

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Iowa Lakes Community College, current sponsor of the Northwest Iowa RSVP, is submitting an application for federal funding to sponsor RSVP in Clay, Dickinson, Emmet, Kossuth and Palo Alto counties. An estimated 96 unduplicated RSVP volunteers will serve within the project's primary focus area of Healthy Futures. This represents 32% of the project's total 300 unduplicated volunteers.

RSVP volunteers will serve people of all ages with a focus on older adults, persons with disabilities, low-income residents, veterans, children, and individuals for whom English is a second language. Service activities will include medical and other necessary transportation, companionship, assisting with food security programs, distribution of health insurance information, nutrition education and obesity prevention.

This will be accomplished through partnerships with 111 stations, including the Department of Human Services, Elderbridge Area Agency on Aging, Veterans' Affairs, Iowa State University Extension, Iowa Lakes Community College, hospitals, community health departments, food banks, schools, public agencies and others.

At the end of the three-year grant cycle, Healthy Futures outputs will report that: (1) 108 older adults, people with disabilities and veterans received services that allowed them to live independently, (2) 800 beneficiaries received information on health insurance, (3) 13,000 individuals received services to alleviate long-term hunger and 4.) 200 residents participated in RSVP-led exercise and nutrition programs. RSVP volunteer service activities will report outcomes that 87 homebound or older adults, people with disabilities and veterans reported having increased social ties and perceived social support.

The CNCS federal investment of \$85,408 will be supplemented by \$72,237 from non-federal resources.

## Strengthening Communities

The Northwest Iowa RSVP serves five counties: Clay, Dickinson, Emmet, Kossuth and Palo Alto. The area served is rural, and the economy revolves around agriculture and industry. The total population for all five counties is 68,356 (US Census Bureau, 2010). The area has a large elderly population: nearly 20% of the population is 65 or older, and more than 10% are 75 or older. Individuals 65 and

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older who are living alone make up 12% of all households. The median income is \$44,709 per household. Northwest Iowa is not diverse in terms of race or ethnicity. Caucasian residents make up 96.3% of the population in the service area, but there has been growth in the Hispanic population over the past five years.

RSVP's main office is in Spencer, the county seat of Clay County. The total population of the county is 16,667. The median age is 39.4, and 18% of the population is 65 or older. Ninety-one percent of adults 25 and older have at least a high school education; 18% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income is \$44,294, and 9% of Clay County residents live below the poverty level (US Census Bureau, 2010).

The RSVP office in Emmet County is located in Estherville, the county seat. The population of the county is 10,301. Nineteen percent of the population is 65 or older. Ninety-one percent of adults 25 and older have at least a high school education and 18% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The household median income is \$42,949, and 11.3% live below the poverty level.

The population of Palo Alto County is 9,421. Twenty-one percent of the population is 65 or older. Eighty-seven percent of adults 25 and over have at least a high school education; 15% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income is \$43,752, with 11% of residents living below the poverty level.

In terms of geographic area, Kossuth is the largest county in the service area and has a total population of 15,543. The RSVP office is in Algona, the county seat. Almost 22% of the population is age 65 or older. Eighty-eight percent of adults 25 and older have at least a high school education; 16.5% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Median household income is \$47,812, with 10.1% below the poverty level.

Sponsorship of the state-funded Dickinson County RSVP program was transferred to Iowa Lakes Community College by the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service in June, 2013, and is now a part of the Northwest Iowa RSVP. The total population of Dickinson County is 16,424. Twenty-one percent of the population is 65 or older. Eighty-nine percent of the population 25 and older has at least a high school education; 21% has a bachelor's degree or higher. Tourism is important to Dickinson County - it has beautiful lakes, many recreational opportunities and varied tourist attractions. Median income is \$39,305. Six percent of residents live below the poverty level.

In the counties served by Northwest Iowa RSVP, veterans make up 12% of the population (US Census Bureau, 2010). Not only is the percentage of veterans higher in northwest Iowa than it is nationally, but the percentage of older veterans is considerably higher in the service area. Nationally,

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40% of veterans are 65 or older; in the service area, 54% are over 65. Additionally, 33% of veterans in northwest Iowa are 75 and older, compared to the national average of 21% over 75.

The local Veterans Affairs office estimates that 40-50% of older and/or disabled veterans need assistance with daily activities such as getting to medical appointments, grocery shopping and errands. They also estimate that 30% of all veterans living in the service area are isolated or lonely, without support from family, friends or neighbors, and would benefit from companionship, telephone reassurance, transportation and assistance with financial and health-related paperwork.

There is strong support for local non-profits in these close-knit communities from businesses, service organizations, public agencies and residents. RSVP receives financial support from these entities throughout the service area.

