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Executive Summary

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An experienced partner of both the Corporation for National and Community Service and Serve Illinois -- the Commission on volunteerism and Community Services, Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House (The Neighborhood House) requests new funding that will enable the existing program to continue meeting the needs of the community while supporting 300 RSVP volunteers that serve East St. Louis, Centreville, Alorton, Brooklyn, Washington Park, and Fairmont City (known as the Greater East St. Louis community) and St. Clair County in general.

We understand and recognize that the seniors in our community, who are at-risk for isolation and premature institutionalization, have years of experience and knowledge that can and does benefit our community in significant ways. The RSVP program fulfills two critical needs in our community: 1) It keeps older Americans vibrant with a sense of purpose; and 2) Helps meet critical needs in our community. During the first six months of 2014 our RSVP volunteers provided more than 29,700 volunteer hours in support of three program areas (tutoring and after-school programs, supporting more than 25 community non-profit agencies, and providing companionships and outreach to seniors in our community). This contribution, according to the Independent Sector valuation of a volunteer hour (\$22.15), is valued at more than \$657,000 in contributed services -- services for which our deeply impoverished community could never afford. Yet the value is really priceless when you consider the benefits an RSVP participant realizes from being engaged in the community, being recognized for their contributions, and interacting with multiple generations.

The primary focus are of our project is education, including mentoring and serving in after school programs. At the end of the three-year grant, RSVP volunteers will have helped children participating in Head Start Programs to improve their readiness for school; helped school-aged children to improve the performance in school with after-school homework support and enrichment; and helped frail-elderly individuals to be safe in their homes through companionship and visiting programs; and expanded the capacity of non-profit organizations in the community to operate critically needed programs that meet basic needs. The CNCS federal investment of \$60,587 will be supplemented by \$39,362 in grantee and state costs, plus an excess contribution of \$3,750, for a total program cost of \$103,699.

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Strengthening Communities

Strengthening Communities

Primary Focus Area: Our primary focus area is education with secondary focus areas of healthy futures and capacity building.

Need: East St. Louis is home to 27,006 residents, 98% of whom are African-American (Census 2010). The community is comprised of a greater percentage of individuals 65 years of age and older than Illinois as a whole (13.3% vs. 12.5% 00 Census 2010) with more individuals living in poverty than Illinois as a whole; 43.5% of residents live in poverty (compared to 13.1% for Illinois as a whole) and 35.1% of all individuals 65 and over in the community live below the poverty level. Median household income is \$19,934 (compared to \$56,576 for Illinois as a whole). According to the 2010 Report on Poverty from the Illinois Heartland Alliance, East St. Louis has the second highest number of households living in "extreme poverty;" defined as having incomes at or below 50% of the federal poverty level.

Poverty negatively impacts many outcomes across generations including physical, emotional and social, negatively impacting the daily lives of all and the future of the young. For children, growing up in poverty means a greater likelihood of dropping out of school, increased transiency, decreased feeling of self-worth, and lifelong health issues such as asthma (Center for Poverty Research, 2012). For individuals of middle age, growing up in poverty has increased the likelihood that they will also live in poverty and raise their children in poverty. I t also means an increased likelihood that they will have children out of wedlock, will rely on public welfare assistance, will have jobs that pay less than a living wage, and will experience negative health outcomes including obesity, heart disease and diabetes (Center for Poverty Research, 2012).

The effects of poverty exacerbate medical issues, contributing to the isolation and frailty of the aged. For example, seniors living in poverty -- even with Medicare and Medicaid benefits -- frequently reporting having to make choices between paying for medications and buying food or properly heating and cooling their homes. Too frequently seniors in poverty have transportation issues which, when living in food deserts such as East St. Louis, make it difficult for them to obtain proper nutrition. Conditions such as diabetes, dementia, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and

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vision loss are all impacted by nutrition. Poverty exacerbates the frailty of seniors making certain physical impairments including weakness, balance issues, and vision issues more pronounced and harder to overcome (AARP, Public Policy Institute 2010).

