

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

An estimated 300 RSVP volunteers will serve Columbus County residents. Some of their activities will include assisting students to complete educational programs, classroom assistance, disaster preparation programs, preventing elder abuse, companionship, medical transportation, and food security. The primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures. At the end of the three-year grant, senior citizens will have increased social support, children will increase their literacy skills, residents will receive services to increase individual and family disaster preparedness, older adults and individuals with disabilities will have increased access to medical transportation, access to food through home-delivered meals, and other services that will allow them to live safely at home and children in grades k-12 will improve academic success. The annual CNCS federal investment of \$95,028 will be supplemented by \$20,000 local funds and in excess of \$25,000 in non-federal in-kind support provided by Southeastern Community College (SCC).

SCC has sponsored Columbus County RSVP without exception since 1973. Since that time, the volunteer base has increased 68 percent, the federal budget has increased more than three-fold and community partners and supporters have remained consistently strong. The current program serves 368 volunteers and 79 volunteer stations.

## Strengthening Communities

Columbus County is the third largest county in landmass in the state of North Carolina. Individuals living in the rural areas must drive up to 45 miles one way to reach the county seat where social service organizations are primarily located. There is not an affordable, easily accessible public transportation system, causing many citizens to be unable to access social services and medical facilities. The state's most economically distressed counties are assigned Tier 1 status, while the least distressed were assigned Tier 5 status. Economic distress of a county is measured by per capita income and population growth. NC Dept. Commerce ranks Columbus County as Tier 1.

According to the NC Division of Aging and Adult Services (Oct. 2013), seniors age 60+ represent 23% of Columbus County's population. The 2010 Census shows: 23% under age 18; females represent 51%; 62% White; 31% Black; and 4.3% veterans. The median income is \$33,024 compared to the state at \$43,754. The unemployment rate is consistently above NC and national rates. In May 2014 it was 8.4% compared to 6.6% in N.C. (ncesc.com). Columbus Co. RSVP is representative of the population: 70% female; 79% White, 20 % Black; and 8% Veterans.

With the downturn in the economy, poverty rates in Columbus Co. (NC) have climbed at an

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alarming rate to 23% and are much higher than the nation's 14.3% and the state's 16.1 % poverty levels (US Census Bureau, 2007-2011). The poverty rate in the county has been above 20% for the last four consecutive census periods (<http://factfinder.census.gov>). The county is devastated by the lack of industry and growth. The US Census Bureau report indicates a loss of 15.2% of Columbus County jobs between 2000 -- 2009. According to Columbus County Department of Aging, the senior population is suffering due to the inability of family members to financially help their aging family members. According to the NC Department of Health and Human Services (2012), there were 105,122 NC grandparents who reported that they had one or more grandchildren under 18 years of age living with them for whom they were financially responsible. This represents 39% of all grandparents whose grandchildren live with them.

According to 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment, conducted by Columbus Regional Healthcare and the Columbus County Health Department, Columbus County has been ranked as the least healthy county in the state of North Carolina for the past four years. It ranks 100th out of 100 counties among the health outcomes ratings (morbidity, mortality) and 92nd among the health factors ratings (social, economic, environment, health behavior). Community health assessment surveys consistently reported that obesity, chronic disease and drug/alcohol abuse were the number one health problems in Columbus County. Feedback from the community health assessment surveys indicated that most people have a general knowledge of how lifestyle choices impact health; however, most report that due to cost, access and convenience, it is difficult to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

In order to avoid/delay moving to a residential facility and to live independently safely and longer, homebound seniors need help with activities of daily living: companionship to fight off loneliness and isolation, safety checks, home repair, and transportation assistance. These activities improve the chances that a person can remain living independently in their own home. Volunteers who visit or call homebound clients can alert social service authorities or relatives when they notice signs of distress, contributing to vulnerable persons' ability to remain living independently safely. Studies have shown that twice-weekly telephone support lowered suicide rates, lowered depression scores, and decreased hospital admissions for the older adults. RSVP volunteers will provide an opportunity for residents to develop regular, meaningful relationships. Due to the large county area (covering 937.29 square miles), volunteer transportation reimbursement is available.

Additionally, according to the Columbus County Dept. of Aging (2014), individuals who do own homes are unable to keep up with minor repairs or need safety enhancements, (i.e., the construction or installation of handicap entrance ramps or grab bars in the bathrooms). These safety

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augmentations result in the frail elderly being able to stay in their own homes. These enhancements, particularly handicap entrances, increase the ability for medical, fire/rescue, and law enforcement agencies to better serve the inhabitants. RSVP volunteers are needed in the planning and installation of safety equipment and/or minor repairs.

