

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

An estimated 250 RSVP volunteers will serve in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties through Lower Columbia CAP's RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum. Some of their activities will include educating and counseling low-income individuals on their healthcare options, delivering meals to homebound seniors, supporting food banks, providing companionship to homebound adults, tutoring/mentoring K-12 students, providing literacy education to economically disadvantaged individuals, and assisting low-income individuals with free tax preparation. The primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures. At the end of the three- year grant, 225 homebound older adults and persons with disabilities will report increased social ties/perceived support, 7,500 individuals will report increased food security for themselves and their children, 3,000 individuals will receive assistance accessing and understanding their healthcare options. Additionally, volunteers will serve in the area of education, economic opportunity, veterans and military families, environmental stewardship, capacity building, and other community priorities. The CNCS federal investment of \$41,066 will be supplemented by \$39,167 anticipated non-federal resources.

## Strengthening Communities

### COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION SUMMARY:

RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum serves two counties, six cities, and forty-eight towns and unincorporated communities. Cowlitz County has a population of 103,300 persons and Wahkiakum County has a population of 4,020 persons based on the 2013 Population Trends report from the State of Washington's Office of Financial Management. According to the 2012 U.S. Census, racially, Cowlitz County is predominantly White (92.5% of residents); the second largest racial group is Native American, at 3.3 % of the population. Ethnically, Cowlitz County is less than 8% Hispanic, which is significantly lower than the state average of almost 12%. The cities of Longview and Kelso contain almost 50% of Cowlitz County's population. Wahkiakum County's population is 94.1% White, 1.5% Native American, and 3.7% Hispanic. Cathlamet is the largest town in Wahkiakum County with a population of 532; the rest of Wahkiakum's population resides in rural, unincorporated communities.

Poverty is one of the greatest issues that continues to impact residents of Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties and has grown more prevalent in the past three years. The national economic downturn

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severely impacted Southwest Washington, especially Cowlitz and Wahkiakum. Historically, poverty and unemployment rates in Cowlitz County are higher than the state and national averages. Between 2000 and 2011 the number of people in poverty in Cowlitz County rose from 11.5 to 16.9%. Today, 19.7% of Cowlitz County residents are considered impoverished according to the 2010-2012 American Community Survey Three-Year Estimates. 32.7% of children fall below the Federal Poverty Guidelines and more than 54% of public school children countywide qualify for free or reduced lunches. The rate of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is at a rate 60% higher than the State of Washington and four times higher than the national average. A significant network of resources and services are needed in Cowlitz and Wahkikaum to help seniors and persons with disabilities maintain independent living, low-income families who face food insecurity, and provide information on healthcare and services to economically disadvantaged individuals.

### COMMUNITY NEEDS (H10, H11, H12):

H10 & 12 - For low-income households, it is a challenge to afford food, let alone purchase nutritious food. Cowlitz and Wahkiakum families are dependent on food stamps, WIC, and school lunch programs to supplement their dietary needs. When these resources are exhausted, families rely on local food banks to supply their emergency food needs. In 2012, the Cowlitz Family Health Center, who is the only WIC agency in Cowlitz County, served 4,541 infants and children under five and 1,745 pregnant, breast-feeding, and postpartum women. Of the infants born in Cowlitz County, 67% were served by WIC with the statewide average being 49.1%. Cowlitz County ranks sixth in the percentage of children served; of the WIC families served, 55% were working and 76.2% live in poverty. In 2012, the city of Kelso was identified as containing the highest number of food stamp recipients in Washington State; Longview was ranked sixth. Cowlitz County has the second highest rate of food stamp usage in Washington State. Food insecurity is a serious and long-term problem faced by our community. With high unemployment rates and lower-than-average median incomes, many residents of Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties experience food insecurity. U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts reports the 2008-2012 median income of Cowlitz County was \$46,568 and Wahkiakum County was \$45,335, both well below Washington State's median income of \$59,374.

According to the 2012 Feeding America Food Insecurity Survey, 16.6% of Cowlitz County residents

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and 15.7% of Wahkiakum County residents face food insecurity. Children are among the most vulnerable victims of food insecurity: 27.6% of children in Cowlitz County and 27.9% of children in Wahkiakum County experience hunger. With one in four children facing food insecurity, food banks, food pantries, and commodities sites provide much needed relief to hungry families.