The intergenerational poverty that exists in East St. Louis is further complicated by years of educational failures. The East St. Louis School District has failed its youth for at least the past 10 years and continues to fail more than 7,500 students that are currently enrolled (Prairie States Test Results 2001 to 2011). Children in the community are bearing the brunt of this failure which is evidenced by poor graduation rates and poor rates of achievement on the Prairie States Examination (I SBE, 2011). Anecdotal evidence, supported by results of the Prairie States Examination, suggests that many students in high school have math and reading skills normal for the average 3rd grade student. Tasks such as completing job applications or completing entrance examinations for technical school are beyond the capability of a 16 year old child with 3rd grade reading and math skills.

Adults in the East St. Louis community are unable to model the importance of education to the youth of the community. According to the 2010 Census, in East St. Louis only 74.2% of adults, age 25 and over completed high school or obtained a G ED (compared to 86.6% of adults in Illinois and 85.4% nationally). Less than 6% of adults in the same age category have obtained a two- year college (associates) degree and only 10% of residents have a bachelor's degree (compared to 30.7% in Illinois and 28.2% nationally). Problems in the District are so pervasive that in June 2012 the Illinois State Board of Education (I SBE) placed the District under state oversight. Statewide test results continue to place the District in the bottom 10% of all districts in the State. According to the 2011 District Report Card, less than 11% of 11th graders are meeting State standards. The graduation rate for students entering the 9th grade in the District is less than 50% and East St. Louis High School has been identified as a Tier I school. Yet community leaders understand that educational failures begin long before students enter high school.

While there are many reasons for the failure of the School District, two that cannot be ignored are poverty (including related issues of transiency and food insecurity) and a lack of educational supports at home; 100% of students are eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program; approximately 40% of parents have no contact with their child's school (including parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence);

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and approximately 55% have only limited or periodic contact.

Hunger also plays a role in learning. According to an article in the Journal of School Health, written by Dr. Howard Taras (a professor of pediatrics at the University of California -- San Diego), "food insufficiency [is] associated with significantly poorer cognitive functioning, decreased school attendance, or academic achievement." Providing food, alleviating the challenges associated with poor nutrition and under nutrition, helps children do better in school. A study published by Tufts University indicates, "poor children who attend school hungry perform significantly below non-hungry low-income peers on standardized test scores."

Hunger and poverty are impacted by the economy and unemployment. Unemployment rates in the Greater East St. Louis community have ranged from a low of 9.2% in August 2013 to a high of 18.6% in August 2011 and currently rests at 13% (Illinois Department of Economic Security, September 2014). Given the educational issues in the community, it is not surprising that the unemployment rates in the community are much higher than the national averages of the same time period. Yet the unemployment rate only takes into consideration those who are collecting benefits and are still looking for work. The Southwestern Illinois Central Labor Council suggests that the actual unemployment rate of all unemployed individuals in East St. Louis stands at more than 50% of able-bodied adults, citing the primary barriers to obtaining meaningful employment as education and low-skills.

The RSVP program at The Neighborhood House, understanding all of this data, will work across systems to identify and implement evidenced-based strategies that support the community. The program's purpose is to increase the capacity of the Neighborhood House and partner organizations to address the pressing needs of the community. The contributions of the RSVP program to the community are enormous. During the first six-months of 2014 alone, RSVP volunteers contributed more than 29,700 hours of service to the community. When valued at the rate per hour for a volunteer recommended by the Independent Sector (\$22.15), RSVP volunteers contributed more than \$657,000 to the community in just six months. Given the poverty levels in the community, this contribution is priceless -- the community could never afford to pay for the services the RSVP program supports.

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Description of Community: The Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House is proposing to implement the RSVP Program for the area known as "the Greater East St. Louis Community." The 2010 U. S. Census Bureau reported that poverty rates in the metro-east have increased compared to 10 years ago. In St. Clair County, about 41,301 people, or 15.5% of the population, had an income below the poverty level. There are approximately 42,000 persons living in the combined communities of East St. Louis, Centreville, Alorton, Brooklyn, Washington Park, and Fairmont City. The targeted areas have a multitude of economic, social, and environmental problems that seriously impact the well being of the children, families, and elderly persons. The RSVP program at The Neighborhood House will address the issues facing the children, families, and elderly persons in these communities by recruiting, and training volunteers, who will work with the Neighborhood House and other agencies, hospitals, food pantries, and churches that are focused on addressing the identified needs in these communities.

