

Narratives

Executive Summary

A minimum of 800 RSVP volunteers will serve in the Centre County RSVP each year from 2015 through 2018. Among the many service activities accomplished by RSVP volunteers, at least 33% (261) of unduplicated volunteers will serve in the Primary Focus Area of Healthy Futures with service activities focused on food delivery through Meals on Wheels, food distribution through area food banks, companionship through Telephone Touch Reassurance, staffing hotlines for the Medicare/Medicaid hotline (APPRISE), and Healthy Steps fall prevention training at area senior centers. In cooperation with 67 partner volunteer stations, Centre County RSVP is dedicated to supporting and improving the community. At the end of the three year grant, 100 homebound seniors will have received weekly food delivery, with 25 reporting increased social support as a result of the delivery visit. Four isolated adults will receive a daily phone call and two will report increased social support as a result. One thousand individuals will receive emergency food, and 100 will report increased food security as a result of the contribution. Five hundred individuals will receive fresh produce from community food bank gardens, and 50 will report increased food security as a result. The annual CNCS federal investment of \$55,561 will be supplemented with \$65,009 by the Centre County Board of Commissioners.

Strengthening Communities

PRIMARY FOCUS AREA NEEDS: Centre County is located in the geographic center of Pennsylvania. In 2010 it had a population of 153,990 people living in 35 municipalities grouped into seven planning regions on the basis of geographic, social, economic, environmental, and political characteristics. These regions vary greatly by age and composition, rate of growth, housing costs, incomes and affordability. Both rural and urban environments comprise the planning regions with the majority of the population living in the Centre Region comprised of six municipalities surrounding the Borough of State College and The Pennsylvania State University. Statewide rankings reveal the County's diverse demographics: by population the county ranks 22nd (out of 67 counties) in the Commonwealth, by growth -- it is the seventh fastest growing county in the Commonwealth, by poverty it is among the top five counties in the Commonwealth for people living below the poverty rate, and for affordable housing it ranked last (as reported by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, 2010). Rapid growth, largely due to increased land development activity, the presence of The Pennsylvania State University, and new highway construction; the attractiveness of the county as a retirement location; and the varied employment opportunities in education, healthcare and business

Narratives

are expected to sustain the county's rapid population growth rate and diversity into the future.

By contrast, Centre County's racial and ethnic composition is much less diverse than Pennsylvania as a whole. White Americans are the racial majority with 89.5% (98.2% aged 65+) share of the county's population, followed by Asian Americans comprising 5.3% of the population (1.2% aged 65+), Black or African Americans at 3.4% (with less than 1% aged 65+) -- much less than the statewide percentage of 11.5%, and the Hispanic population at 2.7% (with less than 1% 65+). (2013 Census Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau "QuickFacts"). Statewide, Centre County ranks third among 67 counties by percentage of Asian population. The Centre County RSVP volunteer population is reflective of the community demographics, with less than 1% of our volunteers identifying a race other than white. Centre County RSVP staff continues to recruit among all populations for new volunteers and anticipate that the ethnic diversity of the volunteer corps will increase as the ethnically diverse population ages and retires.

The County's varied geographic differences and economies influence people's choice for residency resulting in significant differences among the planning regions in population growth and community needs. The Centre Region with its economy driven by education and medical services is a bustling community with a young, diverse population. This demographic extends outward to the fringes of the three valley regions, Bald Eagle, Nittany and Penns Valley, that are easily accessible by public transportation and direct arterial routes of travel. The more rural areas such as the Moshannon and Mountaintop areas and the more distant areas of the valley regions are a poorer, older demographic experiencing decreases in population and unemployment.

Based on current trends, Centre County is expected to see an increase in all age brackets over the next decade (2010 -- 2020) except for the 30 to 49 age group. Sectors with the largest projected increases are the 20 to 29 age group and the 50 to 64 age group. The under-18 age group and the over- 65 age group increase similarly, indicating that the age dependency ratios for these two age groups that existed in 2010 will exist through 2020. However with the projected increase in the 50 to 64 age group, the community needs for the aging population (over the age of 50) are expected to increase in future years. The Centre County RSVP program identifies with the challenges faced by a growing population of low income and elderly residents in need of emergency and supplemental food supplies, and home delivered meals, helping disabled and aging County residents to combat malnutrition and isolation during periods of illness, injury recovery, and homebound conditions. Thirty-three (33%) percent of unduplicated Centre County RSVP volunteers are working in service activities associated with serving their low income, disabled, and aging neighbors. These volunteers

Narratives

distribute emergency food and supplies to elderly neighbors, families with children, and others at risk of starvation through six area food banks and food pantries; deliver nutritious meals to homebound adults through a meal delivery program with an expanding "visitors" role to provide isolation breaking social contact; participate in a food growing program through community food bank gardens to grow and deliver vegetables and fruits to area food banks; provide daily companionship through phone calls designed to lessen anxiety levels in elderly adults living alone and lacking daily social contacts. As Centre County's over 65 population continues to increase, volunteers are training with the Pennsylvania Department of Health to provide "Healthy Steps for Older Adults" and other educational programs designed to improve Access to Care by providing training to allow seniors to remain safely in their own homes. These programs will be taken back to the communities in which the trainers reside, to help aging neighbors remain in their homes.

