

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The legal applicant is the Research Foundation (RF) of the State University of New York, a private, non-profit corporation chartered in 1951 by the New York Board of Regents. A 1977 agreement between the RF and SUNY formalized RF's role as the organization responsible for managing research grants and other sponsored programs.

At SUNY Oswego, the local RF office is the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) which is responsible for the day-to-day administration of sponsored programs. RSVP, as a sponsored program, is administered by RF/ORSP and subject to all policies and procedures in accordance with State, federal and sponsor requirements.

Thus, RF is responsible for the fiscal administration of RSVP, and as with other sponsored programs at SUNY Oswego, programmatic oversight is left to the department on campus from which the grant proposal originated. In RSVP's case, the Office of Business and Community Relations is responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the RSVP program, its staff, community participation group and public outreach.

An estimated 367 volunteers will serve. The federal investment of \$59,692 will be supplemented by upwards of \$73,141 in non-federal resources. However, the non-federal share may be lower because the salary for the incoming project director is yet to be determined, and will depend on the qualifications of the prospective candidate. The primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures. At the end of the three year grant, it is anticipated that the following outcomes will be achieved.

86 volunteers will provide Access to Care for 825 senior citizens through the Osteo, falls prevention and aquatic exercise programs; also through the Senior Health & Wellness Expo.

39 meals on wheels drivers will enable 920 homebound elderly to Age in Place.

13 volunteers will help At-Risk Ecosystems through plant establishment on 7,296 acres and removal of invasive species along six miles of waterways.

7 volunteers will leverage and build the Capacity of the Senior Camping (Lifelong Learning) program by recruiting 50 volunteers and staff to make available educational resources for Oswego County residents.

13 volunteers will provide Disaster Assistance at Red Cross bloodmobiles, securing 7,200 units of blood in Oswego County each year.

13 Tax Aides will counsel and prepare tax returns for 1,115 low to middle income seniors each year.

10 Community Mentors will help 2,000 economically disadvantaged students achieve K-12 Success in reading readiness.

## Narratives

65 volunteers will staff six food pantries and two soup kitchens, providing food security for 16,220 county residents annually.

12 "Busy Knitters" will give hand knit items to 500 family members of active duty military personnel each year.

110 RSVP volunteers will assist a variety of stations with locally identified services.

### Strengthening Communities

#### Strengthening Communities

Based on the 2010 census, Oswego County is a rural, middle to low income county with a high Caucasian population when compared to the rest of New York State. The land area is 951.65 square miles (NY is 47,126) and the number of persons per square mile is 128.3 (NY is 411.2). Per capita money income is \$21,362. (NY is \$30,634.) with 14.7 % below poverty (compared to 14.2% NY).

Total population is 122,109 (19,378,102. NY). Of that number, 96.3% are white (compared to 65.7% NY). Whereas the Oswego County population decreased by 162 people in 10 years (2000 census), the number of people 55 and older rose by 6,158 (over 20%) people. In all, 30,499 people are age 55+. They make up 24.9% of the total population compared to 19.7% in 2000, or an increase of 5.2% in 10 years.

The percentage of older persons 55+ who are RSVP volunteers is 0.45% (459 people). Breakdown by age category is as follows: 55-64 ' 15,099 (60 RSVP); 65-74 ' 8,585 (184 RSVP); 75-84 ' 4,777 (144 RSVP); 85+ ' 2,038 (58 RSVP). The average age of an RSVP volunteer is currently 74 yrs. old.

Oswego County is in the Lake Ontario snow belt where 'lake effect' snow accounts for much of the 150 inches of snowfall each year. Whereas many seniors go south to avoid the harsh winters, many more cannot afford to. Of those who do go south to spend their retirement years, they often return in their later years to be taken care of.

Because there is no senior center in Oswego County there is limited means for social connectedness except through clubs which sponsor trips or the senior meal program whose clientele is primarily 75+. RSVP of Oswego County offers a very vibrant alternative for the productive aging movement and has become a primary means for seniors to integrate into the life of their community.