National Performance Measures and Outcomes: The Neighborhood House has established a program assessment tool that assesses and evaluates each of the agency's programs and services. The program assessment process involves a review of all monthly and quarterly reports by both the agency's program directors and/or executive director, and by the Board of Director's Program and Service Committee. The program assessment for the RSVP Program is updated relative to the tracking of specific outcomes for the volunteer stations. The volunteer stations will provide specific outcome data to show the outcomes for the specific activities that the volunteers are working on; this data will show the impact on the community and/or client population.

We intend to collect data related to national performance measures that focus on education. Specifically school readiness and K-12 success. We will work with the Head Start sites to track Output ED 21 -- Number of children that completed participation in CNCS-supported early childhood education and three related outcomes: 1) ED23 -- number of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of social and/or emotional development; 2) ED24 -- Number of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of literacy skills; and 3) ED25 -- Number of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of numeracy (math) skills.

We will work with our after-school sites to track improved K-12 success rates; specifically Output ED2-- Number of students that completed participation in CNCS-supported K-12 education programs

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including Outcomes ED5 improved academic performance in literacy and/or math and ED6 -- improved attendance.

Data Collection: The RSVP Program manages information and data through its existing management information system (MI S) known as Efforts to Outcomes (ETO). ETO links programmatic activity with outcomes and supports agency personnel and directors to ensure that each of the agency's programs are achieving specific and measurable outcomes which translate to agency impact. The RSVP staff is responsible for collecting and entering all data regarding all components of the RSVP program. Data tracked will include volunteer assignment, record of service and other data from the volunteer stations, which relate to program specific goals and objectives (including National Performance Measures). The RSVP program presently collects and maintains data on both the volunteers and on the programs or projects which they are working. The data on the volunteers demonstrates both their level of involvement and quality of involvement in assisting in the implementation of each of the specific programs. Programmatic data allows us to assess the impact RSVP volunteers are having on programs, including National Performance Outcomes. The RSVP director will obtain and maintain performance evaluations on each of the volunteers from volunteer station site supervisors.

Service to Veterans/Military Families: None of the program activities specifically target services to veterans or military families. However, we know that the East St. Louis community is home to members of the military and believe it is possible that some military families may be served in one (or more) of our program areas.

Recruitment and Development

Recruitment and Development

The Director of the RSVP Program will be responsible for recruiting, training, and retaining a corps of volunteers from East St. Louis and the surrounding communities. Recruitment activities include working with local churches, neighborhood organizations, community groups, civic groups, other social service organizations, health care agencies, educational institutions, youth service groups, and senior service organizations, who currently, and will continue to, assist in the recruitment of volunteers.

Infrastructure for Creating High Quality Volunteer Assignments: As a certified United Way Volunteer

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Center, The Neighborhood House has an existing infrastructure that ensures volunteers are recruited, appropriately trained, placed and receive the follow-up services that ensure their experience meets or exceeds their expectations while filling a needed role in the community. The Neighborhood House's Volunteer Center works with the RSVP program while providing support and guidance that helps to ensure a high quality experience for RSVP volunteers. RSVP volunteers are assigned to a service site that matches their interests and abilities. Special consideration is given to developing assignments that allow for volunteers with limited strength, mobility or other challenges. Each volunteer station is tasked with providing a written outline of duties or a description of the assignment. These written outlines and/or descriptions clarify the role of the RSVP volunteer and alleviate misunderstandings. At no time does any RSVP volunteer replace any paid staff position or encroach upon other existing community volunteer activities.

Volunteer Training: Each RSVP volunteer receives both program and site specific orientation and training. The length and type of training varies according to service site. For example, for RSVP volunteers working in education programs, we ask prospective volunteers about their educational backgrounds and administer assessments (with our partners) to determine their ability to assist in classrooms and serve as mentors. Assessment tools may include determining reading literacy levels, math tests, level of comfort with learning tools (i.e., the internet) and a personal inventory of other skills. For example, crafting knowledge such as knitting or woodworking or cooking may be useful in some after-school enrichment programs. We strive to ensure that our RSVP volunteers have the skills necessary to support classroom, after-school activities and mentoring activities.