Finally, some individuals must rely upon neighbors for basic transportation to the grocery store and medical appointments. Food distribution programs help to alleviate the problem of food insecurity by access to free or low-cost food. However, due to the lack of affordable and accessible public transportation, some residents are unable to get to a congregate meal site and/or food banks. At least three large communities in the county are not being served by home-delivered meals. It is documented that well-nourished independent seniors have healthier, longer lives, lower healthcare costs and are able to remain in an independent living environment longer. The frail elderly would be unable to stay in their homes without the food supplement. Without RSVP volunteers support, seven nutritional sites and the home-delivered meal program could not fully focus their resources on clients' needs and services.

Our strong relationships with the Dept. of Aging and Veteran's programs ensures that the most vulnerable seniors and our veterans and military families are being served. Additionally, with 8% of active RSVPers being a veteran, we are able to target other veterans both as beneficiaries of CNCS programs and engagement in volunteer service.

Columbus Co. RSVP is in the optimal position to ensure National Performance Measures are obtained. Staff has taken advantage of technical assistance, conferences, and other educational opportunities to implement performance measures within the program since the implementation of performance measures. This experience has allowed measurement tools to be developed, tweaked, re-evaluated, and implemented. This process insured that the desired outcomes were being measured and regularly included a thorough community needs assessment. Data is gathered at least annually, shared with CNCS, volunteers and community stakeholders, and electronically stored in back-up files while paper surveys and forms are retained in a secure area.

### **Recruitment and Development**

RSVP provides volunteers with experiences that have a beneficial impact on the community as well as opportunities for individuals to use their time and talents. Volunteer opportunities are based on current community needs as identified by a community assessment. Focus will primarily be on healthy futures and K-12 success. The director has a regular column in the local newspaper that highlights the benefits and joys of volunteerism. This column, "Volunteer Viewpoint," is on the

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Opinion/Editorial page, which according to the Editor, is second page in popularity. News releases to media outlets are frequent and free of charge. The program staff prepares quarterly newsletters and an annual report which are distributed to all stakeholders (volunteers, station managers, public officials, media, funders, etc.). Additionally, the program director hosts a monthly cable television program, "Volunteer Connection," that highlights the services that the nonprofit provides, how the services impact Columbus County, and what volunteer resources are needed.

Volunteers and staff from other agencies are invited to participate in training opportunities planned for RSVP volunteers and Advisory Council members. This collaboration is an effective use of community resources and helps in the promotion of training activities through our partners' public awareness campaigns. RSVP volunteers receive training to address identified community needs through volunteer station supervisor, lead volunteer, and/or RSVP staff. Training is customized to meet the identified need for each station. For example, staff use the NC Health & Human Services curriculum for independent living training events and public school teachers train volunteers to their specific grades and reading programs.

Our most valuable resource is the networking among the volunteers. Word-of-mouth recruitment from one volunteer to a potential volunteer is by far the most effective recruitment strategy. Volunteer station supervisors are also a terrific resource. Staff promote RSVP by participating in local events, speaking engagements, and community educational events. For example, the volunteer survey reflected that volunteers wanted seminars on issues such as legal matters. As a direct result, RSVP recruited a lawyer as a speaker, planned the seminar according to the times the volunteers indicated they could attend, and notified the public. RSVP volunteers were informed of the seminar via electronic and mailed materials. The general public was invited through newspapers and Small Business Center partners. Not only did the volunteers receive a program benefit they specifically requested, but it also served to allow the volunteer membership to know that their suggestions on the survey were valued.

Other public awareness strategies include CNCS brochures, flyers and other printed materials, participation in national service initiatives (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day), development of a program specific brochure, page on the college's website, and online recruitment engines such as Volunteer Match. Building public awareness and successful recruitment campaigns have increased volunteer participation. For the 2013-14 program year, there were 368 actively engaged volunteers serving over 72,000 hours.

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### DIVERSITY

Our volunteers are diverse in terms of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds and reflect the demographics of the county. Last year, RSVP had 368 active volunteers: 15% were age 55-64; 39% were age 65-74; 36% were age 75-84; and 10% were 85 and older; females represent 70% of the volunteers; 20% Black; 79% White; 1% American Indian; 19% reported a disability; and 8% veterans.

Volunteers and volunteer stations are recruited to enhance our diversity. Training and special interest programs (i.e., disaster preparedness) are offered at places of faith, community centers and the local college. Volunteers are recruited as frequently from the senior centers as they are at the local post offices and businesses. Program staff participates in community activities aimed at enhancing diversity. For example, RSVP has recruitment initiatives at the local tribal Pow-Wow and community festivals. Cultural and ethnic events are also advertised in the newsletters in an effort to increase diverse participation.

An effective recruitment and retention tool is low-cost, day trips. These trips are planned to meet diverse interests (art museum, historical tours, planetarium, veteran's sites, arboretum). Volunteers make suggestions for potential trips. In order to participate, volunteers must be an active member. This has resulted in additional volunteer-based recruitment in that they often prefer to share travel experiences with close friends and family members. Trip participants are reflective of our diverse volunteer base.

### RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

RSVP receives funds from CNCS, local government, cooperatives, and private donations. We are also supported by in-kind resources from our sponsor, Southeastern Community College (postage, vehicle insurance, guidance in hiring/personnel matters, office space, etc.).