Centre County is one of eight Pennsylvania counties where more than 30% of all households (56,526) or nearly 17,000 households are considered to be below the Self-Sufficiency Standard. The term self-sufficiency standard defines an amount of income necessary to meet basic needs (including taxes) without public subsidies. It is synonymous with the term living wage. Living wage is the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs: housing, food, utilities, transportation, healthcare, and in many cases, childcare. A living wage provides for a standard of living and may vary based on location. The living wage differs from the minimum wage in that the latter is set by law and can fail to meet the requirements to have a basic quality of life and leaves the household to rely on government programs for additional income and services.

The correlation between livable wage employment, poverty status and affordable housing is paramount. Low and moderate-income working families, elderly, people with disabilities, homeless families, and individuals are all facing critical needs for affordable housing in Centre County, which ranks last in the Commonwealth in 2010. Low and moderate income households are those whose incomes are below 80% of the County median income, or \$39,765, as based on the median household income of \$49,706 reported for 2008-2012 (US Census American Community Survey).

Among these households are the elderly, female-head-of-households, the disabled and homeless. Of elderly renters, 48.4% or 1,089 renter-occupied households and 23.5% or 1,980 of owner-occupied households are cost burdened, paying in excess of 30% of their income for housing. This equates to over one-fourth (28.7%) of Centre County's elderly households paying in excess of 30% of their income. (US Census American Community Survey) Since elderly prefer to age in place, the greatest challenge is to subsidize their current housing costs and to ensure access to assistance with shopping,

Narratives

meal preparation, house upkeep, and other activities of daily living. In response to this growing area of need, the Centre County RSVP Project Director has joined the Community Safety Net, begun in 1996, as a voluntary collaboration of non-profit community organizations whose role is to provide help for emergency situations that involve hunger, homelessness, domestic violence, and other emergency social service needs. While Centre County RSVP does not currently report volunteer service activities which directly address the lack of affordable housing in our community, we are poised in partnership with these vital organizations, which are largely staffed by dedicated, paid social workers. RSVP continues to be available to study the need for affordable housing, and step in to connect measurable service activities with volunteers when the opportunity arises. The RSVP Project Director is currently pursuing two opportunities, "Out of the Cold" and a "shared housing" initiative, but neither program is ready for work plans as of this application. "Out of the Cold" is a program designed to make a warm bed available to "homeless" individuals who will not seek shelter in the established facilities for various reasons. "Out of the Cold" is coordinated through the Community Help Center (a hotline) and housed in churches on a rotating basis through the cold season (October through April). The shared housing program would match a host adult with a home seeker, with the hope of allowing the host to age in their own home, and the seeker to find an affordable housing alternative. This initiative is being championed by the Healthy Aging subcommittee of the Centre County Partnership for Community Health.

SERVICE TO VETERANS: Veterans in Centre County number 9,800 persons, approximately 8% of the total county civilian population over the age of 18. Two-thirds of this population is over the age of 55, with the largest segment being over the age of 75. Nearly one-third of Centre County's veterans served during the Vietnam era. (US Census American Community Survey) In addition to RSVP service activities of driving veterans, assisting with benefits, and providing Troopons[®], area veterans take advantage of the benefits of volunteering with RSVP partners and programs. Nine percent (71) of Centre County RSVP volunteers are veterans (consistent with the percent of the county's veteran population), with 49% of these serving in our Primary Focus Area of Healthy Futures: Food Distribution through area food banks. The majority of veteran volunteers have one to nine years of service with RSVP, but one has 12 years of service, one 15, one 20, and one 28 years of service. Eleven veterans serve the VA as drivers and clerical support. Three veterans serve as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance tax preparers.

Narratives

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES/PRIMARY FOCUS AREAS: The four major elements in the Primary Focus Area, Healthy Futures, are designed to improve the quality of life for County residents challenged with both income and physical limitations. All service activities will lead to National Performance Measure outputs (numbers of neighbors served) and outcomes (survey responses as appropriate), with an established infrastructure to measure, collect, and manage the resulting data in Excel spreadsheets and by data entry in Volunteer Reporter software. RSVP volunteers delivering nutritious home cooked meals and providing companionship will serve approximately 100 home bound individuals. An annual survey of 100 long term meal recipients will track among other inquiries, whether three weekly visits and food delivery positively affect isolation anxiety and increase a sense of belonging. At area food banks, RSVP volunteers distributing emergency food will serve more than 1,000 individuals. Centre County RSVP volunteers, trained to conduct surveys, will attend food distributions at all partner food banks, conducting surveys in person to approximately 100 (10%) individuals annually to determine levels of food security among recipients. In addition to the purchased and donated food, RSVP volunteers grow and deliver fresh produce from community food bank gardens to two RSVP partner food banks. This program is in its first year with RSVP, with excellent potential for growth and expansion. Food security questions specific to the availability of fresh produce will be collected at the food banks being served by this program. All food bank survey data will be collected by RSVP staff and volunteers, and will be recorded in the Volunteer Reporter for annual reporting in progress reports to CNCS. RSVP volunteers serving as Telephone Touch Reassurance callers maintain contact with isolated seniors through daily phone calls and report on daily call logs. As an in-house program, the RSVP staff will maintain contact throughout the orientation process with new partner pairs (one caller, one client) and annually to assess the client's attitude toward social support. The results of these inquiries will be recorded in customized entry fields of the Volunteer Reporter for annual reporting to CNCS. RSVP volunteers conducting training in "Healthy Steps for Older Adults" and other Aging in Place oriented topics will submit attendance log totals along with their hour reports to RSVP in order to track the number of clients participating in health education programs. These numbers will be maintained in an Excel spreadsheet by RSVP staff and reported annually in progress reports to CNCS.

