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Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Board of Chosen Freeholders of Somerset County New Jersey is applying to be the sponsor for The Retired Senior Volunteer Program(RSVP) of Somerset County New Jersey.

The Board of Chosen Freeholders is comprised of the five elected officials who oversee the management of the County. Somerset County government is responsible for providing essential and necessary services to the residents of the County. The Freeholders look to the County Office of Volunteer Services, which will directly oversee the RSVP program, to provide volunteers to help deliver these services.

An estimated 259 RSVP unduplicated volunteers will serve. Some of their activities will include tutoring, tax preparation for low income and seniors and Handyman Services which will include building wheelchair ramps for wheelchair bound individuals who live in Somerset County. The primary focus area for this project will be Education. At the end of the three year grant cycle we anticipate that at least 90% of the students enrolled in a tutoring program will have improved academic performance in literacy and or math. The CNCS federal investment of \$48,066.00 will be supplemented by \$44,532 in County match.

We have chosen to concentrate our efforts in this focus area because according to Kids Count NJ, in 2013 there was a 1% drop in students in Somerset County passing the 8th grade state achievement test. Realizing that a quality education is necessary for every student to succeed, we will channel much of our resources into the tutoring program.

Strengthening Communities

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

Description of the community and its needs:

The RSVP of Somerset County is currently being sponsored by the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders who has been the sponsor for well over 35 years. The Mission Statement for the County is ¿The County of Somerset is committed to excellence and innovation in public service, promoting the well-being of all residents and communities by providing effective, efficient and responsive leadership.¿ The Board consists of five members who are elected from the County at large to serve on the Board.

As one of America's oldest counties, Somerset County is steeped in colonial and Revolutionary War history. The County was established by charter on May 22, 1688, with land conveyance dating to

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1651. Historic sites, monuments and buildings are found in virtually every town, preserved for future generations. Somerset County is at the hub of Central New Jersey. Its 21 municipalities, which encompass 305 square miles, contain a diversity of landscape, population and development that reflects the varied lifestyle of its residents.

Somerset County has a combination of suburban and rural land. It is located in central New Jersey's Wealth Belt between Philadelphia and New York, where the cost of living is higher than most areas in the State. The population has grown over a 10-year period at a rate that is faster than anywhere else in the state, about 8.7% from 2000 to 2010. Its 21 municipalities combine to form a diverse population of an estimated 324,893 in 2013.

The information that we have included herein has been gathered from County wide surveys, Office on Aging Area Plan, The Human Services Priority Population Plan, Kids Count NJ and the Community Development Consolidated Plan.

Weak job growth, following the national recession at the start of last decade, coupled with employment losses reported through September 2008, show New Jersey's private sector employment is already down 14,900 jobs since 2000 with significant additional losses expected to occur over into 2014. In Somerset County, the unemployment rate has increased from a very low 2.1% in 2000 to 5.2% in 2012. While in 2000 there were 3,600 unemployed, there were 9,593 unemployed in 2012, and this number will probably be on the rise in coming months with more impending layoffs and a bad economy.

Economic growth has affected Somerset County's population in many ways. Many high-tech companies continue to relocate out of the county and the retail industry has been declining since 2008. While there are affluent people living in the county, there is an ever increasing poverty rate: from 2.6% in 1990 to 6.4% in 2012. According to the United Way of Somerset County needs assessment data, families with children in Somerset County need an annual income of at least \$40,000 to meet basic family expenditures. There are over 8,000 Somerset County families with children that have incomes below the amount needed to meet basic living expenses. The 8,000 families translate into 10% of Somerset County families or almost 30,000 residents that fall below the amount needed to meet basic living expenses. The population of children in the county continues to

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rise in spite of the decline in the number of children nationally. According to the US Census data, in Somerset County 25% of the population are children under the age of 18. As of 2012, 12% or 38,727 are residents over the age of 65.

How do service activities in Primary Focus Area lead to National Performance Measure outputs of outcomes?