## Narratives

RSVP often provides the missing ingredient for both agencies and individuals in mobilizing seniors as a resource to satisfy unmet needs and target underserved areas. The Osteoporosis (Osteo) Bone Builders Program is a good example of this. RSVP launched the program in 2000 satisfying a critical need for many county residents, especially for those in underserved areas where it has grown most rapidly.

We collaborate readily and let go when need be. For instance, we helped write the grant to reinstate literacy volunteers and nurtured it at the college until it survived on its own off campus.

We launched a music & dance series in 2006 and turned it over to the Elks Lodge and Ontario Center for Performing Arts, Inc. to continue.

When the RSVP aquatic exercise trainer needed more room at the Fulton YMCA pool, more exercise leaders, and more equipment, we worked with the Arthritis Foundation to certify new trainers, helped open up two high school pools for community use and helped develop a fee for service which assured the financial stability of aquatic exercise.

Oswego State University is a major employer in the county and also RSVP's sponsor. SUNY is a key resource and ready reference for RSVP's ability to enhance the capacity of organizations and institutions in the community to integrate senior services. For instance we utilize college interns to help develop new programs and constantly involve students in service learning or volunteer capacities to work alongside seniors on assignment. With their help we developed Senior Cybers, a program that educated senior citizens in computer literacy. This provided students an avenue for community service, fostered good will for the school, educated seniors and enhanced RSVP's visibility. Although Senior Cybers ceased operation after a few years, RSVP developed a partnership with Oswego Library's Public Computing Center and recruited RSVP Computer Coaches to help sustain the Center in 2012. The Center serves all ages, including senior citizens and assists the unemployed with skills development and job searches.

Generating public awareness of RSVP is done consistently through media press releases and also through the Mature Living newsletter. Now that we are located within the Office of Business and Community Relations (OBCR) our ability to reach out into the community has escalated. We often

## **Narratives**

participate in forums, seminars and leadership training relevant to our mission and which offer substantial networking opportunities. Both the RSVP and OBCR Executive Director attend monthly "CEO Chats" attended by station supervisors. In sum, RSVP works in tandem with the college, our sponsor, to integrate senior service into the activities of other service programs within the community. By promoting RSVP volunteers as a resource, we enhance station capacity as well.

Our online presence will be given careful scrutiny and a "make over" in the upcoming grant cycle. All areas will be considered, such as social media, online solicitations and web development. We have an open invitation to submit articles to OBCR's online newsletter which is mailed monthly to the business community. We need to think about publishing our own online newsletter or developing our Facebook presence, especially given the new initiatives that attract a younger audience. The current RSVP website for instance, reflects an old paradigm and needs to "speak" to the incoming boomer generation.

Although Oswego County has a small cultural and racially diverse population, especially compared to urban counties, SUNY Oswego students and faculty offer the diversity desired when we combine their programs with ours. For instance, when RSVP helped facilitate an AARP Health Forum at a senior residence facility and had members of a gerontology class in attendance, a faculty member whose native country is South Korea, offered his perspective on health care in that country.

When we enter our 41st year on April 1, 2015, we embrace the challenge that comes with our demographics -- baby boomers who are reaching retirement, a population that's swelling with 'old' old, a county that's ebbing it's economic base; a harsh forbidding climate. We also anticipate a continued uncertain fiscal climate and the need to adjust accordingly.

### **Recruitment and Development**

Recruitment and Development

With a corps of boomers and other seniors more educated, more healthy and living longer than at any time in history, we acknowledge that our greatest assets are the seniors themselves. By developing their skills and leadership potential we not only raise their quality of life but build our own capacity to maximize outreach. Many of the volunteer opportunities in the National Focus Areas require training and certification of volunteers such as Tax Aide, Osteo Bone Builders and the Six Steps to Better

## Narratives

Balance programs.