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES/OTHER FOCUS AREAS & CAPACITY BUILDING: In addition to our Primary Focus Area of Healthy Futures, Centre County RSVP volunteers perform a variety of activities in National Performance Measure areas of Economic Opportunity, Veterans and

Narratives

Military Families, and Disaster Services, focusing on the individuals, with emphasis on those at financial risk. Economic Opportunity volunteers provide Financial Literacy services by assisting the Centre County Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program with output numbers tracked through the TaxWise ® software reports. Volunteers providing Veterans and Military Families activities serve area veterans as drivers for medical appointments, and as clerical support to help process claims in the Veterans Affairs office. The numbers of veterans served by both activities are tracked by the Centre County VA Director. In addition, many RSVP volunteers have rallied to participate in Troopons ® and support active duty military families by helping their income stretch further with valuable manufacturers' coupons. While the activity itself is simplistic, the benefits are measurable by the potential dollars saved, as reported and recorded in the Volunteer Reporter. In a region known nationally as a fly fisherman's paradise, Environmental Stewardship volunteers in the Centre County Pennsylvania Senior Environmental Corps (CCPaSEC) maintain test data on over 200 miles of streams, and alert authorities when variations in results cause concerns. These active and energetic volunteers help protect our fishing tourism industry as well as our drinking water and environment in areas impacted by past and present industrial activities including coal, lumber, mining, and natural gas drilling. Capacity Building volunteers perform service activity in Supporting Blood Drives, Garnering Donations, and Recruiting Volunteers keeping non-profits staffed, funded, and functioning well. In addition, the new RSVP Project Director is developing a curriculum to provide volunteer management training for partner organizations focusing on sound management practices for recruiting, registering, mentoring, training and retaining volunteers. RSVP staff will maintain accurate output data in the Volunteer Reporter for annual evaluation and reporting, as indicated in the accompanying work plans.

Recruitment and Development

ENSURING HIGH QUALITY RSVP VOLUNTEER IMPACT: Centre County RSVP is well established with a positive reputation among area residents, civic organizations, elected officials, businesses, and non-profits. As stated by Steve Dershem, Chair, Centre County Board of Commissioners, at the September 2, 2014 meeting, RSVP is a "great program here in Centre County." Our location places us in the county seat of Centre County, uniquely poised with access and availability to human service providers. Our program is a part of the Centre County Office of Aging, ensuring a positive relationship with the APPRISE (PA's Medicare hotline) and Ombudsmen programs also part of the Office of Aging.

Centre County RSVP volunteers serving within our focus areas are or have been employed as

Narratives

university staff, faculty, and administration; in engineering firms, in medical professions, in accounting firms, at the local lime plant, at the quarry operations, in the local governments and government agencies, as school faculty and staff, in service industries, and in many operations that thrive here or have relocated outside the state. Many of our retired volunteers are active in groups like the Elks and Kiwanis and local faith organizations, and they bring a large network with them to their service through RSVP. With almost 30 years as a community partner, RSVP has networked with leaders in every Centre County community, and we partner with many non-profits offering positions that challenge our volunteers and provide them with opportunities to improve the quality of life for their neighbors while applying their experiences, abilities, and skills in purpose driven, impact activity.

Many RSVP partner sites request large groups for short projects like mailings, cleaning a food pantry, or weeding and mulching gardens around an animal shelter. These activities are social, needed, and fun, but the experience is fleeting. While we gladly provide this "special project" recruitment for our partners, at Centre County RSVP, our greatest joy is sitting down with a retired person and helping them discover exactly how their time and service can impact their community in a powerful and meaningful way. By matching their skills and interests to the needs of our programs and partner organizations, we are able to help guide them to an area of service they may not have imagined before.

While some volunteers arrive with their partner site selected, their path chosen, and their plate full, many volunteers arrive in a state of bewilderment. For some, retirement is a time of isolation from community and absence of purpose. An interview with a bewildered person is all about exploring the person's passions and finding the areas and skills that are intact and can be put into service for the community. It is such a joy to watch a person's demeanor change from frail and frightened at the beginning of an interview to purposeful by the end. As they tell us of their life and their joys, and even the things they hate, you start to see the life spark glimmer more brightly in their eyes. When we can connect a person seeking a new purpose with a partner seeking a dedicated volunteer, our niche is fulfilled.

