonsocket, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Gloucester and Lincoln, all cities and towns requesting to be serviced in this RFP. In order to increase capacity and prevent displacing any current RSVP volunteers, if awarded the grant as the incumbent it is BVCAP's intention to absorb all current RSVP volunteer sites and volunteers that are active in Northern Rhode Island. In the event that a volunteer site was no longer interested in participating in the program, BVCAP would work with those volunteers first to reassign them to new volunteer sites before outreaching and recruiting new

Narratives

volunteers.

The first step to successful volunteer retention is recognition of volunteer services. By recognizing volunteers, BVCAP commends the individual for their dedication and cultivates a mutual bond of respect and appreciation. Volunteers have the opportunity to join the RSVP Northern Rhode Island Advisory Council. By serving on the Advisory Council, volunteers can advocate for seniors and provide important feedback about volunteer assignments, thereby stimulating improvements to existing programs. A main focus of the Advisory Council will be publishing and distributing monthly newsletters to the volunteer sites updating the seniors and the communities on current RSVP events, volunteer birthdays, milestones and recognizing and thanking an RSVP Volunteer of the month. The Advisory Council will include elected officials; these official positions provide senior volunteers leadership roles within the RSVP program. In addition, the Advisory Council will be responsible for coordinating quarterly volunteer recognition events for RSVP volunteers.

In order to showcase BVCAP's current RSVP volunteers and their accomplishments, BVCAP hosts an annual recognition event. The event is held within the community where the RSVP volunteers both live and volunteer, and is catered and funded by BVCAP and donations from local restaurants and area businesses. At BVCAP's Annual RSVP Recognition Event, members of Rhode Island's Congressional Delegation, local municipalities, local media, and key community partners come together to recognize and celebrate volunteer efforts in the Blackstone Valley area. Special awards are designed and presented to volunteers based on years of volunteer service, including awards for one year, five years, ten years, fifteen years and twenty-five years of service.

Program Management

The Program Director will be responsible for the daily oversight of the RSVP program. BVCAP's Director of Family, Youth & Volunteer Services will provide support and reflective supervision to the Program Director. Reflective supervision is a form of supervision that encourages and supports the development of relationship-based programs such as RSVP. Through the process of reflective supervision, the Program Director will have opportunity to both reflect on the needs of the RSVP program and address any needs in a timely manner. Supervision meetings will take place on a monthly basis, and will serve as a forum for open discussion regarding the RSVP program's needs. Additionally, supervision meetings will allow for the planning and implementation of on-going professional development trainings for RSVP volunteers. In addition, to the RSVP Program Director and the Director of Family, Youth and Volunteer Services, BVCAP will have several volunteer site managers employed by Senior Services Inc. located at the Woonsocket Senior Center, who will be

Narratives

responsible for overseeing the day to day operations of volunteer sites. The volunteer site managers will meet with the Program Director weekly to discuss outreach and recruitment efforts, program operations and any issues or concerns.

Each program station will be assigned a station manager who will be responsible for the oversight of the volunteer station. All station managers will be trained on RSVP policies, procedures, their responsibilities and volunteer expectations. Station manager responsibilities include, but are not limited to, monthly reporting of volunteer hours to the RSVP Program Director and the assessment of volunteer needs in areas of professional development. In order to assure program compliance and to foster working relationships with all volunteers, the RSVP Program Director will visit the volunteer stations on a quarterly, or as needed, basis. To maintain continuous quality improvement, the Program Director will also provide program assessments to station managers on a bi-annual basis. The RSVP Program Director will actively recruit volunteer stations that align with the RSVP program focus areas; they will specifically expand volunteer stations across the Healthy Futures categories, including access to care, food security, and reducing obesity through access to nutritious foods. BVCAP will ensure management of the volunteer stations and remain in compliance with RSVP program regulations; including preventing and identifying prohibited activities. Prior to RSVP volunteers being placed at any volunteer station an MOU between BVCAP and the volunteer station will be drafted and signed by both agencies; the MOU will designate a point person and clearly outline responsibilities and expectations. MOUs will be reviewed and revised every two years.