Each county has an inter-agency network allowing representatives from non-profit, public and governmental organizations to share information, discuss community needs, and become familiar with services offered within the county. RSVP staff has found that involvement in these networks creates new partnerships, provides opportunities to identify and evaluate priorities, avoids duplication of services and helps raise awareness of RSVP.

Northwest Iowa provides an ideal setting to get an education, raise a family, and grow old. Assets include good schools, a community college system with campuses in each of the five counties in the RSVP service area, excellent medical facilities, a variety of entertainment and recreational options, and an emphasis on services and programs for older people.

The economic downturn has negatively impacted businesses as well as non-profits in Northwest Iowa. Agency budgets are strained, staffs have been cut, and services have been reduced. However, the economic decline also creates opportunities for RSVP. Public agencies look to RSVP as a solution to problems resulting from a lack of resources, knowing from past experience that RSVP volunteers are an effective way to fill gaps in service.

For example, the Department of Human Services and Elderbridge Area Agency on Aging both contract with Northwest Iowa RSVP to provide transportation and companionship services for their clients, recognizing that RSVP volunteers can meet the clients' needs in a caring and cost-effective manner. Funds from these contracts are used to reimburse volunteer expenses and help defray RSVP administrative costs.

RSVP staff will continue to identify new opportunities to solve community problems through service with a goal of placing volunteers in high-quality assignments with outcomes that confirm to the volunteers that they are making a difference.

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The demographics of the service area indicate that the need for services for low-income elderly will continue to increase. Because the area is rural with very few public transportation options (most communities don't even have a taxi service), there is a critical need for safe, affordable transportation - not only for the elderly, but also for low-income families, veterans and people with disabilities.

A recent influx of Hispanic families to the area has created challenges, but also opportunities, for RSVP. Several Hispanic families have received services through RSVP volunteers, including medical transportation, mentoring, tutoring and translating. There is a growing need for Spanish-speaking volunteers, and so RSVP staff will address that issue in the coming year through targeted recruitment of bilingual volunteers. RSVP will also recruit advisory council members from the Hispanic community.

Primary Focus Area: Healthy Futures -- Community Need. Northwest Iowa RSVP's Primary Focus Area is Healthy Futures with an emphasis on service activities relating to Aging in Place. Ninety-six unduplicated volunteers (32%) will serve in Healthy Futures: 56 (19%) of these volunteers will serve in work plans with National Performance Measure Outcomes.

Healthy Futures Objective: Aging In Place. The University of Iowa's Center on Aging published a paper titled "The Iowa Challenge in Aging" (Aging in Place, Community Population, 2009). It confirmed that Iowa is a state of older adults. Using US Census data, the report showed that Iowa ranked fourth in the nation in the percentage of residents age 85+ (2.6%), and fifth in the percentage of residents age 65+ (14.7%). In comparison, 1.8% of the US population was 85+ and 12.6% was 65+ in 2009. The authors project that by 2030, 22.4% of Iowans will be age 65+.

The US Census Bureau estimates that in 2013, the percentage of residents over 65 in each of the counties in the service area was substantially higher than the percentage of over-65 residents in the state (15.6%): Clay, 19.4%; Dickinson, 23.4%; Emmet, 19.1%; Kossuth, 22%; and Palo Alto, 21.4%. An estimated 14,412 adults age 65 and older lived in the 5-county service area in 2013.

The Iowa Department of Elder Affairs (IDEA) conducted a survey of the needs of Iowans age 60 and older who are living in their homes (Service Needs of Older Iowans, 2008). The survey reported on the percentage of older adults needing assistance and the percentage of older adults who responded they would be "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to need assistance by 2010.

In responding to the IDEA survey, a majority of older Iowans said they had received a variety of services and assistance provided by government agencies, non-profit organizations, private groups and individuals during 2008. Despite these efforts, 20% of Iowans age 60 and older did not receive the services they needed, or did not receive all of the assistance they needed. Looking ahead, an even

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larger percentage of older Iowans (33%) said it was at least somewhat likely they would be in need of a variety of services within the next two years.

The IDEA study identified transportation as a primary need among residents 60 and older in 2008 and projected the need would increase for those same individuals in 2010. One in 10 said they ride with someone else when they needed to go places and one in five older adults said there were times they were unable to get to places they needed to go due to lack of transportation.

Elderbridge Area Agency on Aging estimates that 30% of senior citizens, people with disabilities, and veterans living in the service area have unmet transportation needs. A survey of RSVP stations and other community organizations in 2009 by Northwest Iowa RSVP clearly showed that transportation was the most critical need for older adults and people with disabilities in the rural communities of northwest Iowa.