One such success is our Disabled American Veteran (DAV) volunteer ride scheduler, Barbara. We include this story in our infrastructure, because it demonstrates not only the essential nature of community engagement, but the significant placement of our program within the County.

Barbara wandered into our office at the recommendation of a new acquaintance. She was displaced, having moved to Pennsylvania from Texas. She lost her purpose when the grandson she had uprooted to care for began kindergarten. She was lonely. She sat on the couch. She gained

Narratives

weight. She developed diabetes. When she dragged herself into our office, she was not in great shape, but she was determined to get herself back on track. A retired school teacher, she instantly rejected any placement that involved schools or children. She rejected thrift stores, food pantries, nursing homes, and anything else that involved lifting, standing for long periods, or walking. She would work in an office, but only if there were other people around. She was determined to start right away. The RSVP office needed some short term help to sort and calculate pen pal survey statistics, so she went to work with this program, until something else became available. Barbara has a distinctive Texas accent, and delightful telephone skills, so she started covering our phones during meetings. Simultaneously, our RSVP director was working in cooperation with the Centre County Veterans Affairs director to start a DAV transportation program. As part of Barbara's work with the pen pals, she had used Excel spreadsheets. Barbara took the initiative to watch every tutorial she could about Excel and taught herself how to use it well. The DAV transportation program was ready to launch, and a volunteer rides scheduler was needed. It would need to be someone who could use Excel really well and had good communication skills, especially telephone skills. Barbara was right there, trained, and excited to begin. Four years later, Barbara is still in the VA office scheduling riders. She has fifteen drivers working under her direction, and lots of regular "customers" who love her. Since those customers are also veterans, she is definitely serving her community and her country every day. Over the years, she has lost weight and is completely free of the insulin on which she was dependent before coming to us. Barbara has friends, she is vested in her community, and she knows without a doubt that her work is important and is making a difference.

We share this success story, because sometimes the best service Centre County RSVP provides is being available and accessible to our volunteers and partners, and allowing the connections to unfold.

In other situations, more intentional structure is required. Centre County RSVP staff is very active on boards and committees such as the monthly Centre County Pennsylvania Senior Environmental Corps (CCPaSEC) planning meetings, the monthly Community Safety Net Meetings (a network of non-profits serving in areas of emergency housing, fuel funding, and economic training), and the monthly Food Bank coalition meetings. These relationships weave us into the fabric of the care community as well, and as volunteer opportunities present themselves, we are in the position to respond. We have also been instrumental in adopting the county's VITA volunteers and encouraging that program to a status described as "model": "We do appreciate the time, devotion, and work that RSVP and ALL of their volunteers put into the VITA program. In the end, the taxpayers of Centre

Narratives

County are the lucky recipients. I wish I could clone the RSVP staff and all Centre County volunteers and replicate it throughout western PA." (email dated 08/13/2014 from Diana Smith, Internal Revenue Service, Wage & Investment, SPEC (Stakeholders, Partnerships, Education and Communication), Area 1). From providing capacity building support to housing non-profits, to testing stream water, to filing income tax returns, to providing emergency food supplies, Centre County RSVP volunteers have a variety of opportunities to use their skills and serve their communities in meaningful and purposeful activity.

Our plan continues to be to remain immersed in the community, in touch with the programs and people who need help, and connecting them with people who can help them.

TRAINING RSVP VOLUNTEERS: Training needs vary from assignment to assignment, and most training for RSVP volunteers happens within the partner organization they are serving. Well trained volunteers become vested and passionate about the people and programs they serve. Significant examples of that include Meals on Wheels, the State College Food Bank, APPRISE, VITA, CCPaSEC, and American Red Cross Disaster Services.

PRIMARY FOCUS AREA TRAINING: State College Meals on Wheels (MOW), Inc. (Healthy Futures/Aging in Place) is a volunteer run program providing hot meals to home bound individuals in the State College Area School District. Leadership of MOW plans to expand their program to include periodic hour long visits to provide the consumer with needed companionship and other assistance in the home. Their fall training will include programming on isolation anxiety, and train volunteers to provide socializing home visits along with meal delivery.

Partner food banks (Healthy Futures/Food Distribution) also provide training. The State College Food Bank describes their training as three parts (1) orientation, (2) mentoring (including a shadowing experience), and (3) partnered, with no volunteer working alone within the facility.

APPRISE (Healthy Futures/Access to Care) is the hotline for Medicare and Medicaid inquiries in Pennsylvania. New volunteer APPRISE health insurance counselors receive free training from the PA Department of Aging in Medicare, Medicaid, Medicare Supplements, Appeals, Fraud and Abuse, Long Term Care Insurance, and Prescription Drug Coverage. These are not easy topics to master, but APPRISE volunteers take joy in helping others in the same manner they found the help and assistance they needed when their journey began. New APPRISE volunteers are always welcome, and Centre County RSVP will continue to recruit and publicize the opportunity and support this well run program.