Program activities are based on community need. For example, it was evident from a recent tornado that the citizenry was not prepared for a natural disaster. Program staff and partners began planning activities that would best meet community needs. As a result of emphasis on this area, state and local grant funds were awarded to RSVP and partners for this initiative. Public stakeholders increased during this process: collaborations were formed with the business and corporate community that did not exist before. There are now strong partnerships with NC FEMA (funding and training source), NC Commission on Volunteerism & Community Service (funding and training source), Community Foundation (funding source), credit unions (funding source and volunteer pool), and industry (funding source and volunteer pool).

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### **VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION**

RSVP emphasizes the positive aspect of aging through the use of one's wisdom, dedication, work ethic, life- and work-experiences. It is a valuable social experience in that volunteers are actively engaged. Many studies have documented the fact that an active individual is healthier and happier.

One area of weakness is transportation. With unstable gasoline prices and unaffordable/inaccessible public transportation, attending events is often too costly for the volunteers. Training and public presentations are offered in a community's central location. For example, disaster preparedness training is offered at any place in the county with 10 or more persons attending.

Volunteers are also involved in community activities through leadership roles. Volunteers are active in assisting in disaster conferences, civic and fraternal groups that promote civic engagement, and local government (county commissioner, mayor, fire fighter, town council).

The RSVP program is supported by community volunteers (those under the age of 55 and others over the age of 55 but non-RSVP members). These community volunteers are primarily episodic. Events supported by non-RSVP volunteers in RSVP initiatives include: recognition events, training sessions, RSVP booths at community events, and disaster preparedness training and events. These volunteers are also dedicated to charitable fundraising (i.e., RSVP's Relay for Life Team).

Recruitment and development are ongoing and important activities. New and potential volunteers are interviewed to assess their interests, hobbies, talents and skills. This assessment results in opportunities for volunteers to challenge and use their leadership skills and other talents.

In an effort to reach a diverse pool of volunteers, recruitment methods include: press releases to local newspapers and media outlets; announcements in church bulletins; participation in speaking engagements; local community fairs and festivals; conducting volunteer-based training; listing opportunities in newsletters, newspapers, and electronic outlets; and, networking with other volunteer-based groups. Creative strategies have also enhanced our volunteer recruitment efforts. Offering fun, educational and low-cost trips has been very effective. For the volunteer to participate in one of the trips, he/she must be actively engaged in volunteer service. This was particularly useful in the recruitment of men to the program. Another strategy was the production of a television show. This show highlights the agencies and organizations that use volunteers and volunteers telling their stories of how volunteerism has improved our communities, enhanced the lives of those they serve, and/or added value to their own lives.

RSVP's goal is to provide a quality experience for volunteers and the community. Interviewing the

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volunteer and a thorough knowledge of the volunteer opportunity accomplishes this goal. After the interview, the volunteer is presented with multiple opportunities. RSVP staff follows up with the volunteer to ensure that the placement is a good fit, training for the volunteer was provided, and the volunteer and the station supervisor are both satisfied. Additionally, staff visit the volunteer while at the work site. This helps staff to understand what the volunteer is actually doing and to assess satisfaction of both the volunteer and station manager. Volunteers have expressed that such visits make them "feel special." If there is dissatisfaction, the staff provides additional opportunities for the volunteer.

Volunteers are surveyed annually for feedback regarding their volunteer service. The survey focuses on the experience: the positive impact they feel that they make; relationship with RSVP staff; whether volunteerism has had a positive impact on their health and/or attitude; do they feel appreciated at their worksite; like the recognition events, etc. The 2013 survey documented that 98% of the volunteers surveyed agreed that they are happier and more positive about themselves; 98% agreed that volunteer work has given them a sense of meaning and purpose; 88% agreed that volunteer work helped to improve/maintain their physical health; 98% agreed that volunteer work enabled them to meet new people and develop new friendships; 98% agreed that volunteer work has a positive impact on the community; and 100% would recommend and encourage others to become involved in RSVP. Though the survey is designed to be anonymous to encourage candid feedback, many take advantage of the back of the form to write a personal note to the staff. These notes are encouraging and express appreciation. For example, "Thank you RSVP staff for all you do. It means so much to so many. Thank you!" Staff and advisory members analyze the survey results to identify program strengths, challenges and areas of concern.

Through media outlets, newsletters, one-on-one contacts, and recognition events, volunteers are told how much they are appreciated and the community impact is expressed in such a way that volunteers and the public are aware volunteerism is making a difference. Sharing copies of impact statements, job descriptions, and following up on volunteer surveys have also resulted in the increase of the volunteers' awareness of community impact and the difference one person's volunteer contributions can make. Volunteers have increased their leadership skills and been publically recognized for outstanding volunteer service through local and state awards.

