

Narratives

Executive Summary

Voluntary Action Center of Northeastern Pennsylvania will utilize the CNCS federal investment of \$68,485 supplemented by non-federal resources of \$35,135.

An estimated 400 RSVP volunteers will serve. The primary focus of this project is Healthy Futures. Some of the volunteer activities relating to this focus will include serving meals to homebound elderly and disabled, staffing food pantries, counseling Medicare beneficiaries, educating Medicare beneficiaries to recognize Medicare fraud, and providing health prevention strategies enabling seniors to live independently. At the end of the three year grant we anticipate that 800 homebound older adults and disabled will report having increased social ties/perceived social support, 450 families facing food insecurity will receive emergency nutrition from food pantries, 4400 Medicare beneficiaries will receive valuable information on Medicare, health insurance and access to Medicare benefits, 1200 Medicare beneficiaries will receive vital information on recognizing Medicare fraud on their Medicare bills, 250 elderly will receive important information on health education/prevention to enable them to live independently and 100 seniors will receive assistance with the SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) application process and will enable them to receive nutritional goods. We will address needs in other focus areas: Education (community based mentoring), Economic (Financial Literacy and Employment) and Capacity Building (volunteers leveraging financial support for non-profits).

Strengthening Communities

RSVP of Lackawanna County will serve the whole of Lackawanna County. The County, comprised of 459 square miles, is situated in Northeastern Pennsylvania, two hours from Philadelphia and two hours from New York City.

The population of Lackawanna County is 213,931 (American Community Survey, 2012). Over 39,543 individuals are 65 and older (Bureau of Labor & Industry, 2014), which translates to one in six people in Lackawanna County aged 65 and older. The Pennsylvania State Data Center projects that between 2010 and 2030 the county population will decrease by 10,000 while the population of seniors will increase. 84% of the population resides in urban areas: 16% in rural areas. One third of the county (76,089) resides in Scranton, the county seat, which is where the RSVP office is located. Of the entire population, 13.7% fall under the poverty level, higher than the state level of 13.1% (US Census, 2012). Of that number of residents who fall below the poverty line, 8.4% are age 65 and older (American Community Survey, 2012). Unemployment in the county has reached a "low" of 6.8%, which is

Narratives

significantly higher than the state average of 5.7% and the national unemployment rate of 6.2%. Of the total county resident population, 93% are white, 5.9% are Hispanic and 3.15 are Black (US Census Bureau, 2012).

Recent compilation of statistical and epidemiological data clearly reflects issues of importance to the community of Lackawanna County: aging, poverty, food access and affordability, and access and affordability to adequate health care. These issues will lead us to concentrate our efforts on the Healthy Futures Focus area, as identified by the CNCS Strategic Plan. For the period of this grant, RSVP volunteer service will concentrate on activities such as home delivered meals to the elderly and disabled; staffing food pantries and local soup kitchens, providing food access and affordability to the aging population and providing Medicare counseling and education to beneficiaries, thus increasing their access to affordable and appropriate health care. These activities will lead us to the following outcomes and/or outputs:

1. By delivering a daily meal to disabled and elderly, providing social interaction and a safety check we will enable this population to continue to live independently.
2. By distributing food at pantries and providing support for pantry staff we will increase food security for low income individuals and their families.
3. By delivering information on health insurance, health care access and health benefits programs, subsidy programs and counsel Medicare beneficiaries we will increase their access to affordable and appropriate health care.
4. By delivering information and education on Medicare billing to Medicare beneficiaries we will increase their recognition of fraudulent billing procedures and prevent them from becoming victims of Medicare fraud.
5. By delivering education and information on health prevention activities and exercises to that population, who are age 65 and older and wish to continue to reside independently, we will increase their ability to live healthy, independent lives.
6. By assisting eligible seniors with their SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) application process, we will enable them to purchase nutritional goods and continue to live independently.