Public transportation in the service area is very limited. Regional Transit Authority buses run only during the daytime and only on weekdays. There is no public transportation for residents in the evenings or over weekends. Taxi service is available during the daytime in the five county-seat communities, but not at all in the smaller towns throughout the rural counties. The public transportation that is available can be expensive for low-income individuals with ongoing transportation needs. It can also be inconvenient. For example, a cancer patient receiving radiation treatments that take just a few minutes may have to wait an hour or longer for the RTA bus to take them home after the procedure.

The lack of convenient, appropriate and affordable transportation results in residents having limited access to necessary services including medical, dental and optical exams; chemotherapy and radiation treatments; physical and occupational therapy; cardiac rehab; dialysis; and mental health care. They also lack transportation for non-medical but necessary trips, such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy, visiting a spouse or friend at a local care center, conducting business at their bank or Social Security office, etc. Volunteers can help meet the need by providing transportation for these individuals, allowing them to remain in their homes longer.

Elderbridge Area Agency on Aging estimates that 20% of residents 65 and older in the service area are homebound. Many other older people who aren't categorized as homebound are nevertheless isolated because they cannot drive, cannot afford public transportation, and/or do not have family or friends living nearby. This elderly population will grow as residents ages 50-64 continue to age in their communities.

Isolation and loss of social interaction due to poor health, lack of transportation or other issues

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are contributing factors to depression and self-neglect. Social exchange is vital to maintaining mental health (National Institute on Aging, "Living Long & Well in the 21st Century: Strategic Directions for Research on Aging" 2007). RSVP volunteers can help ease isolation and lack of socialization through clearly articulated service activities, enabling elderly residents to continue to live independently.

Service Activities: RSVP has identified evidenced-based service activities for volunteers to provide community solutions to address these unmet needs. The goal of the RSVP staff is that these service activities will have a vital impact in both assisting older adults to live independently and increasing their social ties and/or perceived social support. Service activities include:

1.) Transportation: Accessible transportation is critical to helping elderly and disabled populations remain in their homes. RSVP staff annually surveys transportation clients in the service area to evaluate the impact having rides has on their ability to live independently. Ninety-six percent of beneficiaries reported that the RSVP transportation program improved their sense of independence and decreased their feelings of isolation. They also reported they worried less about getting to medical appointments.

2.) In-Home Companionship: Isolation can lead to serious mental health issues for older adults (National Institute on Aging, 2007). In-home friendly visits and telephone reassurance calls from RSVP volunteers can help to combat social isolation among seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans. These visits provide socialization, emotional support and a safety net to ensure homebound older adults receive community support.

National Performance Measures: NPM outputs for these activities will be the number of homebound or isolated adults, veterans and people with disabilities who receive services that allow them to live independently. The NPM outcomes for transportation and companionship will be the number of homebound or older adults and individuals with disabilities who report having increased social ties and/or perceived social support. RSVP staff will work closely with station managers to collect the necessary information to report on NPM outputs and outcomes for these service activities.

Healthy Futures Objectives: Access to Care -- Community Need. The AARP estimates that one person becomes eligible for Medicare every eight seconds. Despite the popularity of Medicare, it is still a confusing system for seniors to navigate. Given the previously reported statistics of older adults in the service area, there is a growing need for assistance in understanding Medicare information and health care choices.

Service Activities. RSVP Volunteers will participate in activities to provide information to clients on health insurance and health benefits programs through the Senior Health Insurance Information

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Program (SHIIP) and through the Elderguides program sponsored by Elderbridge Area Agency on Aging. SHIIP is a free, confidential service that helps Iowans make informed decisions about Medicare and other health coverage. SHIIP volunteers provide one-on-one assistance to Iowans with questions and problems related to Medicare, Medicare Advantage, drug benefits, supplemental insurance and long-term care.

RSVP volunteers will also serve as Elderguides to assist Elderbridge AAA with distribution of Medicare and other health care information at senior centers, health fairs, assisted living facilities, retirement complexes and other events, activities and locations.

National Performance Measures: RSVP staff will work with the SHIIP station managers and with Elderbridge Area Agency on Aging staff to track the NPM outputs to report on the number of clients who receive Medicare and health insurance information through SHIIP volunteers and Elderguides.

Healthy Futures Objective: Obesity and Food -- Community Need. In the 2012 Map-the-Meal Gap report by Feeding America, it is noted that the average rate of food insecurity in Iowa was 13.4%. Food insecurity applies to individuals and families who lack access to enough food for an active healthy life for all household members.

Hunger and food insecurity are closely linked with poverty. A 2010 study found that just under 75% of households served by the Feeding America network of emergency feeding organizations (EFOs) -- food banks, food pantries, soup or emergency kitchens, and shelters -- had incomes below the federal poverty line; household income for 78% of Iowa EFO clients fell below the federal poverty line (Hunger in America: Local Report Prepared for the Food Bank of Iowa, Feeding America).