RSVP's Service Activities: 50 RSVP volunteers will serve 10,000 individuals who face food insecurity throughout Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties. Volunteers will fulfill a variety of food distribution duties including: collecting and transporting food; unloading food delivery trucks; organizing, packaging, and distributing food boxes. Volunteers will serve for an average of 2 hours per week at food banks, food pantries, and commodities sites that are RSVP stations. All food distribution sites will utilize RSVP's modified version of the USDA Household Food Security survey to measure the number of individuals who report increased food security. RSVP will distribute, collect, and record the results of this survey annually.

H11- Long-term food insecurity and limited access to nutritious food negatively impact one's overall health. Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties continue to be in the bottom 15% of Washington State's counties for health outcomes and health factors. Unhealthy behaviors of smoking, obesity, binge drinking, and other factors have Cowlitz County ranked last at 39th out of 39 counties. Negative health behaviors such as maternal smoking are at a rate nearly three times higher than the State average. According to the 2013 Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by PeaceHealth St. John's Medical Center, Cowlitz County's death rate from chronic illnesses is consistently higher than the state average. Cowlitz County's death rate from diabetes is nearly 70% higher than the state rate. Cowlitz residents are 66% more likely to smoke than state residents. Additionally, Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (CLRD) deaths are nearly 54% higher in Cowlitz County than statewide -- this is an important finding, as CLRD is a group of diseases associated with smoking.

In 2010, Cowlitz On The Move, Pathways 2020, and the Cowlitz County Health Department produced the Community Food Assessment of Cowlitz County which mapped low-income neighborhoods and their lack of access to grocery stores and fresh produce. According to the Food Assessment, unhealthy foods are the most accessible option for Cowlitz residents. 36% of Cowlitz adults and 32% of Wahkiakum adults are obese. An important part of improving one's health is

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making healthy food choices. Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties have experienced an increased demand for community gardens to address the lack of fresh produce options in low-income neighborhoods. Additionally, there are 16 school gardens which give students the opportunity to learn where food comes from, taste new foods, and experience growing fresh produce. Multiple studies have shown that elementary students who participate in school garden programs make healthier food choices based on their exposure to new foods. With 27.6% of children in Cowlitz and 27.9% of children in Wahkiakum facing long-term hunger, education and access to healthy food choices are essential to battle the chronic illnesses associated with obesity.

RSVP's Service Activities: 4 RSVP volunteers will serve 300 individuals who face long-term hunger. Volunteers will participate in a variety of hunger-alleviation activities including: developing and maintaining community gardens; weeding, planting, and harvesting at community gardens; supporting healthy eating courses hosted at community gardens; enrolling clients in food programs (both federal, state, and non-profit); connecting individuals by phone or in-person to local services for employment, education, medical, and other financial assistance programs that will result in alleviating long-term hunger. Volunteers will serve an average of 2 hours per week at RSVP stations throughout Cowlitz and Wahkiakum.

### COMMUNITY NEEDS (H8 & H9):

Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties face a rapidly aging population. According to the WA Office of Financial Management, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties have a higher senior population at 17.4% (Cowlitz) and 28.4% (Wahkiakum) than Washington State's average of 13.6%. In the next sixteen years, our community's senior population (65+) will increase to 24.9% in Cowlitz and 42.3% in Wahkiakum. The U.S. Census states that 19.6% of residents in Cowlitz and 23.5% of residents in Wahkiakum have a disability. The Cowlitz County Comprehensive Plan Committee reports that 44.8% of all residents over the age of 65 have a disability. Of those disabled, 25.9% have ambulatory issues and 15.5% have difficulty living independently.

Poor access to food and inadequate access to transportation are primary risk factors associated with institutionalization, isolation, decreased health, and inability to age in place. According to the

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Southwest Washington Agency on Aging & Disabilities, it will take a coordinated system of home and community-based services to promote the independence, choice, well-being, and dignity of persons over the age of 65 and persons with disabilities.