In late 2011 we launched "Life-after-Retirement" workshops and made it mandatory for most new enrollees to attend. At these workshops, which double as volunteer orientation sessions, retirement options are discussed and volunteer assignments in areas of greatest need and impact are emphasized. At these sessions enrollment applications are filled out in consultation with RSVP staff. Only applications issued by RSVP, qualify for enrollment in our program. In 2013 we utilized RSVP Stations to host the orientation sessions which worked for our mutual benefit.

The RSVP Director attends a CNCS authorized training at least once during a grant cycle; more often if funds allow. Smaller, localized training for RSVP staff is undertaken more often. For instance during SUNY's 2011-2012 academic year, OBCR financed training for the RSVP secretary to attend monthly workshops in "Leadership Oswego County". In 2014 the Health Foundation of Western and Central NY funded the Director's training in the Falls Prevention.

The Senior Camping program, which we developed in conjunction with the Oswego County Youth Bureau in 1992, epitomizes "Capacity Building" and has become an incubator for new ideas and new recruits. It is now run almost entirely by RSVP volunteers and covers a variety of lifelong learning programs and hobby sharing pertinent to this age group.

Only 3.7% of the entire population is non-white, and most are likely affiliated with the college or serving in the medical field. Nevertheless, we have two non-white volunteers and welcome more. Oswego County has a history of welcoming refugees--from the site of the Safe Haven Museum where Jewish refugees were given safe haven during the war, to the 13 sites Underground Railroad Stations which are listed in the county's tourism brochures.

Most of our military presence is just north of our border. Nevertheless, we have targeted programming, such as a "Better Balance for Veterans" program we held in 2013. We have contacted veterans organizations to make our programs known, and will continue to do so to realize any degree of success.

We work closely with ARISE, the program which serves people with disabilities, and are a ready

## Narratives

resource for their referrals.

RSVP's best recruitment tool besides word of mouth, is our bi-monthly newsletter, Mature Living, which has grown to a circulation of 3,500. Mature Living is easy, interesting reading that deals with a variety of local and national issues relevant to Older Americans and enables our seniors to stay connected to each other and to the community. It is free when received online or from bulk distribution sites around Oswego County. For those desiring home delivery, there is a modest subscription rate. Upon request, Mature Living is mailed free of charge to RSVP volunteers and to participants in the Osteo and Better Balance exercise programs.

In addition to Mature Living, we developed several site specific recruitment brochures. The RSVP osteoporosis pamphlets, for example, are updated yearly and placed in pharmacies, physician waiting rooms and hospital lobbies. The tax aide recruitment brochures are installed in all town and village clerk offices. Brochures are also given to all participants in the Osteo and Better Balance programs, to share with their friends and medical providers.

Recognition is a high priority for us and encourages the retention of volunteers. The RSVP Advisory Council deserves a great deal of credit for organizing a top-notch annual recognition event. We feel strongly however, that recognition is more than just a once a year activity. Thus, RSVP hosts or encourages smaller program specific gatherings throughout the year.

Volunteers are also recognized in Mature Living by their birthday. By posting the volunteer names by birth date each month, volunteers also acknowledge each other by sending cards or making phone calls.

### **Program Management**

Program Management

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be developed for each volunteer station where RSVP volunteers are assigned in order to ensure compliance with RSVP program and federal regulations including the identification of prohibited activities. Accompanying the MOU will be a volunteer task description; both will be discussed and signed by the agency supervisor and RSVP director. A methodology for timely submission of volunteer attendance sheets will also be arranged at this time.

## **Narratives**

The MOU will remain in effect for three years after signing and at the end of the three year period will be re-negotiated.

Periodic visits to the stations where RSVPs are volunteering will ensure that they are performing their assigned service activities. All volunteers must complete an RSVP enrollment application which specifies their eligibility to serve as an RSVP volunteer.

Stations submit volunteer reports on a quarterly basis. Hours are tabulated with the help of office volunteers and entered in Volunteer Reporter by the Secretary where statistics are kept current. In this way, trends are noted and RSVP is alerted to any significant change in status at volunteer stations.