Food banks and food pantries help people who experience food insecurity by providing basic food items such as meat, dairy products, fresh produce and canned items. In Iowa, more than 1,160 local and regional feeding organizations (EFOs) distribute food to those in need, according to Iowa Food Banks, Feeding America).

The Clay County Director of Upper Des Moines Opportunity, a local community action agency that sponsors food pantries, reported that food assistance participation in Northwest Iowa continues to increase even though the overall population of the area has decreased. More than 12,000 individuals received assistance through food pantries in the service area in 2012.

Service Activities. RSVP volunteers will address food insecurity issues to alleviate long-term hunger in the service area by registering new clients, interviewing returning clients, and by purchasing, collecting, storing, stocking, packing, unloading trucks, and/or distributing food packages.

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National Performance Measures: RSVP will work closely with food pantry station managers to track the NPM outputs and report on the number of individuals receiving support, services, education and/or referrals to alleviate long-term hunger.

Managing RSVP Volunteers and Stations in Healthy Futures: Northwest Iowa RSVP has collaborated with partner stations that focus on Healthy Futures since the project began almost 40 years ago. The project's plan for managing all RSVP volunteers and stations is detailed in the sections "Recruitment and Development" and "Program Management."

Additionally RSVP has further infrastructure in place to manage volunteers and stations as a highly effective means to address identified community needs in Healthy Futures. This infrastructure includes: 1.) a staff that understands CNCS priorities and the importance of NPM; 2.) participation in community partnerships, 3.) leadership through the three RSVP advisory councils, 4.) collaboration with stations for the collection of NPM outputs and outcomes data, and 5.) volunteer recruitment strategies that focus on meeting community needs through a growing pool of potential volunteers age 55 and older living in the service area.

1.) RSVP Staff. The RSVP staff began the re-competition process nearly three years ago by studying information and instructions provided to the first round of grantees by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The director attended several trainings, sharing information learned with the four county coordinators so that they have a good understanding of the new guidelines well in advance of implementation of the grant project. The major focus area, Healthy Futures, was identified quickly based on previous history and current identified need. Several months before writing the grant, staff began the process of identifying priority assignments for all volunteers.

2.) Community Partners. RSVP staff participates in many partnerships with community-based organizations focused on Healthy Futures and older adult issues including: Spencer Blue Zones; Algona Blue Zones; Elderbridge Area Agency on Aging; four area senior activity centers; five independent living facilities, five hospitals and five community health departments. Through collaboration with these groups, RSVP is connected to a network of experts that helps identify and address community needs as related to Healthy Futures.

3.) Advisory Councils. Approximately 30% of current advisory council members are involved in Healthy Futures focus areas through their professions. Council members advise the project staff on identified community needs and suggest effective strategies and potential partners to address those needs. Three veterans or military members serve on the advisory councils. They help the RSVP staff

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determine how to best serve veterans and also help identify veterans who want to be of service.

4.) National Performance Measures Data Collection. RSVP staff understands the importance of tracking NPM outputs and outcomes and communicates the information with station staff at the initial station orientation. RSVP staff works closely with station managers to identify the NPM outcomes that need to be tracked to ensure proper distribution of surveys, collection of data, and analysis of results. RSVP and the stations determine which partner is responsible for each of these steps to provide accountability for the measurement process. Data is entered and reports are easily accessed through the Volunteer Reporter software.

5.) Volunteer Recruitment. RSVP concentrates a majority of the project's recruitment strategies in the Healthy Futures focus area. When providing orientation to new volunteers, RSVP staff provides targeted information about Healthy Futures opportunities. RSVP marketing materials also highlight Healthy Futures as a critical community need and an impactful volunteer opportunity.

Service to Veterans. Working with Veterans' Affairs staff in each county, a focused effort will be made to support veterans and their spouses, helping them to age in place through transportation and companionship services. The college's Veterans' Student Affairs office will assist in identifying veterans and active-duty military members and their families who may need assistance, or who wish to be of service to their communities.

Northwest Iowa RSVP will partner with the Volunteer Network of Clay County to host two "Days of Service" events honoring and supporting area veterans, military members and families. Potential projects include: sending care packages, letter writing campaigns, food and clothing drives, and providing transportation and companionship. RSVP staff will work closely with VA directors in each county to discuss other ways RSVP volunteers can be of service to veterans on an ongoing basis.

RSVP welcomes the opportunity to focus on Healthy Futures to better align volunteer resources to address community needs and to more effectively communicate impact through NPM outputs and outcomes. In summary, RSVP shows effectiveness in activities through performance measurement; enjoys successful partnerships with stations focusing on Healthy Futures; has a respected presence in the communities it serves; and has a strong infrastructure to manage the project's volunteers and stations.