A Feeding America-Senior Hunger study found that food insecure seniors sometimes had enough money to purchase food, but did not have the resources to access or prepare food due to lack of transportation, functional limitations, or health problems. With an aging population, demands for food delivery, transportation, and companionship support services will increase. Access to resources and services is a challenge for seniors and disabled persons in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum due to several factors including: limited public transportation, distance from service providers due to rural living conditions, and limited food providers. RSVP volunteers are needed in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum to help seniors and persons with disabilities maintain independent living.

RSVP's Service Activities: 25 RSVP volunteers will help 330 homebound seniors and persons with disabilities maintain independent living through a variety of services including: delivering meals through Meals on Wheels; transporting clients to medical appointments, essential errands, and service organizations; providing companionship through phone calls and friendly visits; assisting with household chores, reading mail, writing letters, etc. Volunteers will serve an average of 2-4 hours per week at RSVP stations throughout Cowlitz and Wahkiakum. All RSVP stations will use a modified version of Senior Corps' Independent Living Survey to measure the number of homebound seniors and persons with disabilities who have increased social support due to these service activities. RSVP will distribute, collect, and record the results of this survey annually.

### **COMMUNITY NEEDS (H2):**

H2 - People with a low-income and limited education are more likely to have difficulty accessing health care services and are more likely to have chronic health problems. Limited financial resources directly affect their ability to access services, make healthy food choices, and manage chronic health problems. According to PeaceHealth St. John's Medical Center's 2013 Community Health Needs Assessment, Cowlitz County residents perform worse than the rest of Washington State on many standard measures: they are one third more likely to rate their overall health as fair or poor; their number of premature deaths (before age 75) is a third higher than for the State; they are more likely

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to have a chronic disease such as diabetes or high blood pressure; they have a 36% obesity rate (one in three people) -- 10 percentage points higher than statewide rates; county residents are 66% more like to smoke than state residents.

As of 2013, 16% of adults were uninsured although these numbers will be reduced with the expansion of healthcare through the Affordable Care Act. Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties face a rapidly aging population. According to the WA Office of Financial Management, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties have a higher senior population at 17.4% (Cowlitz) and 28.4% (Wahkiakum) than Washington State's average of 13.6%. Programs such as Medicare, Washington Apple Health (Medicaid), and individual plans on the Washington Health Benefits Exchange offer insurance coverage to residents, but the complicated processes and choices can be overwhelming for people. Supplemental programs, such as the Medicare Savings Program and Low-Income Subsidy for Medicare Part D prescriptions, save low-income seniors hundreds of dollars annually, yet many seniors are unaware of their eligibility. Healthcare information is constantly changing which places low-income individuals, vulnerable seniors, and persons with disabilities at a disadvantage. RSVP volunteers are needed in our community to educate, counsel, and navigate individuals on healthcare options.

RSVP Service Activities: 20 RSVP volunteers will provide information on healthcare insurance, healthcare access, and health benefits programs to 3,000 individuals through the following activities: one-on-one counseling, informational seminars, educational classes, distributing information at health fairs, staffing SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors) hotlines, and assisting clients with signing up for supplemental savings programs. Each volunteer will serve an average of 3 hours per week.

PLAN AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT DATA COLLECTION AND ENSURE NATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASURE OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS ARE MEASURED, COLLECTED, AND MANAGED:

RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum has spent the past two years preparing for the implementation of National Performance Measures by meeting one-on-one with RSVP stations to explain Senior Corps' new standards, giving informational presentations on the new "focus areas," and

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working with RSVP stations to develop volunteer positions that fall within focus areas. All outputs and outcomes in this plan were discussed with each of the stations to ensure that appropriate data collection tools and tracking are in place. The RSVP Program Manager will work with all stations to develop individualized plans, outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding, to collect outcomes and outputs from the stations on an annual basis or more frequently depending on what best suits the station. Outputs and outcomes will be reviewed for completeness, consistency, and compliance. Back-up documentation will be saved for seven years.

DESCRIBE ANY ACTIVITY IN SERVICE TO VETERANS AND/OR MILITARY FAMILIES AS PART OF SERVICE IN THE PRIMARY FOCUS AREA, OTHER FOCUS AREAS, OR CAPACITY BUILDING:

According to the U.S. Census, there are 11,118 veterans residing in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs reports that 30% of the veteran population lives in rural areas and the median age for rural veterans is 55-64. A 2011 Department of Veterans Affairs study found that 35.1-40% of Washington State's 65 years and older population are veterans. Veterans in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum face higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, and substance abuse than the general population.

RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum serves veterans and military families through most service activities including delivering meals to homebound veterans, providing free tax preparation to veterans and their families, and distributing food boxes to veterans facing food insecurity. RSVP will add a "Are you a veteran or related to an active military service member?" question to our annual food bank and independent living survey to capture the number of veterans and military families served. RSVP volunteers serve veterans through the SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors) program by helping veterans navigate their healthcare options including Medicare, Washington Apple Health, Tricare, and CHAMPVA. RSVP volunteers also serve at Cowlitz Valley Veterans Service Office which assists veterans in accessing state and federal benefits as well as other community resources.

Veterans also serve as RSVP volunteers. The RSVP Advisory Council is proud to have a veteran on

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their board as an active member. RSVP plans to increase the number of veterans served and recruited as volunteers by: partnering with the soon-to-be-opened Cowlitz County Veterans Service Center which will help veterans access benefits, employment, and housing; hosting informational booths at targeted veteran events including the Cowlitz Veterans Stand Down; actively recruiting veteran volunteers through local VFWs; participating in local drives and fundraisers to supply active-duty military service members with care packages.

### **Recruitment and Development**

#### **VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS AND TRAINING**

RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum is committed to creating high quality volunteer assignments that allow volunteers to share their experience, skills, and talents to improve their community and sense of self through volunteering. This occurs through the site development process and volunteer placement process. Site development is a continual process in which RSVP seeks to align community and national priorities with local non-profits, schools, and government agencies that will provide high quality volunteer positions throughout Cowlitz and Wahkiakum. Our project offers volunteer opportunities and stations that provide high quality volunteering experiences including volunteers with severe disabilities. Our plan also includes a range of assignments to meet a wide variety of volunteer schedules including on-going weekly commitments, short-term projects (ranging from a few weeks to a few months), and one-time service opportunities. Throughout the grant period, RSVP will seek additional high-quality volunteer opportunities which align with our primary focus area and other focus areas.

First of all, volunteers are ensured a meaningful volunteer experience through the RSVP station at which they serve. Therefore, a strong station selection process is integral in creating high-quality and meaningful volunteer assignments. Our station selection process, described in the "Program Management" section, makes certain that all stations have staff in place ready to train, supervise, and support volunteers as they launch into their new volunteer assignment. A high quality station values the skills, experiences, and talents that volunteers over the age of 55 have to contribute to their organization; provides solid training and supervision to verify that volunteers are well-equipped; and recognizes the value that RSVP volunteers bring to their organization and community.

Secondly, volunteers are ensured a meaningful volunteer experience through the volunteer placement

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process. The RSVP Program Manager at Lower Columbia Community Action Program (CAP) is experienced and skilled in the area of volunteer placement. When a potential volunteer contacts RSVP, the RSVP Program Manager conducts a brief phone or in-person interview to learn more about the potential volunteer. Listening to a volunteer's needs and desired ways to serve are essential in matching him or her with a meaningful volunteer placement. After carefully listening to the volunteer's interests, skills, and abilities, the RSVP Program Manager suggests appropriate possible volunteer placements. RSVP volunteers have a wide variety of placements throughout Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties from which to choose. New RSVP volunteers are encouraged to use their current skills as well as develop new skills and interests as they make a difference in their community. After a potential volunteer has selected a placement, the RSVP Program Manager connects the volunteer with the station's assigned contact to begin volunteering. Each station provides the appropriate training for volunteers -- for example in the Primary Focus Area, the SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors) program provides an intense two-day Basic Training and additional monthly update training to ensure that volunteers are properly trained to counsel people with healthcare questions. Finally, follow-up phone calls are made within the first quarter of a volunteer's service to verify that the placement is a good fit and rewarding experience for the volunteer. If needed, volunteers are assisted with placement re-assignment or exploring a new volunteer placement. RSVP also assists volunteers and sites in offering additional training opportunities to increase a volunteer's skills and knowledge.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS, RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND RECOGNITION**

RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum serves two counties, six cities, and forty-eight towns and unincorporated communities. Cowlitz County has a population of 103,300 persons and Wahkiakum County has a population of 4,020 persons based on the 2013 Population Trends report from the State of Washington's Office of Financial Management. According to the 2012 U.S. Census, racially, Cowlitz County is predominantly White (92.5% of residents); the second largest racial group is Native American, at 3.3 % of the population. Ethnically, Cowlitz County is less than 8% Hispanic, which is significantly lower than the state average of almost 12%. The cities of Longview and Kelso contain almost 50% of Cowlitz County's population. Wahkiakum County's population is 94.1% White, 1.5% Native American, and 3.7% Hispanic. Cathlamet is the largest town in Wahkiakum County with

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a population of 532; the rest of Wahkiakum's population resides in rural, unincorporated communities. According to the U.S. Census, there are 11,118 veterans residing in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties. According to the WA Office of Financial Management, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties have a higher senior population at 17.4% (Cowlitz) and 28.4% (Wahkiakum) than Washington State's average of 13.6%. In the next sixteen years, our community's senior population (65+) will increase to 24.9% in Cowlitz and 42.3% in Wahkiakum. The U.S. Census states that 19.6% of residents in Cowlitz and 23.5% of residents in Wahkiakum have a disability. The Cowlitz County Comprehensive Plan Committee reports that 44.8% of all residents over the age of 65 have a disability. Of those disabled, 25.9% have ambulatory issues and 15.5% have difficulty living independently.

RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum is committed to providing meaningful and impactful volunteer placements that reflect the diversity of our community. The first way our RSVP project ensures a diverse pool of volunteers is through our RSVP Advisory Council. The RSVP Advisory Council for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum contains thirteen members representative of our volunteers' backgrounds including but not limited to diversity in age, socio-economic background, ethnicity/race, ability/disability, sexual orientation, and veterans. The RSVP Advisory Council supports and promotes RSVP through recruitment presentations, hosting booths at fairs and community events, planning recognition events, organizing short-term community service projects, and promoting strong RSVP and station relationships through visits. The RSVP Advisory Council meets once per month to plan upcoming projects, share updates on subcommittee projects, discuss project development, and review current project information. The Advisory Council works closely with the RSVP Program Manager to brainstorm ways of reaching new volunteers and creating new station partnerships. Additionally, the RSVP Program Manager provides monthly updates on volunteer hours and numbers to keep the members informed on the status of the project.

One the RSVP Advisory Council's main goals is to promote volunteerism among low-income seniors, persons with disabilities, and veterans. JoAnne Baker, a retired insurance broker and RSVP advisory member, says: "RSVP provides an important opportunity for seniors who think 'I can't do anything because I'm poor or disabled' that they can contribute something. Everyone, regardless of their age or physical ability, has something to give. It's important that RSVP provides volunteer opportunities where everyone can give back." RSVP Advisory members, like JoAnne Baker, are the best

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representatives and recruiters for attracting new volunteers because they are passionate about RSVP and want to share their positive volunteer experiences with others.

To promote volunteerism among persons with disabilities, RSVP has partnered with Life Works, a non-profit dedicated to creating employment and volunteer opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. This new partnership will result in placing people who do not normally have access to traditional volunteer assignments in RSVP stations. RSVP and Life Works are also partnering to create a recycling program to collect printer cartridges and paper from local businesses which will provide people with disabilities an opportunity to get out into the community as well as encourage recycling. RSVP has also partnered with Lower Columbia CAP's Senior Nutrition department to provide the "R U OK?" program. This program provides a daily check-in phone call for homebound seniors or persons with disabilities. In addition to providing companionship, this program offers homebound seniors an opportunity to volunteer by phone. Homebound seniors who sign up to volunteer with "R U OK?" are paired with another homebound senior thus providing an added safety network in maintaining independent living.