The RSVP Program Director will be responsible for the oversight of the program. An outlook database will track and maintain records and data for all volunteer stations, including volunteers assigned to the station, hours of service, and number of individuals served. Each volunteer station will be assigned a station manager who will oversee the volunteers assigned to that station. To prevent and identify prohibited activities, the station manager will receive prior supervision training. BVCAP requires that all volunteers receive a Background Criminal Investigation (BCI) in order to protect volunteer sites and the clients who receive services through the agency's RSVP program. In addition, the RSVP Program Director will also submit quarterly reports to two members of the BVCAP management team, The Director of Family, Youth & Volunteer Services and the Fiscal Director. These quarterly reports will describe the project's accomplishments and its positive impact on the community and its residents.

A Community Advisory Council will be developed through nominations from current volunteers, the Staff and Board of Directors of Senior Services Inc., the nomination committee will be responsible for

Narratives

voting in the initial Advisory Council members by ballot. The initial Advisory Council will nominate new members as the RSVP program continues to build capacity. The Community Advisory Council will develop by-laws based on RSVP's community participation guidelines; the council will oversee volunteer recognition, drafting a strategic plan, conducting a community needs assessment and engage in fundraising activities when appropriate.

Organizational Capability

BVCAP's management structure includes a dedicated, volunteer Board of Directors that meets with the Executive Director and Fiscal Director monthly to review agency business, policy and programming. In addition to the Executive Director and Fiscal Director, BVCAP is staffed with four Program Managers who oversee all agency programs and a staff of over fifty people. BVCAP's staff reflects the ethnic diversity of the community, enabling it to be sensitive to the clients' culture and language, and to provide them with the best possible support. Since 1965, BVCAP has been assisting low income individuals and families and empowering them to become strong self-reliant citizens through a wide range of social programs. Over 12,000 residents of Northern Rhode Island are helped by BVCAP each year. Services include senior services and social services, youth and teen parenting programs, educational and job readiness programs, provision of basic needs, energy and weatherization assistance, housing development and housing assistance, education and counseling, BVCAP has an annual budget of \$10 million, which is made up primarily of Federal, local and state grant funding sources. The remainder of the agency's funding comes from public and private organizations. As a responsible fiscal steward, BVCAP enjoys productive relationships with a host of state agencies that provide contract funds and grants to carry out a host of human-service related activities.

The organization enjoys pristine working relationships with all of its program partners, including Senior Services Inc., which is responsible for providing senior services to the city of Woonsocket and outreach and wellness to the surrounding communities listed in this RFP. In addition, BVCAP works with directly with the municipalities of Woonsocket, Lincoln, and Cumberland, and is a partner in a Community Action Association with Tri-Town Community Action that provides senior services to the towns of Smithfield, North Smithfield, Burrillville and Gloucester.

*** Staffing**

The staff that has been identified for this project is the Director of Family, Youth and Volunteer Services-Deborah Gardner and the RSVP Program Director-Stephen Healey.

Ms. Gardner's is responsible for ensuring that all requirements of Youth, Family and Volunteer

Narratives

Services program grants are adhered to. Primary duties on the RSVP grant include providing support and supervision to RSVP staff, reviewing and monitoring files and overseeing that reports are submitted in an accurate and timely manner.

Mr. Healey's is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the RSVP program. His primary duties include completing and submitting all grant reporting, training volunteer site managers in developing volunteer opportunities, coordinating with volunteer site managers in volunteer recruitment, selection, and training efforts, and planning recognition activities. In addition, BVCAP will have two off-site volunteer site managers employed by Senior Services Inc. that will be responsible for facilitating in capacity building, volunteer site access and liaising between BVCAP and local municipalities.

* Financial management

BVCAP successfully manages \$10 million dollars per year in federal, state and local grants. The financial system used provides accurate, current and complete financial reporting and meets all grantor requirements. The system also provides accounting records as documentation to support and identify all financial transactions.

The BVCAP Fiscal Office is comprised of a Fiscal Director, a Bookkeeper and a Fiscal Assistant. The duties of the department are shared so that more than one individual is involved in all transactions, with all work being reviewed by the Fiscal Director to ensure accuracy and thoroughness. The goal of the fiscal office is to protect and preserve the assets of the organization, as well as, to prepare and maintain accounting and supporting documentation in form and with proper controls. Fiscal personnel are bonded in the amount of \$100,000. Annual audits are conducted by qualified Certified Public accountants in conformity with the Federal Single Audit Act. All fiscal policies and procedures have been reviewed and approved by an independent auditing firm.