### Recruitment and Development

The Northwest Iowa RSVP staff is committed to providing high-quality experiences for volunteers that affirm the contributions they make to their communities and improve the quality of life for the volunteers as well as for the people they serve.

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RSVP volunteers are uniquely qualified to meet community needs through service because they have time, skills, talents, and experience to share. They also have a desire to continue to make a difference in their communities even after retiring.

Baby boomers are ideal for placement in service activities within the Healthy Futures focus area, especially in Aging in Place and Access to Care objectives, because they will be dealing with many of these issues themselves in the coming years. In addition to providing service, volunteers 55+ will be gaining experience and learning information that they will be able to use personally as they age.

Assignments: Advisory council members, site managers, RSVP staff and volunteers work together to develop opportunities that allow volunteers to use skills and experiences they've developed over their lifetimes and to build new skills, develop leadership potential, and provide opportunities for meeting new people. RSVP will offer a variety of assignments, both long-term and episodic, to appeal to a diverse group of volunteers.

A key to providing high-quality assignments is collaboration with community partners, including 111 stations in the service area. The RSVP staff and advisory council work closely with these partners to identify needs and seek solutions to community problems through volunteer service. Assignments are reviewed carefully and are selected based on which ones best align with CNCS Focus Areas, and, in particular, the project's primary focus area, Healthy Futures.

RSVP ensures volunteer assignments will positively impact community needs by reviewing National Performance Measure outputs and outcomes with station managers. A goal is that all assignments will provide volunteers with the potential for personal growth, increased confidence, socialization, improved mental and physical health, and the chance to share their experiences while meeting critical community needs.

Recruitment: The Northwest Iowa RSVP service area is made up of many small close-knit communities. The primary methods of recruitment are through referrals from current volunteers; frequent articles in the local newspapers; public service announcements provided by area radio stations and local cable companies; announcements in church bulletins and newsletters; and through speaking engagements at service club meetings, faith groups, and retiree events.

While these recruitment methods have been very effective in attracting older volunteers, staff will focus on innovative recruitment, training, and placement strategies to attract new volunteers between the ages of 55 and 65 to ensure sustainability for the project. Staff will also strive to create a diverse pool of volunteers including people of all races, ethnicities, and sexual orientation; veterans and members of the military; and people with disabilities. A commonality among volunteers is that they

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are all looking for ways to put their experiences and skills to work for the betterment of their communities.

One way to attract a diverse group of volunteers is through special programs. For example, RSVP has implemented a series of "Lunch & Learn" workshops, taught by trained RSVP volunteers and other community volunteers. The workshops offer educational presentations on a variety of topics to current RSVP volunteers and others in the community age 55 and older. At the beginning of each session, RSVP staff share current volunteer requests with participants. Presentations are selected to attract people of diverse backgrounds and include topics such as: Using Computers, Smart Phones and Other Electronic Devices; Healthy Cooking for One or Two; Planting a Perennial Garden; Writing a Memoir and Journaling; Exercise and Nutrition; and Retirement Planning.

All supplies, speaker expenses and lunch costs are paid through community foundation grants and/or through donations from corporate sponsors. RSVP volunteers are encouraged to bring friends to the sessions. New volunteers are recruited from among the guests, and current volunteers take on new service activities as a result of attending the workshops.

Another way RSVP will enhance its ability to attract recently retired professionals with varied backgrounds is by offering interesting, challenging and rewarding volunteer assignments that provide skill-building and leadership opportunities. For example, RSVP places trained volunteers as "Elderguides" and/or SHIIP (Senior Insurance Information Program) volunteers to provide older people with information about Medicare and other health-related programs; assist in filling out government applications and forms; refer older residents to RSVP for services such as companionship and transportation; and arrange for home-delivered meals, if appropriate. Training for Elderguides is provided by Elderbridge Area Agency on Aging and the Department of Human Services. Both of these agencies contract with RSVP to provide Aging in Place services for their clients.

RSVP will enlist the help of advisory council members, local media and Iowa Lakes Community College Marketing Department staff in creating and implementing a plan to attract veterans, people with disabilities and individuals with diverse backgrounds as volunteers. The RSVP director has requested the assistance of the college's graphic arts students to create a new web site, design localized brochures, and publish newsletters directed to all demographic groups 55 and older.

Training: Orientation for new volunteers and targeted training for current volunteers assigned to new tasks is provided by RSVP staff with the help of advisory council members, station supervisors, college personnel and trained RSVP volunteers. The initial orientation includes a review of the RSVP Volunteer Handbook covering the following topics: overview of RSVP's mission and purpose;

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prohibited volunteer activities (religious, political, etc.); safety issues and accident reporting; grievance procedures; reporting hours; National Performance Measurement, and other topics.