The second part of the recruitment and retention plan includes developing materials and advertising specific to engaging volunteers in the primary focus area, Healthy Futures, as well as other focus areas. RSVP will continue working on these marketing tools with feedback from volunteers and stations to best target groups of unreached potential volunteers. RSVP will translate materials into Spanish to attract a growing Hispanic population. RSVP will also develop more short-term volunteer opportunities to attract younger volunteers who are still working. As the Baby Boomer generation continues to work well beyond 65, the stereotypical image of RSVP volunteers who work five days a week at a volunteer station for twenty-plus years is fading. According to CNCS's "Keeping Baby Boomers Volunteering" study, Baby Boomers seek volunteer opportunities that are not only community enriching, but self-fulfilling. RSVP will concentrate on developing short-term, flexible volunteer opportunities alongside the traditional weekly volunteer assignments in order to attract a younger demographic.

The third part of the recruitment and retention plan comprises of increasing RSVP's online presence through VolunteerMatch.org and social media such as Facebook to attract younger volunteers. RSVP lists current volunteer opportunities on VolunteerMatch.org and links those positions to the RSVP

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Facebook page. In addition to online media, RSVP distributes posters and brochures to stations, community centers, senior centers, libraries, and non-profit organizations. All RSVP stations are given a "RSVP Volunteers Serving Here" sign to proudly display our partnership. RSVP staff and volunteers represent RSVP at various community meetings. RSVP staff and volunteers are active members of community groups including: the Cowlitz Resources Providers Network, Cowlitz Disability Advisory Committee, AARP Local Chapter, Wahkiakum Hunger Relief Task Force, Cowlitz Asset Building Coalition, and Cowlitz Senior Fair Committee. Through attending and participating in community groups, RSVP is able to share new volunteer opportunities, form new partnerships, and recruit new volunteers.

The fourth part of the recruitment and retention plan involves maintaining and nurturing relationships with current volunteers. Research and staff experience have proven word-of-mouth to be the most effective recruitment tool; hence, current and former volunteers are a valuable resource in recruiting new volunteers. When volunteers feel connected to an RSVP station and see the value of belonging to RSVP, they are much more likely to encourage friends and family to join in their experience. Volunteer recognition is an integral aspect of building a relationship with volunteers. Each year, RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum recognizes volunteers in several ways. The RSVP Advisory Council helps organize an annual themed recognition breakfast each Spring. Past annual recognition events have included community dignitaries as guest speakers, presentation of Life-Time Achievement presidential certificates for volunteers who serve more than 4,000 hours, and donated entertainment by local artists. In 2014, volunteers were invited to attend the annual RSVP recognition breakfast. This year's theme was "RSVP Has Talent!" Volunteers were served an all-American style breakfast and entertained by the dancing of a local square dance group. Volunteers received a program that listed all volunteers and hours they served. Three volunteers received their Life-Time Achievement awards and their biographies were featured in the program. In addition to receiving gift cards, volunteers had their names entered into drawings for prizes donated by local businesses at the soliciting of the RSVP Advisory Council.

In addition to an annual recognition breakfast, volunteers are recognized throughout the year through RSVP's bimonthly newsletter and other publications. The RSVP bimonthly newsletter, "Volunteer Focus," features a "volunteer of the month" along with that volunteer's photo and story about their volunteer experience. The newsletter also features a "station of the month" to highlight the

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work of our partners. The newsletter lists current volunteer opportunities, topical articles on senior issues written by RSVP volunteers, and a calendar of community events that volunteers might like to attend. Each RSVP volunteer and station receives a digital copy of the newsletter via email; in cases where a volunteer does not have email, RSVP has a stack of print copies available in the office for the volunteer to retrieve. Whenever a volunteer is featured in the newsletter, RSVP mails them a few printed copies to share with family and friends. The newsletter is an important recruitment tool because it lists current volunteer opportunities, features real volunteer stories, and allows the community to see the important service that RSVP volunteers provide to the community. Copies of the newsletter are distributed at recruitment events and fairs.

Furthermore, RSVP staff and advisory council members regularly attend recognition events hosted by stations to personally thank volunteers and pass out certificates or pins. Site recognition events are an important component of volunteer retention -- volunteers value the gratitude of the RSVP station because it validates the service they contribute within that organization. The RSVP Program Manager also nominates volunteers for community, state, and national awards on a regular basis.