After reviewing all of the County needs that were identified by the various sources, we have decided to concentrate our efforts into the Primary Focus area of Education.

We have chosen to concentrate our efforts in this focus area because according to Kids Count NJ, in 2013 there was a 1% drop in students in Somerset County passing the 8th grade state achievement test. Realizing that a quality education is necessary for every student to succeed, we will channel much of our resources into a tutoring program. Success in school is a key to success in life.

We will also have volunteer opportunities within the other focus areas of Healthy Futures and Economic Opportunity so that we may also affect change throughout the County's other identified need areas. These volunteers will be assigned to our Tax Program, Handyman Program, SHIP program and Money Management; all of which have outcome based reporting.

The volunteers that will be serving in our Primary Focus area of Education will be required to submit to a background check that will be done complimentary by the Somerset County Sheriff's Department. Once the volunteers are cleared they will be assigned to work one-on-one with a student who has been identified by either a Teacher or Guidance Counselor as in need of tutoring help in order to improve their current grade level. The volunteers will be required to submit a monthly progress report to the RSVP office so that we can gauge the progress of each individual student. In addition we will ask the teachers to fill out pre- and post- surveys in order to fully evaluate the success of the tutoring.

Plan to support data collection, measurement and management:

RSVP staff work closely with approved stations to ensure that data and performance measure indicators are consistently being reported. Data is collected from stations and volunteers, denoting the impact they are making in working with priority community needs. Data collection is accomplished through surveys, pre- & post-tests and other outcome measurement tools. Once the information is

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collected, it is used, not only to complete the reports required by the Corporation for National and Community Service, but also to make the community at large more aware of the impact our senior volunteers have in the community that they serve. Annually, an impact survey is distributed to all of our stations. This survey requests data on the work being done by the volunteers and the impact their work has on answering the community need. We request direct information on the impact the volunteers have on the organization and the community at large

Additionally, The Somerset County Office of Volunteer Services, which is the Department that oversees the RSVP program, administers a number of programs that are run by the staff and leadership volunteers. These programs include AARP Tax Assistance, the SHIP Medicare Counseling Program, The Money Management Program and The Handyman Program and allow the collection of accurate information because all volunteer work is overseen by the staff and therefore ensures that data is collected in an accurate and confidential manor.

Activities in service to veterans and/or military families:

Currently, the Handyman Program Service is offered to the families of active duty military personnel. In addition, we work with the Somerset County Office of Veterans Services to provide them with clerical help which has resulted in an increase in the number of Veterans cases that they have been able to file. We will work with them to find alternate ways in which our RSVP Volunteers can work to improve the lives of our Veterans.

Recruitment and Development

RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Plan to create high quality volunteer assignments:

All new volunteers, after completing an application, are interviewed in person and given the chance to discuss their background, their talents and their interests. They are given a Volunteer Handbook which clearly outlines their responsibilities as volunteers and what they can expect from the Station they will be assigned to. We also give them job description for the activity they will be engaging in. We use the impact plans from our stations that fall within our Primary Focus Areas as a recruitment tool. Utilizing the statistics from these plans helps us to explain to new volunteers exactly how they

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can utilize their time and talents to make a positive change in their communities. Using these statistics has been especially useful when speaking with Baby Boomers. Volunteers already assigned to stations that meet these needs will be encouraged, if available, to talk with the potential new volunteer. One example - whenever we meet with a potential volunteer who is interested in the SHIP program, we call the volunteer who runs the program to meet with the new person. This has a proven track record of success. When a volunteer, who has a connection to a particular program, talks to a new volunteer, they do a better job of recruiting the volunteer than just giving them statistics and figures. Having peer to peer interaction has been one of our most successful ways of recruiting volunteers for our more challenging sites.

