

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The City of North Platte RSVP will facilitate and direct volunteer service for 93 unduplicated volunteers in Lincoln County, Nebraska (opportunity NE-2X).

The volunteers will contribute service to Disaster Services (Disaster Assistance Provided; Assisting with Preparation), Economic Opportunities (Housing; Building or Assisting Homes - Habitat for Humanity), Education (K-12 Success; Tutoring-Public Schools), Healthy Futures (Obesity and Food; Food Pantry Support), and Veterans and Military Families (Veterans & Families Served; Assist Veterans with Transportation).

RSVP Volunteers will serve as disaster team & blood bank volunteers, home builders, literacy tutors, food pantry staff, and van drivers transporting Veterans.

RSVP Volunteers will increase and sustain the number of blood donors and respond to disasters, build new homes for economically disadvantaged individuals, increase students reading scores, provide food to the hungry, and transport Veterans for needed medical care.

The RSVP Staff and Stations will measure the success and impact of the volunteers using surveys, pre/post test scores, activity logs, volunteer time sheets and stations sign in sheets.

All service will be provided through 5 work plans, and a network 93 RSVP Volunteers and 16 Stations.

The Primary Focus Area is Education with 50 volunteers or 54% of the total volunteers supporting the National Performance Measure.

The CNCS Federal Investment of \$32,546 will be supplemented by \$10,059 of non-federal resources from the City of North Platte.

## Strengthening Communities

The North Platte Area RSVP program will provide program services to 93 unduplicated volunteers with the sponsorship of the City of North Platte. The service area is Lincoln County which is located in West-Central Nebraska, in what appears to be the heart of the USA. Lincoln County encompasses a total of 2,564 square miles. North Platte is the largest city in Lincoln County and is centrally located at

## **Narratives**

the confluence of the North Platte and South Platte Rivers. U.S. Highways 83 and 30 and Interstate 80 intersect at North Platte. North Platte is located 266 miles North-East of Denver, Colorado and 272 miles West of Omaha, Nebraska. The picturesque landscape consists of never ending cornfields and rolling, grass covered hills.

North Platte is the regional center for higher education at North Platte Community College and health services at Great Plains Health and Callahan Cancer Center. Major economic activities that support the area include transportation, agri-business, ranching, cattle feeding, farming, construction, tourism, retail and wholesale sales.

The United States Census Bureau reports a total population in North Platte of 24,733 and 36,288 in Lincoln County. In Lincoln County, the number of citizens 65 years and older is 6,096. There are 50.4% females in comparison to 49.6% males. The population consists of 89% Caucasian, 8% Hispanic/Latino, .9% African American, .9% American Indian and .6% Asian. 3,484 people live below poverty level.

RSVP will address Education as the Primary Focus Area. On August 26, 2014 the Department of Education released the Nebraska State Accountability (NESA) scores from the spring 2014 test. North Platte was reported to be slightly behind the state in reading. Only 77% of 3rd-8th & 11th graders in Nebraska meet or exceeded the standards in reading. Locally, in North Platte, only 76% of 3rd-5th graders meet or exceeded the reading standards. The NESA test performance level range from Exceeds Standards with a score of 135-200, Meets Standards with a score of 85-134, or Below Standards with a score of 84 and below.

Research shows that good reading skills provide an important foundation for subsequent learning & success, and students who struggle with reading are at a greater risk of educational failure, the Nation's Report Card Reading 2011.

In 2007 the North Platte Public School District elementary school Principals & teaching staff indicated students' in Kindergarten-5th grade, especially those at Title I schools, would greatly benefit from one-on-one tutoring & small group support in reading & reading readiness.

The North Platte Public School District consists of 10 elementary schools, 5 are Title I elementary schools. Often, Title I students come from low income, single parent homes, where mom or dad works multiple jobs to support the family, or homes where both parents work long hours to provide

## Narratives

the basic necessities for the family to survive, as reported in the Bright Hub (Title 1 Student Struggles and Meeting Student Needs article).

Given the lower than standard test scores, research and statistics, it is evident that RSVP Volunteers are needed in elementary schools to assist students with Literacy.

RSVP Volunteers will increase students opportunity to read & assist them with improving their reading skills through weekly one-on-one & small group assistance & support that focuses on helping students with reading proficiency and developing positive habits, which will improve reading skills and test scores & further student success. RSVP Volunteers will help students with reading comprehension, vocabulary, and spelling. Volunteer duties include: reading to the student, reading with the student, listening to a student read, assist in sounding out words, help the student guess the meaning of new words in context, and discussing the narrative and main points with the student.