In an effort to graduate volunteer stations, RSVP plans to minimize disruption to current volunteers where possible. Since the start of Re-competition, we have been on tract recruiting new stations and volunteers in National Performance Focus Areas and by attrition, culling the areas of traditional but not critical placement. We will offer alternative placements for those RSVPs volunteering at stations which are being phased out.

RSVP promotes a variety of community service opportunities through the Mature Living newsletter, but we stress that enrollment as an RSVP member is only possible with the addition of those tasks that lie within compliance limits. With over 40% of our volunteers already engaged in Healthy Futures we can proceed to strengthen existing programs, not only in this area but in all National Performance Focus Areas.

Most of the volunteers engaged in our Primary Focus area, Healthy Futures, are Osteo Bone Builders exercise instructors. Osteo has grown most rapidly through word of mouth, because people are feeling better and telling their friends. Within 10 years Osteo attracted our highest percentage of volunteers and in 2013, the most accomplished Osteo instructors became Master Trainers, enabling us to help certify new leaders without bringing in an outside consultant-- a first for our program. We also helped ensure the program's sustainability by weaning it off of grant support and adding a suggested fee-for-service. Ongoing re-evaluation of the Osteo program has kept it responsive to community needs and an annual volunteer recognition and re-certification component has helped

## **Narratives**

with volunteer retention and the exercises being done correctly in accordance with the latest research.

The Six Steps to Better Balance program came about as a result of evaluating the Osteo Bone Builders program. Survey results indicated a need for augmenting the balance segment of the Osteo exercise regimen and the need for a stand-alone program with just balance exercises, all of which would help satisfy a recurring and critical need in the community. Training the Osteo instructors in Falls Prevention techniques also helped keep instructors engaged, especially for those drawn to skill development and training.

The Six Steps to Better Balance program was launched in 2013 and expanded in 2014 when we became part of the a Falls Prevention Coalition in Oswego County. Pre/post questionnaires were developed with input from coalition members with the intent to efficiently manage the data and demonstrate the concrete impacts of the project.

Because of our success in the Healthy Futures area, our State Senator asked RSVP staff to be on the steering committee to launch the county's Senior Health & Wellness Expo. We have helped organize it and supply volunteers ever since.

We rely on our Advisory Council to ensure local input into program design and evaluation, mobilize resources and ensure volunteer participation in community activities. We also rely on our volunteers where decisions need to be made that are program specific. For instance, when the decision had to be made to sustain the Osteo and Better Balance programs through a fee-for-service, RSVP leaders and master trainers were consulted. Osteo's \$.50 donation per volunteer, per exercise class, for instance, is responsible for equipment, training, uniforms, recognition and administrative support. In sum, the program has remained viable when others were forced to close or curtail growth.

High quality program management is the result of constant evaluation, developing volunteer stations, and prudent fiscal management. This recurring cycle has resulted in sustainable programs with a track record for success.

RSVP staff works closely with the RSVP volunteers, especially those who have taken on leadership roles, such as the Osteo Master Trainers who don't just lead their RSVP peers, but help certify new

## Narratives

instructors and act as a steering committee to formulate policy and program direction. Thus, monitoring duties are often delegated to RSVP leaders with oversight provided by the RSVP Director and Secretary. New initiatives such as those in the National Focus Areas, often require more committee work, press coverage and hands on attention.

### Organizational Capability

#### Organizational Capacity

Fiscal oversight is provided by SUNY's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) which manages our resources and maintains an audit trail. They have extensive experience in managing federal grants and are responsible for robust financial management capacity and systems for the entire SUNY Oswego campus. SUNY's Office of Business and Community Relations (OBCR) provides both fiscal and programmatic oversight of the RSVP program. Before ORSP receives requisitions and deposits, all paperwork is first reviewed and approved by OBCR which also monitors all Advisory Council concerns. RSVP staff abides by ORSP's employee policies.