Narratives

OTHER FOCUS AREA TRAINING: The Centre County Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program (Economic Opportunity/Assisting VITA) recently became an in house program for Centre County RSVP. Centre County RSVP has established training locations to accommodate 12 laptops and 20 trainees, and provided a projector so the leader could demonstrate the TaxWise ® program for all trainees to see. The on-line filing attracts computer savvy volunteers to the program, many of whom are accustomed to filing their own returns on-line. The VITA program of four original volunteers now involves 20 trained and returning preparers, many of whom have been engaged as mentors to new recruits. The result of the mentoring opportunity is that returning tax preparers are studying harder and deeper, so that as they mentor the newbies they are prepared to answer questions accurately. Returning volunteers are also learning how to better use their resources so they can help the new preparer sift through the many IRS publications and find the answers they need. Our group of returning volunteer tax preparers has met this summer for an unprecedented four sessions, in addition to the four session new VITA volunteer training in November, and the four session IRS Certification training in January. In partnership with Centre County RSVP, Centre County VITA has blossomed into one of the most proficient (error rate of less than 3%) and most productive (in the state's top 20 producing sites) VITA programs in Pennsylvania.

The Centre County chapter of the Pennsylvania Senior Environmental Corps (CCPaSEC) is comprised of retired professionals from STEM field careers, who are passionate about tracking the pollution levels in Centre County streams. A recent development in CCPaSEC is that two of the founding teams are retiring. Minimally, six new recruits are needed to staff the teams, but with no one on the teams remaining, all of the experience of the teams in working the site and performing the tests is lost. The loss of these teams has resulted in the development of recruiting and training procedures for new CCPaSEC volunteers. The RSVP Project Director was able to assist the group in establishing Standard Operating Procedures for new member contacts that all team leaders agreed to follow. In addition, RSVP was instrumental in procuring a free monthly meeting room for the CCPaSEC leadership and attends the monthly meetings.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT TRAINING FOR ALL FOCUS AREAS: When CCPaSEC volunteer recruiting and training issues were presented, the RSVP Project Director immediately recognized an opportunity for a capacity building Volunteer Management training program, to be made available to our partners. While some partners have paid volunteer managers, the partners like our food banks (our primary focus area) are almost entirely volunteer driven and may have no one in charge to direct

Narratives

the reception and training of the volunteers we send. On rare occasions, a newly placed RSVP volunteer will report back that no one from the placement has made contact with them. RSVP staff always follow up with these concerns, but we realize that more could be done. Our Volunteer Management training program is still in the preliminary stages, but we plan to promote the opportunity through our fall newsletter and hope to begin providing sessions later this fall. We believe this program will improve our communications with our partners, increase the reporting of hours and activities (making more volunteers eligible for our recognition luncheon), and enhance the volunteer experience.

VOLUNTEERS REFLECT COMMUNITIES SERVED: Centre County RSVP is home to mostly white residents, at 98.2% of the over 65 population, and Centre County RSVP volunteers reflect this fact. Centre County RSVP staff recruit at volunteer fairs and opportunities as provided by our volunteer network, and continue to make volunteer opportunities available to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or creed. As Centre County's racially and ethnically diverse population ages, Centre County RSVP will continue to recruit with a goal of increasing our diversity in pace with the community served.

RETENTION AND RECOGNITION: Stories recounted by RSVP volunteers this past year best reflect the reward system intrinsic in volunteering.

A VITA volunteer completed the tax return of a single mother and was able to help her file electronically for the fastest return of her refund, which miraculously included child tax credits and the benefits of filing as a head of household. When she learned the refund was more than a thousand dollars, and the service was free, she burst into tears. She had paid a preparer the year before over \$200 to complete her return, and had missed credits to which she was entitled. The VITA volunteer smiled and scheduled an appointment back at the RSVP office to file an amendment to the previous year's return so she can receive those credits as well.

A Pennsylvania Senior Environmental Corps (CCPaSEC) volunteer donned waders and journeyed into a pool of water to test a newly formed wetlands created by a beaver dam, skillfully located just past the fording of two runs. As the beavers looked on, water samples were drawn and tested. Witnessing the marvel of the dam was immediate. Discovering that the beavers work resulted in cleaner water running out of the pool than was entering from the polluted run, well that is just nature showing off.