## RETENTION & RECOGNITION

Since 1973, the program has developed a strong base of volunteer and community support. Staff

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members continue to concentrate on the development of resources, recruitment of volunteers, development of volunteer leaders, and the sustainability of special volunteer projects (i.e., America Reads & Juvenile Justice Program of National Significance (PNS)). The award of a PNS has allowed the addition of a part-time staff person. With this assistance, emphasis has been placed on targeted volunteer recruitment, development of volunteer stations for youth mentoring, and volunteer follow-up. These actions resulted in increased retention of existing members. It was reported that the staff's presence accentuated the importance of a volunteer's assignment. Satisfaction among volunteers leads to increased member recruitment. Past experience has demonstrated that volunteers recruiting volunteers is by far the most successful technique.

Staff and Advisory Council Members realize the importance of regular recognition events. Recognition takes on many different forms, based on the individual or volunteer station. Recognition is constant and is mostly public, but it can be a private moment. For example, a free Christmas show trip is given to volunteers who have demonstrated commitment to RSVP and may not be able to afford the expense. Others are highlighted in newspaper articles, award nominations are written on their behalf, trips to local attractions and cultural events are planned, birthday and feel better cards are sent regularly, and members are highlighted in the RSVP newsletter and interviewed on the television program, "Volunteer Connection." Recognition is probably the most important retention aspect of RSVP and is as different as the individuals being acknowledged. Additional recognition opportunities have been due to strategic collaboration with our partners.

Staff regularly nominate volunteers for local, state, and national awards. The program has received three Governors' Awards for Outstanding Volunteer Service, nationally recognized by the MetLife Foundation and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and its volunteers and current program director have been recognized on many occasions with state-level and local awards. These awards are selected by a committee of their peers or via statewide selection committee. 33 RSVP volunteers or volunteer teams have won the NC Governor's Award and the RSVP program has won the award three times since beginning the Governor's program in 1977. A Columbus County Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service began in 2004. RSVP volunteers and/or team members have received this award each year.

Recruitment and retention is further enhanced by having major volunteer events attended by political representatives (Senator, House Representative, County Commissioners, Mayors, Town Councilmen), a newspaper staff writer publishing articles and pictures regarding the RSVP events, and, announcements on the local cable channel advertising RSVP opportunities and information

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regarding volunteerism in general.

### Program Management

RSVP seeks collaborations with organizations and agencies that address the needs of the community and support the CNCS initiatives. Meaningful placements for volunteers are developed and managed through continuous contact with volunteer stations. Volunteer stations are developed through feedback from volunteers, information obtained from media outlets and referral from other volunteer station managers. Other considerations include stations to help meet CNCS identified primary focus areas, the types of volunteer opportunities offered, accessibility and safety of the volunteers and leadership opportunities.

Once a potential volunteer station is identified, RSVP staff arranges a meeting to discuss the mission and goals of RSVP and the potential station, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), possible volunteer opportunities, expectations, recruitment, volunteer support and supervision, prohibited volunteer activities, orientation and training and the importance of communication. Volunteers are not placed until the following has been discussed and signed by the RSVP director and station supervisor: MOU, job description, safety checklist, verification of nonprofit status, handicapped accessibility, and statement of community impact.

Once the volunteer station is established, the station manager and the volunteers are supported through intervention and/or redirection, technical assistance/training, and routine site visits. For example, if a station manager is having difficulty communicating directions to a volunteer, the RSVP staff may assist by reassignment or additional training. Example: a volunteer station requested basic computer training for the volunteers, staff and the general public. This free training was arranged through the RSVP sponsor, Southeastern Community College.

Strengthening relationships is accomplished through site visits. During these visits the recruiter and/or director visits with station staff and volunteers. This ensures that the volunteers and station manager are satisfied and community needs are being met. Site visits are both planned and spontaneous. Additionally, RSVP staff routinely assists volunteers during a volunteer assignment. This serves to answer several questions: Are the volunteers performing the services as outlined on the job description? Are the working conditions appropriate for the volunteers? Are the volunteers having an impact on community needs? Are volunteers participating in prohibited activities? Staff working side-by-side with the volunteers and station managers also builds networking, which increases recruitment.

Station management and partnerships are further strengthened with a comprehensive review of

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the Memo of Understanding at least once every three years and an annual safety check. Progress reporting and planning sessions, at the end of the year, are used to prioritize resources for the coming year. Job descriptions are updated regularly and shared with the volunteers. The RSVP Volunteer Handbook is reviewed annually and updated accordingly. The Handbook is shared with all new volunteers and volunteer station supervisors.

All volunteer stations provide details regarding how the volunteer's efforts will impact the community. This information is shared with the volunteer during recruitment for that specific position. Volunteer station managers participate in the development of the impact statement and provide information for the progress reports. This participation has resulted in a greater awareness and a sense of pride for both the volunteer station and the volunteers. Adding this layer of information has also enhanced resource development for our partners in that they can now demonstrate impact and community need. By far, the most significant result of meaningful placements has been volunteer satisfaction. This satisfaction is directly linked to volunteer recruitment and retention.