Centralized records are maintained on proprietary software that has built in controls for fund accounting with the necessary attendant subsidiary journals, including but not limited to individual grant accounting, general ledger, accounts payable and relevant financial statements. Separate grant accounts are maintained for each grant received. Funds are segregated as appropriate and as circumstances permit. Unique grant account numbers assigned to each grant enable the tracking of revenue and expenditures. Payrolls and monthly charges, prorated and direct, are charged to each grant as appropriate. BVCAP is in full compliance with all federal, state and local contracts regarding fiscal expenditures and reporting. Payroll is subcontracted out to an independent agency.

* Insurance coverage and Required licenses

Narratives

BVCAP maintains all required licenses and insurances including but not limited to workers compensation, liability and auto.

* Data Collection

To monitor participant characteristics and services, BVCAP utilizes, TRACKER version 2010, a database system that was agreed upon by the Community Action Agencies of Rhode Island and in use since 1997. The primary intention of this database is to provide information on the agency's programs and performance, as outlined by the federal government. This data collection system allows for evaluation of program effectiveness in adhering to anti-poverty goals. As a recipient of the federal Community Service Block Grant (CSBG), BVCAP is required to report annually on the continuing fulfillment of the six national goals and twelve national community action performance indicators, identified through ROMA, the "Results Oriented Management and Accountability" performance-based initiative. In addition, BVCAP staff is trained and licensed to utilize a variety of Management Information Systems (MIS) including but not limited to RISE (DHS), EARR (DHS), GeoSol (DLT), Captain (OER), ClientTrack (DHS), and HMIS (DOA).

* Technical Capabilities

All of BVCAP's staff are provided with an agency email address and access to the internet as their job duties require. BVCAP employs a full-time IT Administrator who is responsible for maintaining the integrity and security of the agency's servers and unified threat management device (UTM), as well as software and work stations throughout the agency.

* Protection of sensitive information

All BVCAP staff involved in collecting and maintaining client information and data will adhere to the federal statute put forth in the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552a. Files and relevant documentation will be kept in a locked secure location with access limited to those employees directly involved in the program and program services; no information will be released to outside persons or agencies without the client's prior written consent. All parties adhere to the highest industry standards in regards to maintaining and protecting client information and data. Of the major agencies responsible for collecting and maintaining information; the agency follows the practices but forth by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). EEO

BVCAP is an equal opportunity employer and is in full compliance with RIGL 28-5.1 regarding equal employment opportunity and affirmative action.

Other

RSVP volunteers receive quarterly reimbursement for travel expenses acquired as part of their

Narratives

volunteer duties. The RSVP Program Director is responsible for submitting quarterly mileage reports to BVCAP's fiscal department and checks are cut for reimbursement by the middle of the quarter. RSVP volunteers are reimbursed four times a year for travel expenses and the travel expenses are charged to the grant. BVCAP currently maintains RSVP Volunteer Liability Insurance Policy for all program participants; this expense is also charged to the RSVP grant. BVCAP currently conducts State of Rhode Island Background Criminal Investigation (BCI) checks on all employees and RSVP volunteers, the cost of the BCI's is an in-kind donation made by the State of Rhode Island Attorney General's office to BVCAP because of the agency's non-profit 501c3 status. BVCAP's budget includes the salary cost of the RSVP Program Director whose responsibility includes program support, training of volunteers, outreach, recruitment, reporting and the day to day operations of the program. BVCAP charges a portion of the cost of the annual RSVP recognition to its current RSVP budget. In addition, BVCAP matches up to 50% of the expenses acquired to host the annual event, as well as program supplies that support outreach and recruitment efforts. These supplies include but are not limited to computers, internet access, telephone, postage, ink, toner, and paper. BVCAP has included a match to the agency's RSVP proposal this match is necessary to cover fiscal oversight, program audit, program supervision and payroll expenses. This match, from non-federal funds, fills the funding gap and allows for the agency to meet all of RSVP's federal outcomes and guidelines.

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A