Both The Neighborhood House and our educational partners understand the benefits volunteers bring to the classroom. For example, we need to make sure that volunteers who are helping a school-child to develop reading skills, also have reading skills. Training for individuals working in education settings would also include information about our educational partner's programs and policies including the process for signing in and out as a visitor to the school.

RSVP volunteers working in the Healthy Futures focus area will receive training about identifying health and safety issues as they deliver meals and food to homebound seniors and the disabled in our community, as well as those providing companionship services. RSVP volunteers working in the Capacity Building focus area would also receive training specific to their service site and activity. The

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RSVP volunteers will lead with experience, learn new skills, and teach learned skills to other volunteers and/or staff members, who are stationed at their site.

Demographics of Community and Volunteer Pool: The East St. Louis Community, according to 2010 Census data is predominately Black/African American (98%), largely impoverished (43.5% poverty rate), and has more females than male residents (54.6% female). Approximately 13.3% of residents are aged 65 and over (Census 2010). Our RSVP participants closely mirror the demographics of the community we serve. We also reach out to special populations including members of the military, their families and veterans to provide service to the community.

Volunteer Retention and Recognition: The Neighborhood House sponsors an annual RSVP "Appreciation Day" for all RSVP volunteers and recognizes their service through an awards dinner. During the appreciation day ceremony, each volunteer is recognized by the agency and their service site. All participants receive a certificate of appreciation and are encouraged to bring a guest or family member to celebrate with them.

Program Management

Program Management

Development and Management of Volunteer Stations: The Neighborhood House will continue to develop and manage volunteer stations and volunteer assignments that address specified community needs. The RSVP director, through regular meetings with volunteers and volunteer station supervisors, will continue to collaborate with program partners to assure that the placements are meeting the expectations of both the volunteer, and the volunteer stations, and to assure that the placements are addressing the specified community needs.

Each volunteer station will meet the requirements outlined in Chapter Six of the RSVP Operations Handbook. The Neighborhood House will execute a memorandum of understanding with each site that details compliance with RSVP program guidelines including Non-Displacement of Employed Workers and Non-impairments of Contracts for Service. Each volunteer station will be located within the Greater East St. Louis Community (East St. Louis and surrounding communities). Each volunteer station will assign a staff member who is responsible for oversight of the RSVP volunteers within the volunteer station. This staff member will work collaboratively with The Neighborhood House to assess

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program impact. Volunteer stations will be expected to keep records and prepare reports, support RSVP volunteers and provide for their safety, periodically appraise performance, work with The Neighborhood House to address issues as they arise (performance, transportation, recognition, meals, etc.) and recognize the support of the RSVP program through signage and listing in any annual reports.

Should a volunteer station place RSVP with in-home assignments, they will also develop a Letter of Agreement that outlines the service of each RSVP volunteer's activities in the home assignment (unless the in-home services are of a casual/friendly visiting nature or meal delivery). The Project Director will meet quarterly with each volunteer station to ensure ongoing compliance with program requirements and to address any concerns that may arise during the program.

Advisory Council: The Neighborhood House will continue to maintain an Advisory Council for the RSVP program. The Advisory Council supports the implementation and evaluation of the program, ensuring that the program meets the needs of the community. Advisory Council members include one or more RSVP members, representatives from community organizations from which RSVP members are recruited, representatives from volunteer sites, a member of the agency's Board of Directors and agency senior leadership staff. The Advisory Council, consistent with the RSVP program guidelines, serves to assure community participation in the project.

Organizational Capability

Organizational Capability

Program Management: With a history of serving the community for more than 100 years, Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House (The Neighborhood House), is a multi-purpose United Methodist Community Center. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for all residents in the East St. Louis community.

The Neighborhood House, one of the original settlement houses in the East St. Louis Community, traces its root to a late 19th century approach to social reform and operates with three fundamental beliefs: 1) All human beings have strengths; 2) All human beings have a fundamental right to dignity; and 3) Partnerships are essential to solving problems. With these beliefs in mind, The Neighborhood House operates more than 20 programs with a \$7 million annual budget funded through a

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combination of federal, state, local and private support.