In order to maintain a viable volunteer organization, recruitment of qualified and quality people must be a constant on-going part of the program. These volunteers will be recruited through the use of the print media, free radio and television time, speaking engagements to local organizations of all types, attendance at health fairs and other opportunities where the target audience would be in attendance. In addition, volunteers will be recruited through outreach to various local corporations. The County maintains a web-site which is used as a recruitment tool for all ages of volunteers and the County is on Facebook. Each quarter we send out a newsletter to our active members. This newsletter, which is written by a volunteer, not only provides volunteers with information about volunteer opportunities but it also provides them with tips, advice and information relevant to living in Somerset County. In each edition a page is devoted to recruiting for impact based volunteer opportunities. Utilizing the statistics that are found in the Impact Plans, we have been able to write "want ads" that show the difference that a volunteer can make in the community. Our enrolled volunteers are encouraged to seek out additional or new opportunities that they read about in the newsletter. We also utilize this newsletter to highlight our stations that are making a difference in the community. In addition, when appropriate, we use the newsletter to highlight and thank volunteer groups that are making a difference. This newsletter has become quite popular among our volunteers and has also helped us to recruit new members.

Plans to ensure volunteers receive the training needed to be effective:

The volunteers that are enrolled in our Tutoring Program are given all the materials needed for them to work with the students they are assigned to. Any Teacher who refers a student to the program must agree to provide the tutors with not only materials but also assistance with problems that may

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arise or questions that the tutors may have regarding the progress of the student.

The State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) holds training for volunteers quarterly to ensure that the volunteers are up to date on all changes to the Medicare laws etc. Our Tax Assistance Program volunteers are given a comprehensive training, taught by our Lead volunteers, prior to the start of tax season. In addition, new volunteers, once they have passed the tests and are certified to do taxes are paired up with experienced volunteers to ensure quality review both for the forms being filed and the comfort of the new volunteer.

Volunteers that are recruited to serve in the Money Management Program are given one-on-one training by the Director of the program along with a manual which clearly outlines the job description and their responsibilities. For the volunteers that are enrolled in the Handyman Program, how to demonstrations are done as part of the monthly meetings.

Demographics of the community and plans to recruit volunteers reflective of the community:

As one of America's oldest counties, Somerset County is steeped in colonial and Revolutionary War history. Historic sites, monuments and buildings are found in virtually every town, preserved for future generations. Somerset County is at the hub of Central New Jersey. Its 21 municipalities, which encompass 305 square miles, contain a diversity of landscape, population and development that reflects the varied lifestyle of its residents.

Somerset County has a combination of suburban, and rural land. It is located in central New Jersey's once Wealth Belt between Philadelphia and New York, where the cost of living is higher than most areas in the State. According to the US Census Bureau, the population has grown over a 10-year period at a rate that is faster than anywhere else in the state, about 8.7% from 2000 to 2010. Its 21 municipalities combined to form a diverse population of an estimated 324,893 in 2013. In 2013, persons under the age of 18 constituted 23.6% of the population and those over the age of 65 number at 13.8%. It is estimated that within the next 10 years the population age 65 and older will almost triple as the baby boomers come of age. Approximately 4.5% of the total population of the County has income that is below the poverty level. According to the US Department of Labor the rate of

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unemployment for Somerset County is almost 8%. From June 2008 to June 2009 the County saw an increase of 3.6% in the unemployment rate. According to a report in Bloomberg News, the number of households in Somerset County enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has almost tripled from 1237 households in 2008 to 3777 in 2013. The area food banks have reported a 35% increase in demand and a drop in available supplies.

Somerset County is a very culturally diverse county. According to the US Census Bureau, the majority of the residents are white(59%), Asians (15.9%) and Hispanics(13.9%) are the next largest ethnic group followed by Blacks(9.8%).

It has been our experience that if you offer quality and challenging volunteer opportunities, people of diverse backgrounds will gravitate to your organization. We have made connections within each of the ethnic groups that comprise the major population makeup of the County. We currently have a broad spectrum of volunteers within each group and we rely on them to be our *RSVP Ambassadors*, reaching into their own communities to assist us with recruiting more volunteers to adequately reflect the total ethnic population. Many of these volunteers have brought their peers to our office to join the program. As examples, both our tax program and our tutoring program appeal to volunteers of diverse ethnic background. As proof, over 20% of our current Tax Volunteers are of Asian descent.