These outcomes will be confirmed by data collected periodically (surveys to recipients of services and statistics of activity) by the stations and the RSVP office. These data instruments are described in the

Narratives

specific work plans.

The Voluntary Action Center has managed an RSVP grant for 38 years and has successfully collected, measured and managed data collection as required by CNCS. When memorandums of understanding with volunteer stations are negotiated, we take time to discuss data collection with station personnel to ensure that all required report information will be collected and submitted on a timely basis, thus enabling us to measure performance toward stated goals.

Service to veterans will be integral to our activities in the Healthy Futures focus area. It is estimated that there are 18,964 veterans living in Lackawanna County (US Census Bureau, 2012). This population will be targeted as both recipients of services and deliverers of service through all our service activities through the Healthy Futures focus areas of Medicare Counseling, home delivered meals, food distribution, and SNAP enrollment, in addition to service activities in other priority areas such Tax Counseling for the Elderly.

A community advisory council (the "Advisory Council") ensures that RSVP is responsive to the needs of our community. The council is comprised of representatives from non-profit, senior, education, and disabled sectors, RSVP volunteers and at large community members. This group is an excellent link to the pulse of our community. One of our goals is to continually assess and make sure that our council is representative of our changing community. In addition to our community connection through our Advisory Council, our staff and sponsoring agency (Voluntary Action Center) are actively involved in a number of community and statewide organizations including United Way, NEPA Aging Network Alliance, Interagency Council, Housing Coalition, PA Association of Senior Centers, Volunteer Centers of PA, HandsOn Network and Senior Corps of PA Directors Association. Voluntary Action Center (VAC) also convenes an organization of volunteer coordinators - DOVIA (Directors of Volunteers in Alliance) on a quarterly basis. These affiliations continue to promote awareness of our agency and our activities and provide more opportunities for collaboration. We enter into partnerships with numerous organizations that also strive to meet various community needs. For instance, VAC has become a core partner of the Aging and Disability Resource Center. By utilizing our RSVP and Volunteer Center databases, we are able to mobilize a large number of volunteers for many community-wide activities.

Our affiliations with the aforementioned organizations help to build awareness of our program. In

Narratives

In addition, we use a number of other means to "get the word out". RSVP maintains a page on the VAC website and activities and opportunities are updated on a regular basis. Voluntary Action Center is responsible for a community volunteer calendar published monthly in the county's largest newspaper. In addition, we place articles in weekly community newspapers and bulletins, and take advantage of any speaking engagement invitations with civic and social organizations. Each year we organize efforts around two national days of service: Make A Difference Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.

Our community collaborations and our growing relationship with faith-based partners are making us more visible to people of diverse backgrounds. Many of our work plans target a diverse population. We participate in our community MLK weekend activities each year and spearhead a intergenerational, community-wide service project for MLK Day.

RSVP is an integral part of Voluntary Action Center. We have a proven track record of providing capable volunteers for large and small community efforts. We utilize web-based recruiting systems: the United Way's Get Connected, volunteermatch.org and SeniorCorpsofPA.org. We also maintain a skills bank which indicates the interests and skills of our volunteers. This is vital to recruitment for community events and activities and especially valuable to placement of baby boomers who are highly skilled and often interested in episodic volunteering.

Our RSVP volunteers enhance the capacity of the agencies they serve on a daily basis. Many of our volunteers also recruit other volunteers to serve.

We have worked very closely with the Lackawanna County Senior Companion Program for years. The RSVP Director serves on the Senior Companion Program Advisory Council. A number of senior companions volunteer in the RSVP Pen Pal Program in their off hours. We participate in Pennsylvania's Service Commission training opportunities and networking so that we are aware of other service partners in our area.

Recruitment and Development

Voluntary Action Center, as the sponsor of RSVP of Lackawanna County and the Volunteer Center has had over 40 years experience in recruiting volunteers to meet community needs. Through our existing collaboration with community partners and in alignment with the CNCS strategic plan, we will utilize our expertise to develop high quality, high impact volunteer assignments and opportunities that address current community issues.