RSVP Volunteers will serve students in Kindergarten-5th grade. Classroom Teachers will decide whether every student in the classroom or just those who are struggling receive assistance. Volunteers will assist in the same classroom for the duration of the school year. Volunteers will serve between 30 minutes to two hours a week during school hours.

Each RSVP Volunteer will be invited to a training provided by teaching staff & reading coaches. At the training, volunteers will practice skills they will use while assisting the students. Volunteers review techniques on how to help a student who struggles with pronouncing a word, how to help with vocabulary and meanings of words, comprehension, etc. Volunteers are also shown different reading procedures; volunteer reading to student, student reading to volunteers, etc. At the training volunteers also sign a Volunteer Agreement and complete a background check with the North Platte Public Schools. Volunteers receive on-going supervision & support provided by teaching staff, school staff and RSVP.

The data needed for the National Performance Measure output is collected from the schools on a monthly basis. The Volunteer sign in sheets are collected at the beginning of the month. Each sign in sheet contains the number of students who are assisted. That information is tracked by the RSVP staff throughout the year to ensure at least 300 students are receiving assistance.

Reading test scores are collected after the spring test results are available to measure the National Performance Measure outcome. The outcome, students will show improvement in their reading skills/performance by improving their assessment score, will be measured at the end of the school year.

The North Platte Area RSVP will provide 50 RSVP Volunteers as Literacy Volunteers, which is well

## Narratives

above the 25% minimum guideline for National Performance Measure workplan(s).

The North Platte Area RSVP will also address Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures and Veterans and Military Families as Other Focus Areas.

RSVP Volunteers will serve as Blood Bank Volunteers and on the Disaster Team. With North Platte being a regional center for health care and cancer treatment, a lot of blood is needed in the community. Statistics show blood donations are down nationally; however the demand continues to increase. RSVP Volunteers in North Platte will play a vital role in Disaster Preparation by sustaining and increasing the number of blood donors. RSVP Volunteers will staff the blood bank and help at blood drives. Volunteers will also donate blood and platelets. Aside from the Red Cross staff who is actually drawing the blood, the donation center and blood drives are organized and ran strictly by volunteers.

When a disaster strikes, RSVP Volunteers will be deployed. The most common local and statewide disasters are grassland fires, house fires, tornados, and flooding, however volunteers also respond nationwide to tornados and hurricanes.

Volunteer hours needed to measure the output are provided by the RSVP Volunteers and Stations.

RSVP Volunteers will also serve as Habitat for Humanity volunteers. In American, 5.1 million families have worse case scenario housing. RSVP Volunteer will help to address that by helping to build one to two houses for economically disadvantaged individuals (one to two families). Volunteers will help with the construction, office support, meal preparation, advisory board, fundraising, etc. Over the past 16 years, over 40 Habitat for Humanity Homes have been built in North Platte. Data needed for the Output & Outcome will be provided from reports from the Habitat for Humanity office.

RSVP Volunteers will also serve at two local food pantries to address to growing hunger problems across the nation. Volunteers only, will staff the two local food pantries taking care of essentially the entire operation. Volunteers will purchase food, pick up food from donation sites or food banks, sort, stock, pack and distribute food. Volunteers will also clean, maintain and if possible make improvements to the facilities. Food Pantry volunteers will provide emergency food at the pantry 5 days a week. The Food Pantry will track the number of individuals helped (for the Output) and will survey recipients yearly to see if they report an increase in food security (for the Outcome).

## **Narratives**

Last but not least, RSVP Volunteers will assist Veterans with transportation through the VA Nebraska/Western Iowa Health Care System. It is very important to provide rides for area Veterans who are aging and need help getting to appointments for medical care. According to the US Census Bureau there are 146,852 Veterans in Nebraska. Locally, there are 3,480 Veterans in Lincoln County. The nearest VA hospital is located in Grand Island, Nebraska which is 150 miles away from North Platte. RSVP Volunteers will transport Veterans needing a ride. Volunteers will receive training and undergo a physical and medical screening. Volunteers will drive the 300 mile round trip about once a week. Volunteers usually spend 4 hours on the road and approximately 4 hours waiting for Veterans to receive medical care. Volunteers are treated to a free meal in the cafeteria. Data is received from the VA Volunteer Coordinator and Travel Coordinator on a monthly basis to track the number of Veterans being transported for medical care.