### **Program Management**

Lower Columbia Community Action Program has a proven record and well-established infrastructure in place to ensure project compliance with federal regulations since 1964. This includes an active and engaged RSVP Advisory Council; regular review of OMB circulars; updating program materials for compliance; quarterly reviewing all volunteer files to ensure all are current and updated; collecting, tracking, and reporting outcome requirements. Lower Columbia CAP consistently performs well in compliance monitoring visits with no major findings.

The RSVP Advisory Council consists of thirteen active and diverse RSVP volunteers and community members. The Advisory Council meets monthly to receive program updates, provide feedback to staff, assist in program development, and report on recognition, recruitment, and other service activities. Many RSVP Advisory Council members serve as "station relations liaisons" to promote a stronger relationship between RSVP and stations.

RSVP/Volunteer Center of Cowlitz-Wahkiakum's station recruitment process ensures that all volunteer stations are in compliance with RSVP regulations from the time a site applies to become a station and throughout the partnership. Prospective stations apply to partner with RSVP by

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completing an application and submitting volunteer job descriptions. The materials are reviewed by the RSVP Program Manager. If the site and volunteer job descriptions align with RSVP guidelines, RSVP will meet with the station staff to ask follow-up questions and tour the site to gain a full understanding of the station's volunteer program. During the site visit, RSVP orients the prospective station on program information and requirements. If the site meets RSVP standards, a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is signed. Every year, the MOU is reviewed by RSVP and the station to verify they are in compliance. Annually, stations verify safety standards through email or written agreement. If stations are not following regulations, RSVP will discuss and verify changes needed through written documentation. If the station cannot make the needed changes to come into compliance, the MOU is terminated. Stations are welcome to reapply again when compliance issues have been resolved.

Prospective RSVP volunteers fill out an application which includes program eligibility criteria and agree to undergo a background check. After a volunteer's background check has cleared, the RSVP Program Manager conducts an in-person interview with the prospective volunteer to discuss his or her interests and current volunteer opportunities. The RSVP volunteer then receives a copy of their volunteer job description and the RSVP Volunteer Handbook. The RSVP Volunteer Handbook provides a history of RSVP, clearly outlines prohibited activities, lists volunteer rights and responsibilities, and explains the volunteer supplemental insurance. RSVP members have the option of volunteering at any RSVP station. RSVP hours are verified by the RSVP Program Manager or their station supervisor.

RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum and its sponsor, Lower Columbia CAP, plan to minimize the disruption to volunteers and stations participating in service activities that no longer align with the RSVP program by providing volunteers and stations the following options: 1.) Stations which no longer align may develop capacity building volunteer positions in which RSVP members may participate and continue to support the organization; 2.) Volunteers will be offered positions which align with the new focus areas; 3.) Volunteers may continue to volunteer outside the RSVP program. Lower Columbia CAP is committed to recognizing the service of all volunteers, including those who serve outside RSVP focus areas. Lower Columbia CAP is seeking additional grants to fund a volunteer program that will support the efforts of all community volunteers; an additional volunteer program would minimize the disruption to current volunteers who no longer serve in RSVP focus areas.

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Lower Columbia CAP has a proven track record for measuring performance in the primary focus area (Healthy Futures) and is partnered with organizations that have a proven track record for measuring performance in the primary focus area. SW Washington Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities, Catholic Community Services, Lower Columbia CAP's Meals on Wheels/Senior Nutrition and Transportation Departments are examples of partners and stations which focus on keeping seniors and persons with disabilities independently in their homes. Lower Columbia CAP's Help Warehouse provides USDA commodities to individuals facing food insecurity and partners with food banks throughout Cowlitz and Wahkiakum to distribute these commodities. Lower Columbia CAP is also committed to helping people understand their healthcare options by sponsoring the SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors) program. All of these partners and programs track and report the number of clients served; these sites also participate in RSVP's annual USDA Household Food Security and Independent Living Surveys.