Volunteers will be given a detailed description of all current volunteer opportunities. Ongoing training specific to assigned volunteer positions will be offered by the volunteer stations as described in the Memo of Understanding (MOU). Additional assignments and training opportunities will be posted on the RSVP website and included in newsletters, group emails, and other publications.

RSVP recruits volunteers of all backgrounds, ethnicities, abilities and skills. The volunteer pool represents the demographics of the community served. RSVP offers a variety of assignments to fit the needs of each volunteer. Assignments vary in skills required, time commitment, physical requirements, experience and education so that there is an assignment suited to each volunteer, including volunteers with disabilities. Iowa Lakes Community College is an equal opportunity employer and works closely with agencies serving people with disabilities. Iowa Lakes and RSVP will ensure that accommodations are made for any volunteer wishing to serve.

Iowa Lakes sponsors an English as a Second Language (ESL) program at each of its five campuses. The ESL program is an RSVP volunteer station that requests tutors and mentors through RSVP. ESL students have also served as RSVP volunteers. One of the RSVP coordinators has a masters degree in ESL.

Retention: A happy volunteer is a long-term volunteer. Appropriate placement is key to volunteer retention. New volunteers complete a registration packet that includes information about the volunteer's work experience, skills, interests, abilities, talents and hobbies. New volunteers are interviewed by RSVP staff to glean additional information and then given descriptions of positions that match the volunteer's personal preferences. The volunteer chooses the assignment(s), and sets his/her own schedule. The new volunteer is trained and placed as soon as possible after registering with RSVP.

RSVP coordinators contact volunteers within three weeks after they have been placed to confirm the success of the placement and satisfaction of the volunteers. Coordinators also contact the station managers to confirm that the recently placed volunteers are meeting the stations' needs. This provides an opportunity for feedback and a chance to address concerns.

All RSVP volunteers are asked to fill out a survey twice a year to assess the volunteer's satisfaction with the placement, give the volunteer an opportunity to change assignments, and provide an update to RSVP on the volunteer's availability, health status, preferences, schedule, etc., that might affect future placements.

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Volunteer recognition is a priority for RSVP staff and is provided throughout the year through personal thank-you notes, birthday cards, nominations for volunteer awards, coffees which double as training sessions, and through innovative formal recognition events. In addition, station managers are encouraged to provide recognition for all RSVP volunteers placed at their site.

### **Program Management**

RSVP is well integrated into the communities' organizational and educational structures in the service area due to its more than 38-year history in northwest Iowa, and also because the project has had a strong sponsor, Iowa Lakes Community College, throughout its existence. Under the guidance of Iowa Lakes, RSVP has developed best practices, policies, and procedures to provide quality program management for the project.

Management of Stations: RSVP ensures that volunteer stations are in compliance with program regulations through an ongoing series of communications, documentation and annual reviews with the station managers. RSVP Station Handbooks are provided for all stations, and station managers sign a Memo of Understanding (MOU) when becoming a partner agency. The MOU outlines responsibilities of RSVP and the station, articulates prohibited volunteer activities, and delineates clear volunteer job descriptions. RSVP coordinators visit the stations annually and have station staff sign a new MOU every three years as required by the CNCS.

RSVP provides an orientation and a RSVP Station Handbook for new stations that includes an overview of RSVP and the Corporation for National Service; an outline of station responsibilities; volunteer assignment information; a list of prohibited volunteer activities; instructions and forms for reporting hours; insurance information; guidelines on volunteer separation; guidelines for volunteer safety; information about National Performance Measurement; and policies regarding non-discrimination, confidentiality and non-displacement of employed workers. RSVP staff conducts an annual assessment with all partner stations to review station contact information, current volunteer placements, additional volunteer needs, safety checks, and volunteer concerns. Station managers are encouraged to ask questions and give feedback to RSVP staff.

Requests for volunteers are made in writing (through email, fax or letter), by the station manager who will be supervising the volunteers. The assignment descriptions outline the volunteer opportunities, purpose, tasks, schedules, qualifications and benefits. RSVP staff reviews all assignments to ensure these placements give RSVP volunteers opportunities to participate in a variety of meaningful, high-impact service activities. RSVP staff also verifies that placements are in compliance with all program regulations.

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Stations Outside of Primary Focus Area. RSVP staff oversees stations that address community needs within CNCS's other focus areas in accordance with the completed MOU and the project's policies and procedures. Based on identified community needs, RSVP has volunteers engaged in service activities in the following CNCS focus areas: Healthy Futures (including services to veterans), Education, Economic Opportunity, Disasters, and Capacity Building.