Narratives

VOLUNTEER RETENTION: For most volunteers, the work is the reward. And when the work is rewarding, volunteers stay. Quality placements and excellent training result in confident volunteering experiences, and this confidence is reflected in the ownership volunteers take when they stay in a placement for the long run. The average VITA volunteer has served 6.5 years, with the longest service 27 years. Some food banks have been partners for more than 8 years, and the average food bank volunteer has served 5.6 years. The average CCPaSEC volunteer has served 6.3 years with the longest service 17 years. The average Meals on Wheels volunteer has served 8.6 years, with the the longest service 25 years. Well run programs that value and reward volunteers with challenging and meaningful activity retain volunteers. These programs prove that RSVP partners and programs are strong retainers. When a problem does arise with a partner or a volunteer, the Centre County RSVP staff is quick to investigate and cautious to respond carefully, providing opportunities for both volunteers and partners to overcome hurdles in placement or training needs. This approach has permitted continued good relations with quality partners, better placements for volunteers, and greater volunteer retention.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION: Recognition is a valued part of every human's experience, and RSVP of Centre County is able to provide it. For many of our partners and volunteers, our Volunteer Recognition Luncheon is the only opportunity they have to celebrate the work they do together in offices, on hotlines and food lines, answering phones, driving vans, delivering meals, and growing vegetables. Our sponsor organization, the Centre County Commissioners are able to make this luncheon very special by utilizing in-kind funds from the Pennsylvania State University. Our luncheon features valet parking, a hot meal served to the table, Penn State Creamery Ice Cream for dessert, and just a few well timed speeches. Volunteers attending are recognized with yearly pins in five year increments from 5 to 25 (and next year we will add 30). There is also a special award, presented by the Centre County Commissioners, for volunteers serving in excess of 500 hours in a given year. Since 2010, this honor has been achieved 75 times, with several volunteers receiving the award annually.

Our Pen Pal Program, which we are successfully continuing as a community priority because so many of our pen pals also participate in focus area service, recognizes pen pals who have served for five and ten years. In two more years we will add a fifteen year certificate to this recognition, which is presented during the Meet & Greets at elementary schools. Twenty-two percent of our four hundred

Narratives

adult pen pals have received a five or ten year award.

In addition to our recognition luncheon, Centre County Council of Human Services hosts an annual volunteer of the year award named "Rose Cologne" after the first recipient. In most years, Centre County RSVP has selected a volunteer with 500 hours of service in a variety of jobs. We believe these volunteers take advantage of all of the opportunities available through RSVP. In addition, this year, we were able to recognize our tax partner, Centre County VITA as the recipient. Our most senior tax preparer, 86 years old and still providing leadership in the program, received the award on behalf of the group at a dinner he attended with the RSVP staff, the Centre County Commissioners, and two of his fellow VITA volunteers. We have excellent confirmation that these recognition programs will remain intact as our program continues with the awarding of this three year grant.

Program Management

STATION COMPLIANCE: The Centre County RSVP Project Director (PD) and the RSVP Program Assistant (PA), under the direction of the Director of the Office of Aging, and the Centre County Board of Commissioners (BOC), have direct responsibility for maintaining positive partnerships with the 67 current RSVP volunteer stations in Centre County. Currently, all stations and station supervisors meet the Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS) regulations, including a signed and up to date Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), written job requests that meet service activity standards, documented orientation and training of RSVP volunteers, accurate reporting of volunteer hours, and accurate reporting of clients served as required by RSVP for computing outputs. As appropriate, stations are providing survey documentation for outcomes, or have agreed to accommodate our trained volunteers who will conduct surveys of their clients to gather the required outcomes data. All RSVP station supervisors have received a copy of RSVP stated program regulations and prohibited activities, as provided by RSVP staff when the original MOU was signed. New volunteers who interview with staff are oriented to appropriate and inappropriate activity for RSVP volunteers. The prohibited activities are posted on the RSVP website as part of the Centre County Government website.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE ACTIVITY COMPLIANCE: The PD visits volunteer stations as appropriate and available, and checks in with volunteers through informal contacts to ensure that they are working in their assigned activities. The RSVP PD and PA follow up diligently with any volunteer who expresses a concern about a partner or a volunteer service activity, and conversely with any partner

Narratives

who expresses a concern about the behavior or performance of a volunteer.

MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS (GRADUATING STATIONS): Centre County RSVP PD and PA serve on boards to keep our program in touch with the needs of the community. The PD serves on the Community Safety Net keeping pace with non-profits offering emergency housing, fuel, and food assistance in Centre County. The PD also serves on a subcommittee for Healthy Aging. Finally, the PD attends Centre County Pennsylvania Senior Environmental Corps meetings and acts in an advisory capacity to the Centre County Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program. The PA serves on the Food Bank coalition uniting food banks served by the State Food Purchase Program, keeping pace with the ongoing needs of those serving residents with low Food Security. Both the PD and PA are invested in the community, and as employees in the Office of Aging, remain in contact with the daily, monthly, and annual developments in issues surrounding healthy aging. Centre County RSVP seeks to support activity that not only sustains life, but also activity for which people seek to live. Therefore, our Other Community Priorities include nursing homes and hospitals that help sustain and promote health, and arts organizations, museums, festivals, and outstanding educational endeavors that celebrate life. We have not graduated any stations at this time. In terms of our remaining community priority partners, the average age of their volunteers is 75, and 30% are over 80 years of age. Centre County RSVP staff no longer actively recruits partner organizations that fall outside CNCS preferred focus areas, and RSVP staff encourage current volunteers whose primary service activity falls within Other Community Priorities to seek additional opportunities for volunteering within the focus areas. The partners and volunteers in our Other Community Priorities really are priorities, and the 30% designation, and 240 volunteers remain a solid commitment to our sponsor and our community. As stated by Steve Dershem, Chair of the Centre County Board of Commissioners, at the September 2, 2014 meeting, "RSVP has been integral to Centre County for much longer than I have been here, and we very much value it, but at the same time we want to make sure it remains reflective of needs locally and so many of the services our seniors provide." Like our sponsor, Centre County RSVP continues to value the volunteer efforts of our aging volunteers who have devoted a decade or more of service already to their community under the proud banner of RSVP. We are confident that the benefits of volunteering, which have been championed by Dr. Erwin Tan over the years--the rewards of serving with purpose, the isolation breaking and physical movement encouraging activity required for volunteering, continue to be beneficial and will be supported by our organization.