In addition, the director is a trainer for the North Carolina Association of Volunteer Administration (NCAVA). The director teaches classes titled, "Basics of Volunteer Management." All volunteer station supervisors were invited to attend the training. Twenty-four volunteer station supervisors and Advisory Council members were trained in Basics of Volunteer Management. These individuals have requested additional training from NCAVA and/or the community college system. As a result, the director was instrumental in organizing professional development training for Columbus Co. volunteer managers, endorsed by NCAVA, concerning professional/personal change, parliamentary procedures, grant writing, advanced volunteer management and "Grassroots Leadership."

### ASSESSING PROJECT PERFORMANCE

The volunteers and volunteer station supervisors assess the program annually. The survey is included in a newsletter and includes a stamped-addressed envelope. The survey is used to determine satisfaction and enjoyment of recognition events, to ensure volunteer's personal needs are being met, and to assess knowledge of community impact. SCC assesses RSVP as part of the annual Institutional Effectiveness Plan. This generally takes place in the spring of the year. This assessment is directed toward efficiency and effectiveness of the voluntary experience and the RSVP program. Each of these assessments strengthens the program and continually focuses attention on program improvement, effectiveness, and community impact.

In 2013, 100% of the volunteer stations surveyed agreed the RSVP volunteers had the knowledge,

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skills, and work/life experiences for them to perform their volunteer service; 100% reported that RSVP volunteer support enabled them to increase the range of services they offered to the community; and, 95% reported that volunteer support enabled them to sustain essential services in the face of decreasing financial resources. Staff and advisory council members review the survey results to identify problems, share successes and improve services.

According to a 2012 stakeholder project assessment, volunteers, volunteer site staff and community and advisory members, reported that RSVP provides needed community services, is well known in the community, sets a positive example in the community, and is well respected in the community.

The 2013 survey to measure volunteer satisfaction revealed 100% of the volunteers felt happier and more positive about themselves because of their volunteer work; 96% felt that their volunteer work had given them a sense of meaning and purpose; 99% reported that volunteer work increased the contact they had with people outside their immediate family; 96% agreed that the agency they volunteered for was grateful for their help; 96% felt free to go to their volunteer station supervisor if they had problems or suggestions; and 95% enjoyed the benefits that come with being a RSVP volunteer (appreciation luncheon, newsletter, travel reimbursement, trips, liability insurance, etc.).

The Advisory Council, comprised of elected officials, station supervisors, active RSVP volunteers, and interested community members, meet quarterly and are classified by the IRS as a 501(c)3, charitable nonprofit. The Advisory Council completes an annual Project Self-Assessment. The purpose of the self-assessment is to determine if the program is meeting grant requirements. The 2013 assessment revealed that 100% of the members were very satisfied or satisfied with the program's responsiveness to community needs for volunteer service, the adequacy of Community Advisory Group, the development and management of volunteer stations, the on-site volunteer training and supervision, the program's use of performance measures, program diversity, volunteer support, planned and informal communications, the ways in which the sponsor has supported resource development (cash and in-kind) to maintain or increase non-federal share of RSVP project budget, and the development and management of volunteer stations. There were no areas of concern identified by the Advisory Council Members.

Lastly, CNCS assesses the program annually through Program Project Reports and at least once every 6 years, the Program Specialist completes a Compliance Monitoring Site Visit. These assessments serve to ensure grant compliance and meeting community needs. The last compliance review was in 2014. The results of the assessments have always been without exception.

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### **MANAGING INFORMATION AND DATA**

It is policy to maintain a record keeping system that is compliant with the CNCS regulations. The program utilizes a computer-based record keeping system, Volunteer Software, for the sole purpose of collection, storage and retrieval for reporting purposes. With this computer program, there has been an increase in the accuracy of reports and the ability to store and retrieve data. This data base software is updated annually. Access to files is limited to management who has the authority to review them. Volunteer files are stored in a locked cabinet in a controlled area.

Information obtained from volunteers and station managers is used in the annual report and progress reports, which is more explicit to the volunteers' impact in meeting community needs. This information is also shared at volunteer recognition events ensuring that volunteers, partners, and stakeholders are receiving this information both verbally and in a written format.

RSVP began assisting volunteer stations with the transition to performance measures in 2012. This was done with the station supervisor, discussing how to transition nonimpact volunteer opportunities and how to retain or recruit volunteers for nonimpact jobs. Over the course of the past two years, fewer calls for nonimpact opportunities and more calls for volunteers that address CNCS identified performance measures have been received. This approach to transition has given RSVP the time and opportunity to develop, implement, evaluate, tweak, and re-implement our measurement tools as well as create a less disruptive volunteer and station graduation plan. This could not have been done without direct input from our partners. Assessing and reporting workplans and community impact is now effective and efficient.