RSVP volunteers also serve at Community Priority stations to address the diverse needs of northwest Iowa. RSVP volunteers help many non-profit organizations stretch their administrative capacity so these agencies can expand their services. In this rural service area, RSVP volunteers provide critical assistance to organizations that are almost entirely run by volunteers.

NPM Data Measurement and Collection. RSVP staff communicates frequently with stations engaged in work plans that address NPM outputs and outcomes to ensure the data needed is being collected and measured. Starting with the initial MOU, RSVP outlines the station's responsibility in providing the necessary data for the project to measure NPM outputs and outcomes. RSVP collects NPM outcomes data annually from surveys and/or evaluation tools generated by RSVP or partner stations. With the implementation of CNCS' new NPM outputs and outcomes, RSVP staff will be meeting with affected stations to ensure sufficient tracking systems are in place.

RSVP staff tracks data utilizing Volunteer Reporter, a volunteer management software program designed specifically for Senior Corps projects. RSVP analyzes the data and identifies the impact being made to ensure that NPM outputs and outcomes are being met. RSVP staff reports NPM outputs and outcomes in the annual Project Progress Report.

Graduating Stations. RSVP has already begun the process of graduating stations that are no longer in alignment with the project's currently identified community needs or CNCS Focus Areas. RSVP will continue to communicate with the graduating stations to discuss the changes to the project, define the new focus areas as they relate to the community needs, provide information on the timeline and process for graduation, and explain the communication strategy in regard to the volunteers. A PowerPoint presentation has been developed to share the new information with stations and with volunteers.

RSVP will minimize the disruption to volunteers by working with the graduating station to ensure volunteers are getting a consistent message about the program changes, encouraging the volunteers to continue to serve the station outside of the RSVP project, offering other volunteer opportunities within the project's focus areas, and providing a timeline for the graduation process. RSVP will also communicate with RSVP volunteers who have overlapping placements at both

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ongoing stations and graduating stations to inform them about the changes in the graduating stations' status and how this will affect their reporting of volunteer hours.

In addition, RSVP will minimize disruption to volunteers by maintaining open lines of communication between volunteers, stations and RSVP staff. Current volunteers working outside of CNCS Focus Areas and Community Priorities will be encouraged to consider placements in positions that do align with the Focus Areas and remain active in RSVP. It is anticipated that the majority of current volunteers will choose to be involved in other activities that align with CNCS priorities.

Aging in Place activities have always been an important part of the Northwest Iowa RSVP's programming, due to the large elderly population in the service area. For more than a decade, RSVP staff has measured performance for companionship and transportation service activities through Programming for Impact. PFI outcomes consistently confirmed that those services were needed and appreciated by the beneficiaries: 95-98% of residents served report that RSVP volunteers help them remain in their homes longer and decrease their feelings of isolation.

Advisory Councils. Three advisory councils in the five counties provide leadership, support and feedback for RSVP staff, and the council members serve as important links between the community and RSVP. New advisory council members attend an initial orientation, which includes an overview of CNCS and RSVP, as well as reading through the RSVP Advisory Council Handbook. Ongoing training is provided as needed.

Volunteer sites are selected based on alignment with CNCS priorities. RSVP staff ensures that they qualify as volunteer stations according to regulations. A Memo of Understanding must be signed and on file at the RSVP office prior to placing volunteers.

Stations provide a written request which includes a detailed volunteer job description to the RSVP coordinator, who then determines if the request is appropriate and confirms that it does not involve prohibited activities.

When new volunteers register with RSVP, they are asked to provide their date of birth so coordinators can verify they are at least 55 years of age and therefore eligible for RSVP.

### **Organizational Capability**

Iowa Lakes Community College has sponsored RSVP in Northwest Iowa since it began in 1977, providing continuity, stability and exceptional support for the project over the past four decades. The college has five campuses, one in each county in the RSVP service area. RSVP has an office at four of those campuses. An Iowa Lakes trustee serves as an RSVP advisory council member.

Iowa Lakes Community College's mission is: To provide opportunities for quality lifelong

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learning and promote economic development for our communities. Iowa Lakes is a well-known and respected leader in northwest Iowa and is committed to creating lasting, positive change in the areas of education, economic development, environment and health. Iowa Lakes does this by collaborating with a wide range of community partners including businesses, donors, K-12 schools, more than 40 non-profit agencies, faith-based organizations and many others.

The Iowa Lakes Community College financial department oversees the RSVP budget; processes requests for reimbursement; issues expense and payroll checks; reviews and signs off on in-kind documentation; prepares financial reports required by CNCS; and provides for an annual audit of RSVP. The CFO has 44 years of experience overseeing the finances of Iowa Lakes Community College.