All prospective volunteers are personally interviewed by staff to ensure that they are matched to the activity to which they are assigned. Part of this meeting will be a general volunteer orientation in

Narratives

which the roles and responsibilities of volunteering will be discussed. Once a volunteer is assigned to a volunteer station, the station supervisor will be responsible for the training specific to their service activity. Subsequent follow-up after placement with both the volunteer and the station ensures that both the community needs and the volunteer needs are being met. Volunteer leadership is encouraged. Our Tax Counseling for the Elderly Program is now led by a team of volunteers who meld their tax knowledge and IT knowledge effectively.

Our recruitment of baby boomers and recent retirees has brought us a number of highly skilled volunteers - both a benefit and a challenge. We hope to entice and recruit more highly skilled volunteers to address all the needs in the Healthy Futures Focus areas.

Volunteers and staff will be encouraged to take advantage of further training which may be offered by our partners, CNCS and our staff in the Healthy Futures Focus areas. There are many opportunities for our volunteers and staff to participate in trainings. These training opportunities, in the past, have included trainings with the State Health Insurance Counseling Program, PennServe, grant trainings through the Non-Profit Resource Center, and quarterly DOVIA trainings.

Recruitment of volunteers is done in a variety of ways: through newspaper stories, websites, church newsletters, speaking engagements and faith-based and professional partnerships. Our volunteers remain our best recruiters. We take advantage of current RSVP volunteers who have offered to speak at our New to Medicare classes to share their own volunteer experiences and knowledge with newly retired individuals. We strongly encourage our current volunteers to share their experiences with their friends and social networks.

We utilize our quarterly newsletter which is mailed to our volunteers to try to recruit volunteers to serve in high priority areas, such as Healthy Futures. We attempt to keep our volunteers aware of the evolving community needs.

We will take every opportunity to recruit volunteers from diverse populations and will not discriminate with regard to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or degrees of English proficiency or ability. For years Voluntary Action Center has received funding from Lackawanna County for a program aimed at involving mental health consumers in volunteer service. Last year we were the recipients of a Penn Serve grant to recruit Veterans and disabled members of our community into national service. The funds were used to host a training event for station volunteer coordinators to increase opportunities to serve. We will continue to partner with Gino Merli Veterans Center, the Department of Veterans Affairs and our veterans organizations, all serving veterans and their families.

Narratives

Our goal will be to engage veterans and their families in service, while serving those whose needs remain unmet.

Recognition and retention are of vital importance to a quality volunteer program. Retention of experienced volunteers is important to building and sustaining a strong volunteer base, in which volunteer leadership is utilized and valued. A comprehensive in-house orientation program was developed within the last two years, with the State Health Insurance Counseling Program, aimed at retaining volunteers

for this highly skilled, knowledge-based volunteer opportunity. Since the implementation of that specific orientation, there has been almost 100% retention - one volunteer left due to her husband's relocation out of state. Volunteers will be encouraged to keep our staff informed of their experiences. Inactive volunteers will be contacted to determine the cause of their inactivity and placed in another volunteer position, if desired and appropriate.

Volunteers will be recognized in a variety of ways, understanding that each volunteer's motivation for serving is different. Volunteers will be sent written, personal cards, contacted by phone, invited to an annual recognition event and invited to participate in any appropriate training events.

Program Management

RSVP staff will meet annually with volunteer station staff to ensure they are in compliance with RSVP program regulations. During this meeting staff will review station volunteer management practices, review the volunteers' working environment, discuss new volunteer needs, update memorandums of understanding as needed, and review methods of data collection (Performance Measures Outputs and Outcomes). As part of this process, RSVP staff will meet with volunteers to ensure that volunteers are performing the service activity to which they were assigned and to measure their satisfaction.