As verified in previous progress reports, performance measurement goals are being accomplished. Last year's performance measurements focused on safety and independent living for senior citizens and the disabled. As a result of exceptional volunteer recruitment, increased donor support, and good volunteer management, this performance goal was exceeded by 30%. For the 2015 year, the priority area of healthy futures and the secondary emphasis on K-12 success will be the focus. Last year, 87% of the students receiving mentoring/tutoring services increased their academic skills and 80% of the students were promoted to the next grade. Working with our partners and targeted volunteer recruitment led to more engaged volunteers and a measurement tool that effectively measured outputs.

### **Organizational Capability**

Southeastern Community College (SCC) has sponsored RSVP since 1973 without incident or exception. SCC also has successful experience in hosting AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps\*VISTA

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programs and partnerships with area agencies hosting these and Learn & Serve programs. Longevity of staff, sponsor, and stakeholders have enhanced the program and resulted in name recognition. RSVP continues to grow and meet community needs with a stable and vibrant volunteer base.

As a program within SCC, RSVP is fiscally audited by the office of the NC State Auditors. The program has never had an audit exception.

The SCC Business Office assists the director in creating the budget. The budget is based on the current year's emphasis and historical precedence. Monthly budget reports track program spending. The director and the Dean of Workforce and Community Development review the budget monthly to ensure resources are managed effectively. The financial system is based on a requisition format. This format requires the justification of purchases, and signatures by the initiator, director, sponsor, and business office staff to ensure funds are available. The sponsor's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) ultimately approves and signs the purchase order. This check and balance system ensures appropriate use of funds and accountability. This system is used for all federal program funds as well as donations/grant funds. Each year the sponsor's CFO provides the director with a current facilities use and cost schedule to determine in-kind contributions and rates.

### SUSTAINABILITY

17% of SCC's Board of Trustees members are active RSVP members. The sponsor continues to offer generous in-kind support through office space, motor pool, custodial, security, telephone, educational programs/classes, computer and IT services. The college's Foundation Office, a 501C(3), offers an avenue to charitable donations. Donors can designate RSVP when making their gift to the Foundation.

Since the hiring of the current director, the director's successful grant writing has netted over \$1,304,741 in grants from local, state, federal and private sources. Resource development that enhances capacity building and sustainability continues to be a focus of the staff and Advisory Council.

The resources used to sustain the program also build capacity and public awareness. This is accomplished by strategic use of media outlets. Two examples are the use of television and newsprint. The director writes a column for a local newspaper. This is free publicity in that RSVP is always mentioned in the article. Media support has always been a significant in-kind contribution with our local newspapers and local access television station. The director hosts a cable television program, "Volunteer Connection," which airs 4 times a month. This in-kind service is provided by the program's

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sponsor.

Up until the nationwide 20% federal budget cut to RSVP, the director had increased the federal budget by 104%. The program's charitable fundraising has increased 62%. These efforts earned the sponsor more than one million dollars and the charitable organizations tens of thousands of dollars. Additionally, program participation and retention has risen 61%. In 2014, RSVP was one of the few programs to receive an increase in county funds.

### KEY STAFF POSITIONS

In addition to the Sponsor's supervision of the program, the RSVP staff consists of a full-time director, part-time program assistant and part-time recruiter. Also instrumental to the program is the finance officer.

Director: hired in 1997 for the daily management and coordination of the project. The director is a certified volunteer administrator by the NC Association for Volunteer Administration. She holds a doctorate in Education degree and graduate and undergraduate degrees in psychology. Prior to working for the sponsor, she was a rehabilitation counselor assisting individuals with physical restoration and job development and placement. The director has been an employee of the sponsor since 1993 and was hired as a counselor working specifically with disadvantaged students. Since assuming the RSVP director position, she has coordinated an AmeriCorps\*VISTA program and served as liaison for AmeriCorps, Service Learning and Learn & Serve programs. The RSVP Director was instrumental in the organization of a local volunteer manager's professional development group, Volunteer Columbus!. Professional development activities include topics such as managing change, Basics in Volunteer Management, Grassroots Leadership, writing grant proposals, and the basics of parliamentary procedures. Professionals, volunteers and RSVP staff participate in this training. The director was presented the 2011 Volunteer Administrator of the Year award by the NC Association for Volunteer Administration and the NC Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service in 2014. This director has doubled the financial resources of the program and significantly increased the capacity and sustainability.

Program Assistant: This individual, hired in 2004, works 20 hours per week. She is instrumental in following up with volunteers, job placement and encouraging them to submit a time sheet monthly. She is responsible for submitting monthly volunteer travel requests and maintenance of the electronic data reporting system. Prior to securing this position, she was an active RSVP member. She retired from a local financial institution and comes to RSVP with vast knowledge of the community.

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Recruiter: This individual, hired in 2006, at 20 hours per week, is devoted to recruitment of individuals to serve the Juvenile Justice and America Reads PNS primarily. She is effective in volunteer recruitment and responsible for volunteer placements and the development of volunteer opportunities and volunteer stations. Prior to her position as RSVP Recruiter, she was an active RSVP volunteer. She retired from a local financial institution and is outgoing and well-known.