The newest and largest group of potential volunteers are the Baby boomers who are very different from previous generations of volunteers. Many of them are still working and are short on time but are long on the desire to help. Volunteering with the RSVP program will offer boomers the opportunity to participate in volunteering activities that fall within the Priority Focus Areas which meet community needs and also answer their own need to feel that their time is valued and not wasted. Episodic volunteer activities have proven to appeal to Boomers as the time commitment is not as regimented as regularly scheduled activities. Most of the Boomers that are already enrolled in our RSVP program have chosen to volunteer in our Handyman Program, our Tax Program, our Money Management Program and our Tutoring Program because these programs offer the most flexibility in hours and time commitment while showing strong results that can make a difference. These programs also offer training opportunities for the volunteers enrolled in these programs. Through the training offered the volunteers are not only better able to help the clients served by the programs but the volunteers have learned new skills. In our Handyman and Tax programs, the

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training is provided by other volunteers. In the Handyman program we have highly skilled former professionals who have offered training on specific home repairs and in the Tax Program, the volunteer instructors attend 4 days of training and are then able to train the other volunteers in the tax laws etc. We will continue to use these programs as examples to encourage our other community partners to find more volunteer opportunities along these lines.

Plan to retain and recognize volunteers:

To recognize our active and valuable volunteers, we utilize several methods, including highlighting their great work in our quarterly newsletter. We also highlight our stations and partners that are accomplishing the goals and objectives that we have outlined in the Primary Focus areas.

In addition, the use of the media is not confined to just recruitment. It is also used to highlight the accomplishments of our volunteers and also to showcase the program successes to the community. This gives the volunteers a sense of accomplishment that is shared with their friends and neighbors. It also makes the county more aware of our program and the value it brings to the community. We also nominate individual volunteers for any and all opportunities for special recognition. We will continue to seek out all kinds of recognition opportunities.

In our Handyman Program, whenever a complimentary letter from a client is received, we display them at the monthly volunteer meeting. We have received very positive feedback from the volunteers regarding this idea. They feel that their work is really appreciated and most of them strive to do more! In addition, most of the volunteers have stayed with this program for more than 5 years.

Whenever we receive positive feedback from a resident of the County who has benefited from the services of an RSVP volunteer, whether it be a student whose tutor made a difference or a tax client who sent a letter to thank the volunteers who prepared their taxes, we always forward those letters/e-mails on to the volunteers so that they can see for themselves that their effort made a difference!

Program Management

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The RSVP Program will continue to find new, impact based volunteer assignments in the Primary Focus Areas by networking with the non-profit organizations within Somerset County. This is one

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way that we have already been successful in finding new impact based volunteer opportunities. Being based within the County organization makes it easier to find out about new programs and services that are available to help answer community needs. The Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders is always looking to offer new services that will help the residents live better lives. They look to the Office of Volunteer Services to recruit volunteers whenever possible to assist in the provision of these services.

The Board of Chosen freeholders is the current sponsor of the RSVP grant and therefore there will be no disruption of the program if we are awarded the grant. For the past few years we have been actively working to transition all of our volunteer placements into the Corporation's primary focus areas. We feel confident that the majority of our unduplicated volunteers are already serving in programs that align with these focus areas. The small percentage of volunteers that are not in the primary focus areas will still be involved and considered as a part of RSVP because their assignments do fall under our Community Priority focus areas.

The Project Director oversees all aspect of the day-to-day operation of the Somerset County Retired and Senior Volunteer Program. The current project Director has been an RSVP Director for 18 years serving in that capacity for Essex and Hudson Counties in northern New Jersey and now in Somerset County. The County provides clerical assistance. The Project Director's goals and objectives of the job performance are evaluated twice yearly. This enables the Sponsor to maintain quality program management.