### **Recruitment and Development**

The North Platte Area RSVP will assure quality experience for volunteers through the development of new volunteer opportunities and expansion of existing opportunities. The opportunities will always focus on assignments that impact the community and align with National Performance Measures. The RSVP staff will work with Stations to survey the volunteers to ensure their experiences are high quality.

When enrolling, volunteers provide information about their skills, hobbies, volunteer experiences, employment, interests and expectations. This information helps the staff learn about the volunteers and match them more appropriately to placements. By carefully placing volunteers where they can use already developed skills or help them build a new skill, where they will enjoy serving and where they are needed, the volunteers quality of life is enhanced and they genuinely feel they are a valuable part of the community!

Once a volunteer has been placed, stations generally hold orientations for new volunteers to go over policies and procedures, duties, and to answer questions. Stations also offer training necessary for specific assignments where volunteers will learn new skills.

Over the past 40 years, the North Platte Area RSVP has built a strong corps of volunteers. RSVP participates in all local community health fairs to ensure that RSVP is promoted and recognized in the community. At health fairs, RSVP volunteers hand out information particularly to people 55 years

## **Narratives**

and older and often recruits volunteers on the spot.

The RSVP Director speaks at various community participation groups, organizational meetings and within the community as part of the recruitment effort. The Director participates/attends various community participation groups and boards in order to make contacts, share information, report on the wonderful accomplishments of the Volunteers and become more knowledgeable about the organizations and individuals that volunteers are serving.

Other recruiting strategies are brochure distributions, newspaper articles, radio psas, the RSVP newsletter, church fliers, other Station newsletters, and providing an attractive wide range of volunteer opportunities that appeal to everyone!

The City of North Platte provides a website, which includes RSVP contact information, the monthly newsletter, volunteer opportunities and a current brochure. RSVP also utilizes Volunteer Match and Facebook.

RSVP retains volunteers by allowing individuals to select from a wide variety of activities, by listening to the volunteers interests and expectations, by creating flexible scheduling to accommodate the amount of time a volunteer has or is willing to offer, and by allowing the volunteers to do assignments they enjoy and receive personal satisfaction from.

RSVP holds two recognition events each year. During National Volunteer Week RSVP Volunteers enjoy the Hamburger Bash. This event has been generously donated by the Eagles Club for the past few years. Volunteers enjoy hamburgers and fries, a centerpiece drawing and each others presence. In December, volunteers are recognized at the Volunteer Recognition Banquet. This event is sponsored by the City of North Platte. Volunteers are recognized for accumulating the most lifetime hours and the most hours during the past year. Volunteers are also recognized for serving 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35 & 40 years. They are provided with a calendar for the upcoming year which includes pictures of volunteers in action, along with an individual token of appreciation. The Mayor of North Platte gives the welcoming speech at all volunteer recognition events to express the gratitude of the community and acknowledge the wonderful service the volunteers offer so willingly.

## **Narratives**

In addition, RSVP staff mails the volunteers thank you notes, recognizes them in the newspaper, nominates them for community and state awards and attends recognition events held by Stations they volunteer at! Volunteers also receive birthday cards and wedding anniversary cards on their special days.

### **Program Management**

The North Platte Area RSVP has undergone a lot of changes in the past few years. The North Platte Area Retired & Senior Volunteer Program history dates back to 1973 when the first RSVPs were popping up across the nation. Over the years the program has continually grown from 100 volunteers in its first year to over 650 volunteers in 2012. Just a few years ago in 2012, when the first round of competition was being introduced, the program missed the application deadline, therefore causing it to relinquish the federal grant after nearly 40 years. When this happened the City of North Platte, which is the local sponsor, decided to continue to support the volunteer program and created the North Platte Area Ready to Serve Volunteer Program. Thus all the volunteers were transitioned from one program to the other. One key feature with the new program is it is open to volunteer of all ages, not just those 55 years and older. Volunteer's ages range from 8 years old to 99 years old. In the past two years we have recruited nearly 45 new volunteers, 5 more sites and volunteer hours have increased by nearly 1,200 each month.

With the NOFA being offered in Lincoln County, the City of North Platte would once again like to sponsor a Retired & Senior Volunteer Program. If awarded, select volunteers from the existing program would be invited to join the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program.