### Organizational Capability

**EXPERIENCE:** Lower Columbia Community Action Program(CAP) was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization in 1967, as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Today, there are over 1,100 community action programs across the nation, including thirty in Washington State. For 50 years, Lower Columbia CAP has worked to realize its mission of "building healthy communities, one family at a time." Lower Columbia CAP has started a number of programs that grew into important, vital organizations including the Family Health Center, Emergency Support Shelter, Ethnic Support Council, Head Start, and Saturday Farmers Market. In 2013, Lower Columbia CAP served approximately 20,000 people through a variety of food, housing, senior nutrition, transportation, and volunteer service programs. CAP's Executive Director, Ilona Kerby, says: "At CAP, we are in the business of helping people succeed in realizing their goals for a better life for themselves and their families. By giving them a hand up -- not a hand out -- CAP is helping people become successful in their lives, and that means a better, stronger, healthier community for us all. Their success is our success."

**CAPACITY:** Lower Columbia CAP complies with outcomes based reporting for funders such as Washington Department of Commerce, Cowlitz County, and WA Department of Transportation. Lower Columbia CAP manages over forty grants and has a budget in excess of \$7 million. The major

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funding source is government contracts and grants with the balance of revenue from fundraising, donations, program service fees, and in-kind donations. Annually, Lower Columbia CAP must meet OMB A-133 audit requirements by an independent CPA firm. The RSVP budget is designed to meet out programming needs and sufficient to cover all costs. RSVP operates on three-year renewable grants which cover approximately 51% of the program expenses. The remaining balance is committed by Washington State Department of Commerce. The Human Resources Department requires job descriptions for all positions and has a compensation plan based on job functions. The role of the RSVP Program Manager is clearly defined to ensure all project functions are accomplished. Internal policies are in place to outline appropriate use of staff time, purchasing procedures and travel, etc.

**KEY RSVP STAFF:** The current RSVP Program Manager has worked with RSVP for over one year and previously served two years as an AmeriCorps member with Cowlitz AmeriCorps Network. She provides program leadership and management including volunteer and station recruitment, volunteer placement, program compliance, and volunteer recognition. The RSVP Program Manager works closely with the RSVP Advisory Council to build a thriving RSVP program. Lower Columbia CAP's Finance Director has been with the organization for more than 15 years. The Finance Director manages the processing of requisitions, payroll, invoices, accounts payable, inventory, computer technology, and contract management. The Human Resources/Operations Director has been with Lower Columbia CAP for 7 years and directly supervises the RSVP Program Manager. The HR/Operations Director reviews RSVP program development plans, reports, and grants; coordinates daily operations of the CAP's sites; manages Human Resources; develops and implements policies and procedures; oversees quality assurance and employee relations; responsible for employment, compensation and benefits, equal employment opportunity, affirmative action, performance management, staff training, orientation, workers' benefits and human resource information system; ensures that staff conforms to internal policies/procedures, as well as laws and regulations.

**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT:** Lower Columbia CAP manages approximately forty contracts annually. The Finance Department provides the processing of requisitions, payroll, invoices, accounts payable, inventory, computer technology, and contract management. Annually, Lower Columbia CAP must meet OMB A-133 audit requirements by an independent CPA firm. Lower Columbia CAP

## Narratives

manages over 40 grants and has a budget in excess of \$7 million. Lower Columbia CAP has fiscally sound checks and balances in place and regularly receives unqualified audits with no negative findings.

TRACK RECORD: Lower Columbia CAP has over eleven years' experience sponsoring RSVP in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum. For 50 years, Lower Columbia CAP has provided leadership experience in hosting programs and developing programs which eventually form into separate entities. Since 2003, Lower Columbia CAP's RSVP/Volunteer Center for Cowlitz-Wahkiakum has connected people 55 and older to meaningful volunteer opportunities. RSVP volunteers currently have the opportunity to serve at over 40 stations including food banks, veteran service centers, schools, and other non-profits organizations.

CAPITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT: Lower Columbia CAP maintains one full-time facilities employee and two part-time facilities assistants. Lower Columbia CAP has one HQ facility manager. In addition, CAP manages forty properties. Maintenance of eight buses and vehicles is conducted by four full-time and two part-time drivers.

PROCEDURES FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT: Lower Columbia CAP uses data collection tools, as appropriate, to monitor our outcomes and accomplishments, including: CNCS Periodic Reports collected from stations, surveys completed by RSVP volunteers, end-of-year assessments. RSVP uses a database to track recruitment, volunteer hours, and station development activities and outcomes. RSVP determines our annual success by comparing the outcomes to our projected performance measures.

### Other

N/A

### PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A