Narratives

DEMONSTRATED TRACK RECORD IN PRIMARY FOCUS AREAS: Centre County RSVP has partnered with Meals on Wheels since 1989, the Food Bank of State College since 1986, FaithCentre Food Pantries since 2003, APPRISE since 1998, Telephone Touch Reassurance since 1989, and Healthy Steps training since just earlier this summer. With the introduction of the new performance measures, the RSVP Program Assistant (PA) joined the Food Banks Coalition as an associate partner and began attending meetings to keep abreast of the needs of this non-profit group. As a result, many other food banks and pantries have partnered with RSVP, and our record for volunteer placement at these partner organizations continues to expand. Many of these food banks are volunteer run and operated, and RSVP staff will provide volunteer management training, as needed, to ensure quality recruitment, training, retention, and reporting. The food bank community garden group sprang up out of the State College Food Bank, and Centre County RSVP met their enthusiasm and organization with a partnership network that is helping it grow and develop. The PD and PA worked together to create a food security survey instrument and present this instrument to all food bank coordinators for acceptance. To date, all food banks have agreed to allow RSVP trained staff and volunteers to conduct anonymous, voluntary surveys at their facilities, during a distribution cycle. Several of the food bank coordinators expressed an interest in receiving the resulting data, and a few indicated that they had additional questions we could pose as a service to them. The first round of surveys is scheduled by March of 2015 for statistical reporting purposes. We are hopeful to achieve a ten percent (10%) voluntary participation rate among food bank clientele, or approximately 100 responses. Centre County RSVP's rich history will continue to fuel our progress with partners in our Primary Focus Area of Healthy Futures.

RSVP FEDERAL REGULATIONS FOR STATIONS AND VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT: Volunteers aged 55 and older are placed with Centre County RSVP partners in good standing with signed and current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Volunteers are placed as their skills, interests, and availability permit. Volunteer placements and hours are recorded in the Volunteer Reporter. Volunteer hours are reported by the partner on a monthly basis and maintained in the Volunteer Reporter, creating annual and lifetime hours accounting. When a volunteer is seeking opportunities, RSVP staff meets with the volunteer, discusses interests, identifies insurance coverage, discloses prohibited RSVP activity, and encourages participation in our discount card and recognition luncheon. If a placement is not appropriate for a volunteer, we work with the partner and the volunteer until a

Narratives

more suitable placement is determined. Most volunteers who find their niche, actively participate with the partner for three or more years. MOU reports are run annually with programs needing renewal reviewed for job activities, hours reported, comments from volunteers, and interactions with RSVP staff. As appropriate, partner stations are contacted to review any areas of concern and to update all contact information so that a new MOU can be drafted, signed, and appropriately filed.

RSVP ADVISORY COUNCIL: The Centre County RSVP maintains an active Advisory Council (AC) of volunteers and partner representatives, which meets monthly through the year. Sixteen members currently sit on the board, serving three year terms on a rotating basis. Seven board members are serving their second 3-year terms. The RSVP AC provides monthly feedback on the workings of the RSVP program and budget. They also assist the RSVP staff with the planning and execution of the volunteer recognition event. AC members assist with all fundraising activities surrounding luncheon sponsorship, recruit volunteers from their geographic areas of Centre County including Phillipsburg, Centre Hall, Millheim, Boalsburg, Milesburg, Port Matilda, Bellefonte, and State College, which represents a wide range of diverse communities in our service area. AC members act as liaisons with these communities, sharing news and supporting RSVP opportunities in their home areas. The AC is comprised of five men (one a veteran) and eleven women. One AC member has 24 years of volunteer service through RSVP and one has 22, with the average volunteer service record of nine years with RSVP. Our AC's collective lifetime contribution is 22,222 hours. One AC member calls all RSVP volunteers on their birthdays each month. All AC members provide leadership service at their respective volunteer sites, and communicate the needs and successes of their sites, which include impact activities within the Veterans Affairs office, food bank gardens, our local hospital, nursing homes, court administrators, Meals on Wheels, and the Pen Pal Program. RSVP staff encourages the AC to recruit new members from additional impact programs including the Pennsylvania Senior Environmental Corps, the food banks, APPRISE (Medicare hotline), and VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program) as terms renew.

Organizational Capability

FISCAL OVERSIGHT AND PROGRAM COMPLIANCE: Our program is amply provided with 250 square feet of office space in two rooms, furniture, telephones, computers, and technical support through our sponsors, the Centre County Board of Commissioners. RSVP has access to the conference rooms, parking, and amenities available in the Willowbank Office Building. The office provides for two full time staff work stations, one rotating volunteer desk, and a designated volunteer

Narratives

desk occupied by the VITA leadership. The volunteer portion of the office includes a conference table at which planning meetings and new client interviews are conducted.