Finance Officer: This individual, hired in 1999 by the sponsor, assists in the management of all of the sponsor's federal, state and local grants. She is familiar with submitting reports electronically and has relationships with CNCS staff as appropriate for her area. She is responsible for volunteer travel reimbursement, filing quarterly financial reports, and processing requisitions.

As with all SCC employees, RSVP program staff are subject to the sponsor's Policies and Procedures. This manual clearly defines roles, rules, regulations to guide program operations, all personnel policies including hiring, supervision, training, use of college vehicles, travel reimbursement, etc.

RSVP staff meet monthly to discuss program operations and planning. Staff is evaluated annually to review performance, develop personal and professional goals and update/review their job description. Succession planning developed a list of roles and responsibilities for each position, including key deadlines/obligations.

### PAST EXPERIENCE MANAGING FEDERAL GRANT FUNDS

SCC has managed federal grants of various focus and amounts since the opening of the institution in 1964. Fiscal oversight, though the ultimate responsibility of the Vice-president of Administrative Services, falls within the SCC Business Office. The accounting system established within SCC and the NC Community College System ensures annual state audits and safe guards to prevent over-spending and spending accountability. For example, requisitions and purchase orders are not approved without funds on-hand to cover the expense. SCC's controller consistently submits timely electronic financial statements through eGrants. All spending requests require two signatures and the appropriate justification (paperwork and/or invoice). The annual state audits are conducted by the NC Office of the State Auditor. All of the college's programs and departments, despite funding source, are held accountable to the same standards and submit to state audits. The Controller assisting with the RSVP program is also responsible for all college grants and special funds (federal funds included). She has worked with these funds without exception.

The sponsor's policies and procedures ensure that both program and fiscal personnel review

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program expenses to ensure that they are allowable, reasonable and allocable. The general ledger account code structure used by the NC Community College System provides a method for recording, monitoring and reporting revenues and expenditure by program code. This system also allows an immediate, up-to-date view of the budget.

### TRACK RECORD

Columbus Co RSVP has an exemplary track record in the accomplishment of goals and objectives. This is accomplished as a result of program staff taking advantage of CNCS training on the development and updating of impact statements, and Advisory Council members and program sponsor supervisor attending meetings/training sessions on the development and use of impact statements and performance measurers. All work plans, with the exception of one, are based on performance measurements. Volunteer station managers are instrumental in the development of workplans. Their participation begins at the onset of the partnership. For example, volunteer station managers are required to submit a volunteer job description for each position, which requires information on how the volunteer's service will impact the community. This information is shared with the volunteer. The impact in the community is also shared with our stakeholders (volunteers, funders, partners, volunteer station sites). Sharing this information has resulted in volunteers expressing pride in their service, volunteer station managers realizing additional opportunities for volunteers to serve, and greater public awareness.

Volunteer stations have increased to more than 100 sites with more than 360 active volunteers. There have been no program exceptions. Seniors are recruited to serve on the Advisory Council and committees. Free training has been offered through the sponsor with the expressed purpose of developing grassroots leaders.

Volunteers have also been recognized for their service. RSVP staff regularly nominate volunteers for local, state, and national awards. Since 1977, approximately 30 individuals and/or RSVP teams have received the NC Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service. A Columbus County Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service began in 2004. A RSVP volunteer and/or RSVP team have received this award each year.

### IMPACT FOR 2013

87% of the students tutored/mentored demonstrated better academic skills. One participating elementary school is boasting the highest reading scores in the county with the help of RSVP

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volunteers.

100% of the senior citizens/disabled adults identified as in need of visitation by a RSVP volunteer maintained their independence because they have companionship and a weekly check on their well-being and 80% demonstrated improved overall well-being and enhanced quality of life.

429 individuals were assisted with Medicaid issues, of which 28% fall below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level.

27,865 meals were served at congregate meal sites. The daily and/or regular contact has enabled the seniors to receive a meal and feel safe. 100% senior citizens participating in the nutrition program maintained independent living this service year.

86 senior citizens were able to remain in their homes as a direct result of safety enhancements (construction or installation of handicap entrance ramps or grab bars in the bathrooms).

243 volunteers representing 34 volunteer stations reported 15,672 hours of service in the nonimpact category. Many Columbus County RSVPers like the variety, exposure to people, and the challenges of working with different agencies, all of which were nonprofits.

### POLICIES & PROCEDURES

SCC enjoys support from the state, county commissioners and the general public in terms of financial support. Recently one donor gave over \$3 million to support the college and its mission.

Program staff fall under the college's personnel policies and procedures, which clearly state protocol for travel, leave, purchasing, hiring, etc. The policy and procedure manual also clearly defines the roles of the administration, faculty, staff and Board of Trustees.

As previously explained in more detail, purchasing procedures follow the NC Community College System protocol. All purchases must be supported by written documentation and at least two authorized signatures, ensuring that all expenditures are reasonable, allowable, and allocable.