The college uses Datatel software for financial, personnel and student data collection and reporting. Iowa Lakes has high standards of financial accountability, including a stringent system of checks and balances to ensure it operates in a sound fiscal manner. A committee of board members review the operating budget and audits, which are then approved by the Iowa Lakes Board of Trustees at their monthly meetings. The organization ensures financial statements conform to generally accepted accounting principles, as well as applicable OMB circulars, statutes and regulations.

Project Staff. The current RSVP director, Mary Steele, has held the full-time position for over 26 years. She has extensive experience in writing grants and reports, volunteer and staff management, marketing, and public speaking. Steele served two 3-year terms on the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service, including chairing the commission for her second term. She also served three terms on the board of the National Association of RSVP Directors and is past-president of the Iowa Association of RSVP Directors. Steele has a BA in Journalism and Human Services. Prior to her current position, she was a newspaper editor, reporter, and photographer.

The RSVP director is supervised by Jolene Rogers, Executive Director of the college's Economic Development and Continuing Education Department. She reviews the director's performance on an annual basis, signs off on her time sheets and requests for leave, and approves all purchases and reimbursements. Rogers is only the third sponsor representative assigned to RSVP in its 38-year history. Having an experienced supervisor who is knowledgeable about the program and national service is a significant benefit to the RSVP director and to the program in general.

Four RSVP coordinators recruit and place volunteers, assist with training, provide recognition for volunteers, and perform other duties described in detail in the coordinator job description.

Sue Ahlers, who coordinates RSVP in Clay and Palo Alto counties, was hired for the position eight

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months ago. Ahlers has a BS in Family Resource Management and has extensive experience in volunteer management. She has lived in the area for 22 years and has strong ties with the community.

The Kossuth County coordinator, Gene Miller, is a retired church administrator; prior to that, he was a pastor and music teacher. He was hired in October, 2012.

The Emmet County coordinator, Linda Anderson, worked in an adult day care center before taking the position with RSVP nine years ago. She and her husband have provided foster care for more than 30 children, and has considerable knowledge of DHS and other social service agencies and programs.

Ann Aalgaard was hired in November, 2013, to coordinate the recently acquired Dickinson County Program. She has a BA in education and a Masters in ESL.

Iowa Lakes Community College has procedures in place in the event any employee leaves with or without notice. Those procedures are detailed in the personnel manual and apply to the RSVP director and the coordinators. Procedures are established regarding advertising positions, interviewing candidates, offering positions, and hiring and training new employees so that the process is conducted as quickly and efficiently as possible. An advantage of the structure of the Northwest Iowa RSVP is that coordinators in each county would continue the work of recruiting, training and placing volunteers even if the program were temporarily without a director.

Purchases are made through a requisition system and are signed off by the RSVP director and her supervisor before submission to the financial office. An employee personnel handbook is available online to all Iowa Lakes staff and is updated regularly. The handbook includes detailed information on personnel management procedures, leave requests, travel policies, grievance procedures, staff and administrators' roles, prohibited activities for staff, and internal policies.

In addition to providing RSVP with fully furnished offices at four campuses, Iowa Lakes Community College also provides hardware and software, IT support, utilities, telephone and internet services, office supplies and custodial services at no cost to RSVP. The RSVP staff has use of the college's computers, printers, fax machines and copiers. Classroom space and media equipment are available to RSVP for meetings, recognition events, and training sessions.

The Financial Department maintains appropriate systems for generating RSVP reports and processing all financial transactions. The department monitors fiscal records and purchasing procedures; handles RSVP accounts receivable and accounts payable; includes RSVP employees in its payroll system; arranges for annual audits; and submits RSVP financial reports to the CNCS State

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Office.

The Human Resources staff assists the RSVP director with advertising for, interviewing and hiring new staff; helps develop job descriptions; maintains personnel files; and tracks leave/vacation time. RSVP staff is included in the college employee classification system, receiving wage and benefits commensurate with college employees in similar positions. RSVP staff is included in all college-wide training, including fall and spring inservices.

The Planning and Development Department assists with grant management, provides assistance to the director with marketing RSVP, and promotes and tracks donations to the project.

Iowa Lakes has successfully managed cumulative grant revenues in excess of \$3,000,000 annually. The Office of Planning and Development provides technical support and regulatory compliance oversight to all grant-funded projects. Planning and Development Office personnel have more than 30 years collective experience in successful grant management and compliance, including U. S. Department of Education TRIO programs and Title III -A projects.

The Chief Financial Officer provides fiscal oversight of grant disbursement and expenditure verification. An independent auditor reviews external grants at least once during the contract period. Grant awards over \$100,000 are audited annually. Iowa Lakes has consistently received "unqualified opinions" and there have been no audit findings in the past 10+ years.

### Other

Not applicable.

### PNS Amendment (if applicable)

Not Applicable.