The Neighborhood House relies on volunteers to achieve its goals. As a United Way of Greater St. Louis Certified Volunteer Center, The Neighborhood House relies on the efforts of more than 600 one-time and on-going volunteers annually. Recently, our agency worked with East St. Louis Mayor Alvin Parks to launch the City of Service Program in East St. Louis. Through this program, our agency will work collaboratively with Mayor Parks and his team to identify and develop volunteer activities in the community that will support the revitalization of the community. Mayor Parks has indicated that he will rely heavily on the experience of The Neighborhood House to train, orient and supervise volunteers working in the community. It's this type of partnership that began in the community and that has been supported by both the AmeriCorps and RSVP programs.

Fiscal Oversight: The Neighborhood House uses an automated accounting system that is able to segregate program income and expenses based on program function. The financial management accounting system is updated annually to include all applicable changes in the accounting industry. The Neighborhood House and its fiscal staff have managed federal awards for more than 25 years. We record accounting transactions and prepare financial statements in accordance with the OMB A-133 Circular standards and the cost-principles associated with both program regulations and OMB guidance. Program and fiscal staff work together to ensure that all expenditures are made in accordance with program guidelines and comply with OMB circulars.

Organizational Capacity Support for RSVP: As an experienced CNCS grantee, The Neighborhood House has developed the internal policies, procedures, and practices to ensure that the RSVP grant will be effectively and appropriately implemented, following all CNCS rules and regulations. Quarterly stakeholder meetings ensure that service site locations and partners are implementing the proposal with fidelity to this proposal. The Neighborhood House has the capacity to assure that the RSVP program has adequate facilities, equipment, supplies and management support to efficiently and effectively administer the program.

Self-Assessment Procedure: The Neighborhood House completes a semi-annual and annual evaluation of all agency programs and services. The RSVP programs completes this self-assessment process through surveys completed by the volunteer stations to help assess the effectiveness of the

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program. The assessment is reviewed by agency leadership staff and the agency's Board of Directors.

Key Staff: Key staff include Mr. William Kreeb, CEO of The Neighborhood House, Mr. Aundrea Young, Sr. Vice President of Administration and Ms. Caroline Johnson, RSVP Program Director.

Mr. Kreeb, MSW, MBA, serves as the CEO of The Neighborhood House. He has more than 35 years of experience in developing and managing various types of volunteer programs and monitors the achievements of the RSVP program. He is supported in this effort by Mr. Young and Ms. Johnson.

Mr. Young, who holds a bachelor's degree in accounting, acts as the agency's comptroller; overseeing all fiscal matters for the agency. Young is familiar with accounting standards for non-profit organizations, including federal cost-principles and OMB circular and audit requirements. Young has more than 15 years of experience in administration and management of federal programs.

Caroline Johnson was a member of the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House Board of Directors for more than 8 years prior to accepting employment with the Neighborhood House. She brings a rich background to The Neighborhood House, having more than two decades of experience in public health, criminal justice, education and correctional enforcement in this community. Johnson began her employment with the agency in January 2011 working with the agency's TANF Job Placement & Family Support program and was appointed as Program Director of the East St. Louis Retired Senior Volunteer Program in June 2013. Since 2011, Johnson has spearheaded a comprehensive county assessment for the homeless in East St. Louis, leading the development and implementation of initiatives to improve the homeless rates in the community. She has worked with various departments within the agency to further develop her individual performance as it pertains to building a stronger community through volunteerism. During her time as interim program director, she led several initiatives which provided technical training to Volunteers to increase their capacity-building abilities. Johnson serves as a member of the United Methodist Women and on the steering committee for the St. Clair County Homeless Action Council. She holds a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and Management from McKendree University of Lebanon, Illinois.

Other

Other

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We do not anticipate graduating any existing RSVP service stations, as our program design continues to focus on the critical needs of the community -- education, economic opportunity and healthy futures.

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

PNS Amendment

Not applicable.