At regular intervals, the RSVP Advisory Council will meet to share ideas and suggestions to enhance the RSVP project. The Advisory Council represents a broad spectrum of the Community and they provide insight into the needs of the various communities where they reside. These volunteers are considered the RSVP Ambassadors to the Community- representing the program and getting the message out that we are here to provide volunteer assistance to organizations that answer the needs and align within the primary focus areas. At the meetings they share information about things that are happening in their own towns and they distribute information back to their respective communities. They also represent the RSVP program at meetings and community events throughout the County.

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Using volunteers to answer the critical needs of the community is the cornerstone of what the RSVP program is all about. Recruiting and developing stations that answer those needs is one of the most important functions of the program. Each year our Stations that fall within our Primary Focus areas will be visited to keep the lines of communication open, to update the Memorandum of Understanding if necessary, to review station records, to assess the Stations' accessibility and safety, and to make them aware of any changes to the program in general. In addition, these visits will ensure that the RSVP volunteers serving at these Stations are not engaging in activities that are prohibited or do not align with our primary focus. This allows us to develop new or upgrade existing volunteer assignments. Site visits help to create a more personal relationship between the stations supervisor and the director. It broadens the lines of communication and will clarify any misunderstandings of the program that may exist which will help to avoid problems before they arise and have a negative impact on the project which may also result in the loss of volunteers. Open communication will also make it easier for the project staff to collect the data necessary for reporting on the impact of the program in the community. Once a station recognizes the value of the program and the volunteer assignments in helping them to carry out their mission for the community, they will be much more willing to work on the data collection necessary for the reporting.

On a yearly basis the active volunteers will be surveyed to determine their satisfaction with volunteer assignments and the RSVP project in general. Stations will also be surveyed and they will be asked for input into any gaps that exist as we strive to meet the priority community needs and focus our energies into the primary focus areas. This will allow all stakeholders in the program a chance to provide input on the things missing or problems that may exist with the RSVP program. This will assist the project staff in determining how effective the RSVP program is in the community and how it is perceived in its ability to answer the critical needs of the Community.

Every six months our impact assignment stations are asked to provide the RSVP Director with statistics, facts and figures to support the community needs statements and outcomes. These Site Directors are asked to show verification for the results they report on. This data helps to prove the impact that the volunteers are making working within the primary focus areas. Data collection may be accomplished through surveys, pre- & post- tests and other outcome measurement tools. Once the information is collected, it is used, not only to complete reports that are required by the Corporation for National Service, but also to make the community at large more aware of the impact our senior

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volunteers have in the community that they serve. This data is also used to recruit new volunteers.

Five years ago the RSVP program, realizing the need for free tutoring help for underachieving students was a need within the County, embarked on a partnership with the County Superintendents Office, and the Sheriff's Office to create a tutoring program. Working closely with the County Superintendent of Schools, we were able to get the word out about this service to all the schools in the County. The Sheriff has provided us with free background checks including fingerprints for all volunteers interested in serving as tutors. All student referrals must come from a teacher or guidance Counsellor thereby guaranteeing that the students are definitely in need of the service and also making it easier to get the feedback necessary to gauge the impact of the program. To date, we have had 500 students referred to the program with over 98% of them already assigned to a tutor. Consistently, 85% of the students assigned to tutors have shown improvement in their class work.

Each year the Office on Aging does an Area Plan which surveys the community to ascertain the residents' priority needs. Each year the plan has shown that aging in place is the highest priority for those residents age 60 and above . To that end, we have already aligned many of our volunteer initiatives within the Healthy Living Primary Focus Area. We have volunteers that serve in the SHIP program which help Medicare beneficiaries with direct one-on-one assistance. At the end of each calendar year the residents that have benefitted from the service are surveyed for their satisfaction; each year the overall rating for the work performed by the RSVP volunteers has over a 95% positive response.