Centre County RSVP falls under the leadership of the Centre County Office of Aging. As such, the Centre County RSVP Project Director is well supervised and is positioned to receive both guidance and support from the newly appointed Director of Aging, who has fifteen years of experience with the Office of Aging including past support and interaction with RSVP. The Director of Aging reports to the Board of Commissioners, ensuring a line of authority and accountability. The infrastructure supporting Centre County RSVP is unfailingly supportive, so that after nearly 30 years our program is woven into the fabric of the county, and our volunteers are part of the daily operations.

Finances are overseen by a Financial Specialist with over 25 years of experience working with the County and 13 years of experience working with RSVP and federal grants. The finances are managed by the County's UNIX Financial Management System and the Federal Payment Management System. RSVP is subject to all County audits and financial management policies. All budgets, fundraising, and spending is subject to the requirements of the County and conducted in compliance with the requirements of CNCS.

All RSVP staff members have clearly written job descriptions of their positions as developed by Centre County's Human Resources Department. Annual evaluations and self-assessments are conducted in accordance with County human resources regulations as overseen by a full time, professional Human Resources Officer.

STAFF ENSURE THE PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: Centre County RSVP is comprised of two full time paid staff positions. The Project Direct (PD) was newly promoted effective August 25, 2014 and brings five years of experience running the Nexus Pen Pal Program, the Centre County VITA program, and assisting with all aspects of managing volunteers in the Centre County RSVP program. The PD is responsible for maintaining the grant compliance measures, including documenting and analyzing outcomes and sharing results with station supervisors, the Office of Aging Director, and the Centre County Board of Commissioners. The PD represents the Centre County RSVP program in the community, maintaining regular contact with station supervisors to ensure effective support and compliance with program regulations. The PD supervises all programs run from the office including the Pen Pal Program and VITA; reports to the RSVP Advisory Council; and manages the budget. The PD represents RSVP on the Community Safety Net. The PD, a former teacher, is currently developing the curriculum for a volunteer management program designed to empower volunteer run partners to

Narratives

effectively recruit, register, mentor, and train new volunteers. The PD has a Bachelor's Degree in English and Secondary Education, with additional study and certification in technical writing. She previously pursued a career in technical writing, with additional training and experience teaching secondary English. The PD's volunteer experiences include, among other things, ten years leading a church youth group she developed from the ground to a thriving program, adult dance class instruction and dance recital management, and various activities with band boosters in concessions and chaperoning.

The Project Assistant (PA) brings 15 years of experience to our program and is the primary resource for data maintenance in the Volunteer Reporter; record keeping for stations, volunteers, and programs; execution of the annual volunteer recognition luncheon, including year of service awards and special hours awards; and liaison with the area food banks through monthly attendance at planning meetings. The PA's long associations with RSVP partners and volunteers ensure cohesive and consistent implementation of CNCS policies and procedures regarding Memorandum of Understanding, hours reporting, and performance.

Working together, these staff members will facilitate the Pen Pal Program, VITA program, Telephone Touch Reassurance Program, and Troopons ®. Both RSVP staff members actively participate with programs as part of our sponsor, the Centre County Government. The PA currently serves on the County's Health and Safety Committee, and the PD currently serves on the subcommittee on Healthy Aging as part of the Centre County Partnership for Community Health. As an independent office, Centre County RSVP must institute standard operating procedures in areas of station management, volunteer evaluation and placement, volunteer record keeping including hours reports and output/outcome data, and program implementation. These operating procedures are the responsibility of the PD, with regular analysis and evaluation by both staff members to ensure quality and excellence in all interactions with stations and volunteers. The skill sets and dedication of these two paid staff persons will ensure the successful accomplishment of the proposed CNCS program.

RSVP OPERATED UNDER COUNTY OPERATING PROCEDURES: As a County sponsored organization, Centre County RSVP falls under the operating procedures for the County Government and the financial management practices of the Office of Aging (OA). The RSVP office, furnishings, and equipment are provided through the County, with excellent technical support provided by the County's technology contractor. All purchasing follows the County procedures for accounting and auditing, and fall within the line item budget established with CNCS as part of the RSVP grant.

Narratives

RSVP FINANCIAL CAPACITY: Management of funds is carried out through the specifications of the OA's financial officer who has more than 25 years of experience managing Federal, State, and local grant funds and tax allocations. A strict program of requests for funding and appropriations is carried out, with funds reported through the County's UNIX financial management program. The PA is currently responsible for initiating all purchasing procedures (requests for supplies or purchase orders, processing bills, and providing reimbursement) and maintaining weekly input and updates. All financial activity is verified through the OA's financial officer, who in turn reports to the OA Director, the County's Chief Financial Officer, the County Administrator, and ultimately the Board of Commissioners, ensuring that the CNCS funds awarded to Centre County RSVP are well maintained and appropriately distributed. All CNCS grant related documents will be maintained in compliance with specifications of the grant award contract.

Other

not applicable

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

not applicable