SUNY Oswego provides office space and abundant personnel support including a "Technology Support Professional" readily accessible to the RSVP staff. Since moving the RSVP office to within the physical complex of the OBCR division, the project has the support of a state-of-the-art facility, including conference space, equipment, and supplies. What remains a challenge is program visibility and access. Visitor parking in close proximity to the office is an issue for the division, not just RSVP.

According to SUNY Oswego's 2006-2007 Economic Impact study, more than one third of the students and half of the faculty and staff volunteer. For example, SUNY Oswego has a gerontology tract and offers students related Service Learning opportunities: Adopt-a-grandparent students visit residents of nursing homes, student athletes rake leaves for senior citizens, creative writing students conduct writing workshops with residents of a nearby retirement community, and so on. United Way works in conjunction with the School of Business and RSVP to co-promote their VITA program and our AARP Tax Aide program.

Securing additional resources is an ongoing process. Proposals are submitted annually to the NYSOFA and the United Way and occasionally to private foundations, especially for program-specific initiatives. Direct appeals are also periodically published in the Mature Living newsletter.

## Narratives

Ways to cut spending are also ongoing. For instance, volunteer mileage reimbursement is limited to areas of National Focus where there is a fee-based or grant subsidy. Occasionally to save resources, the annual recognition of volunteers will be an event and not a luncheon. In 2012, when public funding for Mature Living was cut, it was no longer mailed free of charge. However, when it was soon apparent that the lack of communication began to have adverse effects, we sought more sponsors to make Mature Living self-sustaining and restore outreach.

Currently there is a part time secretary and full-time Director. The RSVP Director will be a new hire for this grant cycle. The former Director served in that capacity for 30+ years and plans to remain engaged as an RSVP volunteer. The person responsible for appointment of the next RSVP Project Director is Jeffrey Grimshaw, Director of OBCR. The selection will be made in consultation with members of the Advisory Council. Prior to Mr. Grimshaw's position as Director, he was the Assistant Director (since 2005) and prior to that, the Executive Director of the Fulton YMCA, preceded by a background in law enforcement. Mr. Grimshaw has a BA in Government Administration and 10+ years' experience in developing requests for proposals, monitoring and evaluating subcontractor performance, workforce development, human services and the organizational development arena.

The RSVP secretary, Tracie Wallace, was hired in March 2011 at 24 hours per week. Her most recent employment was at Oswego Health where she was an office manager at the Oswego Hospital Child Psychiatry department and also a Health Information Coordinator at The Manor at Seneca Hill, which is part of Oswego Health. In 2012 she received certification as a Hospice volunteer and graduated from the Oswego County Leadership Program.

In order to compensate for diminished RSVP support staff, RSVP office workers and student interns from various disciplines help out each semester. For instance, we utilized an intern with a major in Human Development/minor in Gerontology to help with our computer literacy initiative. Interns with a Health and Wellness major have helped develop our Osteoporosis and Better Balance programs. With their assistance we plan to implement an obesity initiative in the near future.

OBCR conducts monthly meetings in which goals and objectives are reviewed and reported out. The Corporation's Focus Areas are included in these monthly assessments and input from colleagues are

## Narratives

at times implemented for program improvement. At the end of the academic year, an annual assessment is submitted and incorporated within OBCR's report to the College President. RSVP staff evaluations are done annually.

### Other

Other

Due to paradigm shifts, RSVP plans to minimize disruption to current volunteers where possible. Since the start of Re-competition, we have been on tract recruiting new stations and volunteers in National Performance Focus Areas and by attrition, culling the areas of traditional but not critical placement. This current transition has brought our Community Focus Areas to within the 30% requirement. We will offer alternative placements for those RSVPs volunteering at stations which are being phased out.

RSVP promotes a variety of volunteer opportunities via the Mature Living newsletter, but we stress that enrollment as an RSVP member is only possible with the addition of those tasks that lie within compliance limits. With over 40% of our volunteers already engaged in Healthy Futures we can proceed at a comfortable pace to strengthen existing programs, not only in this area but in all National Performance Focus Areas.

### PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A