The RSVP Volunteers that are enrolled in the AARP Tax Assistance program have helped over 2200 low income residents to file their tax returns. In addition, they have helped 550 seniors annually to file their Property Tax rebate forms assisting them in receiving a refund on their property taxes.

The RSVP Volunteers that serve in our Handyman Program complete on average over 500 minor home repairs for seniors and disabled resident of the County. The volunteers last year installed well over 100 grab bars and 75 railings enabling the residents to feel safe and more secure living in their homes. In addition, in 7 years, the volunteers have also built 100 wheelchair ramps throughout the County. These ramps have allowed formerly homebound wheelchair bound residents to be able to finally leave their homes with limited assistance, thereby enabling them to participate more fully in

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the community.

Our program is very fortunate in the financial backing it receives from our local sponsor who contributes far in excess of the minimum requirements of the grant. All concerned with our program take every opportunity to obtain funds, equipment or services to improve our ability to answer the needs of the community and engage volunteers within the Primary Focus Areas.

Organizational Capability

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Plan and infrastructure for sound programmatic and fiscal oversight:

The Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders has been the sponsor of the RSVP program in Somerset County since its inception well over 30 years ago. The County of Somerset has an excellent reputation for strong fiscal accountability and the County has a Triple A Bond rating. Over the years, the Board of Freeholders, through the various administration offices, has demonstrated an excellent oversight capability and an outstanding record of providing support for the RSVP program. The RSVP program uses office space in the Human Services building located in downtown Somerville. The RSVP program director is a county employee and is offered any opportunity available to all other county employees including professional and/or technical development opportunities. The RSVP director is considered an administrator within the county organizational chart.

A great amount of the support necessary for the RSVP program is provided in-kind by the County's graphic arts, print shop, transportation, finance, Sheriff and purchasing departments. The finance department provides payroll as well as oversight and auditing services to the program. The RSVP finances are also audited annually by the firm that is contracted to provide county auditing. All purchase requests must be processed through the county purchasing office, using its procedures for oversight and department head approval, thereby ensuring availability of funding, use of proper billing procedures, ability to purchase through state contract pricing and timely payment. The Sheriff's department has provided free background checks for volunteers that currently serve in impact based programs housed within the Office of Volunteer Services and the RSVP program. These background checks are to ensure the safety of the frail and vulnerable population that benefit's from these programs.

The RSVP program has been placed in the Office of Volunteer Services which is a division of the Human Services Department of Somerset County. The overall responsibility for oversight of the

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program is placed in the hands of the Coordinator of the Office of Volunteer Services, William Crosby, who was once the RSVP Director. Mr. Crosby has been an active volunteer throughout the community for over 40 years. The Program has one full time director and the County provides an administrative assistant for additional support. The current RSVP Director has over 18 years of experience working in different New Jersey RSVP programs.

The Board of Freeholders is responsible for providing residents with services necessary to maintain and/or improve the quality of life, through programs administered County wide. Somerset County offers an extensive list of programs which address the needs and hopes of its people of all ages, races, income levels and educational backgrounds.

The Board of Freeholders provides a variety of solutions to the challenges facing its citizens. RSVP is one of the tools used to help enrich the lives of its senior volunteers, and the communities, agencies and individuals they serve. A well-trained volunteer presents a cost effective way to deliver much needed social services. As the available dollars shrink for many agencies, the RSVP volunteers and the services they deliver become more necessary.

Being a County administered program will give the RSVP program the advantage of being connected to programs and services that are constantly being updated and changed based on the needs of the communities. The community needs are researched through the local United Way, the Office on Aging Area Plan, The Human Services Priority Population Plan, The Community Development Consolidated Plan and the Counties own needs assessment. It is the mission of the RSVP program to provide meaningful, rewarding and fulfilling volunteer opportunities for people aged 55 and above and at the same time, we must utilize these volunteers to meet identified community needs. RSVP will provide volunteer linkage to community groups and organizations that have a proven track record of utilizing valuable volunteer time to answer community needs.

Other

nothing at this time

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

not applicable