Voluntary Action Center, having been an RSVP sponsor since 1976, is very familiar with federal regulations governing RSVP. Voluntary Action Center has always maintained memorandums of understanding with stations and organizations with missions that fall within the Healthy Futures Focus area. We have successfully recruited and retained volunteers who deliver meals to the homebound, serve meals to the homeless in food pantries, provide education and counseling to Medicare beneficiaries, and provide health prevention education to those individuals desiring to increase their level of independence. We have been successful in collecting data and measuring performance in those areas.

We have an active Community Advisory Council in place, which is representative of the community

Narratives

at large. It is comprised of individuals who represent the diverse needs and interests of Lackawanna County. They are instrumental in assessing the community's needs, both current and future. All volunteers will be recruited in compliance with RSVP age eligibility requirements. No volunteers will be placed at any station until memorandums of understanding have been reviewed and negotiated and job descriptions are on file in the RSVP office.

Our plan for responsibly graduating volunteer stations to meet the new focus area requirements and minimize disruption to current volunteers will have several facets. First, volunteers serving in areas that do not fit the current CNCS strategic plan will be interviewed to determine their interests in transitioning to a position that aligns with the current CNCS strategic plan. Some volunteers may be interested in other volunteer opportunities offered through our sponsor agency, VAC or moving to Capacity Building opportunities. Secondly, those stations that can safely and effectively manage volunteers without RSVP support will be asked to assimilate current volunteers who do not wish to transition and who are meeting a local priority need. RSVP will provide technical assistance to those stations, as needed, to pave the way for a seamless transition. Thirdly, when volunteers age out, relocate, or find other interests, etc., those volunteers will not be replaced.

Organizational Capability

Voluntary Action Center has sponsored an RSVP Project for the past 38 years, and has been Lackawanna County's Volunteer Center for 42 years. The Volunteer Center's mission is to identify community needs, reach and recruit potential volunteers, place volunteers in meaningful assignments, publicize achievements of volunteers and to provide volunteer management training opportunities. This mission is in direct correlation with the mission of RSVP.

Lackawanna County RSVP Director Diane Brown will have primary responsibility for overseeing the Lackawanna County RSVP Project. Ms. Brown served as the RSVP Field Coordinator for 8 years before she became RSVP Director. She previously worked in education and human resources. The RSVP Field Coordinator has served as a Volunteer Coordinator for the last three years. The sponsor staff supporting the project includes an Interim Executive Director, Office Secretary and Fiscal Manager (who is a CPA). Financial records are kept according to generally accepted accounting principles by the fiscal staff and audited by a certified accounting firm. Voluntary Action Center has an actively engaged Board of Directors, which is very supportive of RSVP and the RSVP mission. Throughout its 42 years, Voluntary Action Center has successfully managed grants from varied funding streams - private, local, state and federal.

Narratives

As previously mentioned, Voluntary Action Center has had vast experience directing volunteer programs since its inception as a volunteer center 42 years ago.

Voluntary Action Center expanded as it responded to community needs. Today it is an "umbrella organization" sponsoring many programs which provide direct service utilizing volunteers: Big Brothers Big Sisters, Tax Counseling for the Elderly and APPRISE Medicare Counseling. Voluntary Action Center coordinates the PrimeTime Health Program in Lackawanna County (which presents health promotion programs to older adults) and supervises three Senior Community Centers. All of these programs track program outcomes to ensure that prescribed goals are met.

Voluntary Action Center is committed to ensuring that office space is adequate for staff and volunteers. We make sure that the environment is welcoming to volunteers who participate in numerous meetings, training events and volunteer assignments. In January 2015, Voluntary Action Center will be relocating to another site, within the city limits. At our current site, there is on-street, metered parking. At our new location, there is ample, free parking which will be available to our volunteers and staff. The new building space is newly renovated, handicap accessible, conveniently located and with more office space than we currently have. Our equipment is upgraded as necessary. Supplies (and any other expenditures) are requested with internal purchase orders by staff, approved by the immediate supervisor and then the executive director. Purchase orders are then reviewed by the Fiscal Manager for proper documentation, expensing and payment.

Other

na

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

na