With the 40 year history of volunteer management, The North Platte Area RSVP has developed several methods to insure the stations are in compliance with all CNCS rules and regulations. First of all, all stations will complete a Memorandum of Understanding every 3 years, which will be in place prior to volunteer placement defining specific responsibilities of both the sponsor and the station. The MOU will also contain a discrimination notice and identify other prohibited activities. Also, Stations will receive Quarterly reports which will help monitor progress towards the outputs and outcomes.

Since the North Platte Retired & Senior Volunteer Program will start off by recruiting volunteers mainly from the North Platte Ready to Serve Volunteer Program, there will be no need to graduate volunteers immediately.

## **Narratives**

Over the life span of the grant, community needs may change and the program will need to graduate volunteers. In this instance volunteers will be notified and given the opportunity to transition to another station. If another station is not found, they will remain a member of the all ages, North Platte Ready to Serve Program.

In 2007, the North Platte Area Retired & Senior Volunteer Program created the Literacy Program in the North Platte Public School District. In the past 7 years, the program has evolved from serving just 3 schools to now serving 10 schools, which include the 5 Title I schools. In the first year of the program it served just 3rd graders. With the recommendation of several teachers and Principals, the program now serves students in Kindergarten through 5th grade.

The RSVP Program monitors the number of volunteers, students and hours each month to ensure progress is being made towards the outputs and outcomes. Also, because the schools value the Literacy Program, they are always willing to provide us with the test scores and any other needed information.

The North Platte Area Retired & Senior Volunteer Program has had an Advisory Council in place since 1973. The council plays a vital role in helping guide and support the program. The Advisory Council consists of 10 members all with different skills, professions, and experiences.

The RSVP Staff ensures all volunteers are eligible to serve in RSVP by verifying their age with a valid ID. Also the staff ensures all MOUs are signed and in place before volunteers are placed at the station. RSVP staff uses Volunteer Reporter to track and manage Stations, Volunteers, Jobs, Placements and Hours.

### **Organizational Capability**

The Project Director oversees the financial management system, with additional expertise provided by the City of North Platte Accounting Department & Finance Department. It is also overseen by the Recreation Director. All purchases (and payroll) made by the RSVP staff are submitted for payment to the Recreation Secretary. Approval for payment is authorized by the Recreation Director and finally the North Platte City Council. The City of North Platte Accounting Department issues all payments. The Accounting Department also receives all federal funds requested by the RSVP Director.

The Project Director will submit a continuation or renewal grant proposal to CNCS, thus establishing parameters for the annual budget and project plans. Following approval, RSVP operates within established guidelines and submits all required reports in a timely fashion. The Recreation Director

## **Narratives**

signs project reports and the CNCS grant.

The sponsor reviews programmatic reports as well as providing financial management of the program. The non-federal RSVP budget is recommended and presented by the Leisure Services Recreation Director and approved by the City Council. Documentation of financial records is on file at City Hall. The City of North Platte contracts with independent auditors who provide an annual audit of the federal grant and local match upon completion of the budget year.

The City Of North Platte has successfully managed the NP Area RSVP for 40 years.

Dana Songster, Project Director, has been employed with the City of North Platte at the North Platte Area RSVP for 15 years in various capacities, serving as the Director for the past 7 years. The Director assumes all duties outlined in the Operations Handbook. The Director is responsible for writing the CNCS grant, completing and following the budget, completing reports in e-grant and the Payment Management System, requesting federal dollars, maintaining Station relationships, recruiting and retaining Volunteers and assuring program sustainability and writing the monthly newsletter.

The Director will complete a Waiver and will also work as the Director for the North Platte Area Ready to Serve Program. The Retired & Senior Volunteer Program will consist of just the Director. The Ready to Serve Program will consist of 2 Part Time Secretaries, who may assist the Director with task associated with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program.

With this being the first year the City of North Platte will have both programs, we plan to work on and improve (if needed) the way the budget, staffing, work load, etc. is set up. In the future we may budget for 1 Part Time Secretaries salary from the CNCS grant.

The City of North Platte has already developed Governance type of policies with the City of North Platte Code of Ordinances. It has developed internal policies such as an Employee Handbook, Delegations of Authority, Timekeeping Guide, Travel Policy, Staff Code of Conduct, Document Retention Policy, etc. The City also follows internal procedures in the Financial Department. The Finance Department, who has a Director of Finance with 13 years of experience, along with the City Administrator have successfully managed the Citys assets for many years. A clean Audit reflects their ability to manage the Citys finances.

### **Other**

N/A

## Narratives

**PNS Amendment (if applicable)**

N/A