The RSVP program is treated the same as all other programs at SCC. As a result, computer upgrades, equipment, and technical support are in-kind contributions. High-speed internet on broadband has been the standard for years. This in-kind service allows RSVP staff to take advantage of webinars and other forms of online training. SCC provides in-kind support in the form of space for staff offices and volunteer functions, postage, vehicle insurance, security and custodial support, information technology support (including training and repairs), and professional development funds (conferences, seminars, college course, etc.).

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### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The plan for continuous improvement involves evaluation of program effectiveness, the beneficiaries of RSVP services, and community impact from performance measures. These areas are assessed by the staff, the sponsor, the Advisory Council Members, the volunteers, the volunteer stations and CNCS Compliance Monitoring and progress reports. Results of the evaluations are disseminated primarily through written communication, i.e., annual reports and newsletters.

RSVP is a part of the sponsor's annual Institutional Effectiveness Plans (IEP). IEPs are designed to demonstrate how the mission and the goals of a program (ie, RSVP) impact the services, mission, and goals of the college. Critical areas are identified by the sponsor. RSVP then describes how these areas of critical importance will be addressed. This process ensures that the sponsor and project are compatible and focused on the service area stakeholders and beneficiaries.

RSVP staff are evaluated annually by the sponsor. Accomplishments, challenges, and short- and long-term (personal & programmatic) goals are established and evaluated. This format keeps the focus on what is efficient and effective in terms of staffing patterns and programmatic issues. Electing to evaluate both the challenges and accomplishments has resulted in a more strategic approach to volunteer recruitment.

As a direct result of the 2009 Field Guidance Reference, an annual assessment of the accomplishments and impacts of the project on the identified needs and problems of the client population in the community was developed. This assessment reflects the accomplishments and impact the program has had on an identified community need, and is in addition to the information reported in Progress Reports. This assessment evaluates volunteer satisfaction, communication systems, resource development, and development and management of volunteer stations. For example, this process pointed out the need for services to seniors in the community to enhance their ability to live independently at home. What was missing was how many people actually benefited from the volunteers' efforts. As a result, the RSVP staff educated the volunteer base on the importance of the information and encouraged volunteers to include this information on their timesheets. More accurate data regarding the numbers of beneficiaries is now being captured. This area will continue to be a focal point.

Volunteers and volunteer station managers: Our assessment revealed that the public and the volunteers were basically unaware of the impact being made in the community. As a direct result, a strategic emphasis was placed on the dissemination of this information. Impact of the RSVP volunteers is being talked about at public presentations, in newspaper articles, in the annual report to

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stakeholders, at recognition events, and through personal one-on-one acknowledgements to volunteers and/or the beneficiaries. Comments from volunteers reflect that receiving this information made a positive impact on how they felt about volunteering. The 2013 surveys reflect that 98% of the volunteers now report they are having an impact on the community through their volunteer service as compared to only 90% in an earlier survey.

Additionally, the CNCS conducts annual program evaluations through Program Progress Reports. The program has successfully completed compliance reviews. The CNCS is very helpful in responding to progress reports and providing constructive criticism that has enhanced the program. For example, through the review of these reports the staff are reminded that individuals outside of our community may not be aware of our demographics and economic struggles. Providing detailed information and expanding on how assessments have added value to the program's effectiveness has also been a tremendous asset in demonstrating impact in our community.

Feedback from assessments is taken seriously. Because assessments have proven useful in the strengthening of quality service and identification of potential weaknesses, we will continue to evaluate our program and disseminate the results. Surveys will continue to be used in the development of the sponsor's institutional effectiveness plans, planning of events, determining recognition strategies, informing the public of community impact, and ensuring that the volunteers are meeting the needs of the volunteer stations.

### Other

The 2014 Compliance Monitoring report, as submitted by CNCS program specialist Frank DiSilvestro on April 17, 2014, reported the following "strengths and effective practice" for Columbus County RSVP. This information is quoted directly from the official report.

Organizational Capacity: The RSVP director has strong organizational skills and over 16 years of experience running the program. The sponsor offers valuable support and resources for the RSVP program (facilities, financial management, technical assistance, etc.).

Impact: The program addresses a range of community needs. Primary areas of impact include Health, Education, and Disaster Preparedness/Response. The program has also demonstrated a flexibility and responsiveness to community needs as they are expressed to the sponsor and project director.

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Community Input: The RSVP advisory council meets regularly and provides valuable input and feedback on the program. During the monitoring visit several members of the advisory group shared their perspectives on how the program is meeting important community needs.

Program Management: The RSVP program is managed in an organized and efficient manner. For example:

Volunteer Reporter is used to house volunteer assignment descriptions and track volunteer hours. This leads to efficient and accurate reporting on CNCS-required progress reports.

Member files are well organized.

Station files are well organized.

Fiscal Systems: The program has effective financial tracking and documentation through Southeastern Community College's financial management system. Federal and non-federal funds are tracked separately and all expenses spot-checked during the monitoring visit were backed up by documentation.

### **PNS Amendment (if applicable)**

N/A