

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

RSVP of Hampshire & Franklin Counties is sponsored by the Hampshire Council of Governments (HCOG), a voluntary association of cities and towns facilitating regional collaboration in Hampshire County and beyond. HCOG's mission is to contribute to the overall prosperity and quality of life in the region by helping cities and towns save money, improving quality of services, and being a voice for Western Massachusetts. In addition to RSVP, our human services department includes a Tobacco Free Community Partnership and Wellness Program.

RSVP of Hampshire & Franklin Counties first began serving Hampshire County in 1973 and expanded into Franklin County in 1999. RSVP is a well-known and well-respected resource in the local community and throughout the region. RSVP was awarded a Programs of National Significance grant by CNCS to support the Osteoporosis Exercise Program, which has grown to serve hundreds of seniors each year at 23 sites in the community.

We are requesting \$147,182 with an \$83,484 non-Federal match, and we propose to engage 600 unduplicated volunteers at 55 stations. The primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures. Some of the related volunteer activities will include brown bag, companionship, money management, osteoporosis exercise classes, senior transportation, and staffing a computer learning center. Volunteers will also provide extensive capacity building support through fundraising, volunteer management support, and blood drives, as well as support to the local VA medical center.

At the end of the three year grant, the central outcomes we anticipate are: seniors will increase their socialization and quality of life and seniors will report increased food security. Also, local nonprofits, senior centers, hospitals, and schools will increase their capacity to serve the community through increased funding and support of their volunteer management infrastructure.

## Strengthening Communities

RSVP of Hampshire & Franklin Counties, located in rural Western Massachusetts, serves a combined area of 1,227 square miles, made up of forty four towns and two small cities. The Connecticut River runs through the center of the service area, which is bounded on the west by the Berkshire Mountains and on the north by Vermont. Franklin County, with a population density of only 102 people per square mile, is the most rural county in the state. Hampshire County, located just to the south of Franklin County, is more populous, with an average population density of 288 people per square mile. It is home to the Five Colleges including the University of Massachusetts and Amherst College.

The counties show parallel geographic and socioeconomic patterns. The western hill towns of both

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counties are extremely rural. These small towns offer few social services, and lack of transportation and broadband internet make it difficult for residents to access what services do exist. The central regions of both counties hold the population and economic centers, including the small cities of Northampton (population 28,500) and Greenfield (population 17,500). The eastern edges of the two counties are significantly depressed and are striking in their poor economic and community health indicators. Per capita income and median household income in both counties are below the state average. 11.8% of residents live below the poverty level, with 23.8% living below 200% of the poverty level.

RSVP of Hampshire & Franklin Counties focuses on Healthy Futures as our primary focus area, due to the clear need to support older adults in our region so that they have access to healthy food and other supports to allow for healthy aging in place. According to the 2014 Massachusetts Healthy Aging Data Report, 17% of the statewide population will be 65 or older in 2015, and by 2030 one out of every five residents will be a senior. Hampshire and Franklin County populations mirror this statewide trend. As the senior population increases, supports that will enable these seniors to thrive at home become both a humanitarian and economic necessity. The Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative describes the ingredients of healthy aging as including healthy eating, social engagement, physical activity, the leading of meaningful lives, being proactive about one's health, and feeling safe and secure. The Collaborative further states -- and RSVP agrees -- that "[t]here is no acceptable percentage of adults that should be denied the opportunity to age well."

In their Area Plan for 2014-2017, Highland Valley Elder Services, an RSVP volunteer station that is the Area Agency on Aging for our southern communities, stated that "[a]ccess to transportation to assist with attending medical appointments, grocery shopping, and errands is virtually non-existent in most of our communities." This echoes the Healthy Aging Report finding that senior transportation options are limited in 25 of the 46 communities in Hampshire and Franklin counties. In addition to transportation, HVES includes "the need to foster independence, and reduce isolation" for seniors as one of their top focus areas as identified by their most recent needs assessment. Franklin County Home Care (FCHCC), the Area Agency on Aging and RSVP volunteer station serving our northern communities, concurred in their 2014-2017 Area Plan, concluding that "[i]ssues of social isolation, need for basic benefits counseling/help with money and finances, [and] lack of transportation...loom large for our elders and were the most talked about issues in the focus groups [conducted as part of their needs assessment]." Lynne Feldman, the Director of Community Services at FCHCC, adds, "At FCHCC, we support independent living for everyone. As people live longer, the need for home and

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community based services will grow. These services improve quality of life and save money by postponing the need for institutional care. [We] could not do this work without a steady stream of dedicated volunteers."

The Healthy Aging Report notes that one of the only consistent resources in each of the communities RSVP serves to promote healthy aging is the presence of a council on aging and/or senior center. Through RSVP-supported programs such as transportation, companionship, osteoporosis exercise classes, brown bag and Meals on Wheels, money management, SHINE, and a computer learning center, these area senior centers are able to support local seniors and enable them to remain independent longer.

RSVP of Hampshire & Franklin Counties currently has strong, long-term partnerships with 22 area senior centers and/or councils on aging; we support their programs by providing high-quality volunteer referrals, volunteer management support, and our signature RSVP osteoporosis exercise classes led by trained volunteers. We have also partnered with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts for the past twenty years, working closely with them to provide volunteers for their warehouse operations as well as their brown bag program. Their brown bag staff works with us each year to distribute postcard surveys to brown bag clients, which had a 45% return rate in 2013.

These close relationships also enable RSVP to work with senior center and COA staffs to complete data collection with consistently high rates of return, accuracy, and completeness. For example, for the past decade RSVP has worked with Senior Centers hosting the Osteoporosis Exercise Program to collect participant numbers on sign-in sheets or electronic log-in systems and to complete participant surveys measuring overall health markers, number of falls or bone breaks, and -- for the past two years -- whether participants experience an increase in social support due to their participation. Last year's surveys had a 51% rate of return, and 97% of respondents indicated that they experienced an increase in social support due to their participation.

Surveys are produced by RSVP staff with feedback from station staff as well as an RSVP volunteer with a Masters in Marketing and Public Relations who has extensive experience drafting surveys, proposals, and other materials. Data is collected by RSVP-trained staff and/or volunteers at the station or mailed to participants to be returned directly to RSVP, and then surveys are tallied and cross-checked by at least two of the RSVP staff, including the Director, the Osteoporosis Exercise Program Coordinator, and/or the Volunteer Coordinator. Results are then communicated back to the station, to the volunteers leading the program, and to our funders in regular required reports. Extending this model of data collection to other programs, such as transportation and companionship,

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will be a straightforward process of producing and providing program-appropriate surveys and following the same collection process we have long used. Because RSVP staff provide one-on-one support and training to any new station staff who hold key positions related to RSVP-supported programming as well as ongoing support and annual station meetings for existing staff, RSVP has the opportunity to ensure that station staff are up-to-date on the latest data collection processes and that all data is collected and managed with care.

In addition to focusing on Healthy Futures programs, RSVP of Hampshire and Franklin Counties also has extensive Capacity Building programs, including 22 stations where volunteers provide significant fundraising support; a developing partnership with Red Cross Blood Drives; and volunteers engaged in volunteer management. We support a small ESL program and partner with the local VA Medical Center in Northampton, MA. Volunteers at the VA provide socialization and support to veterans on site, for example assisting them with completing forms for medical appointments and travel reimbursement. RSVP has also recently completed a volunteer survey, which has allowed us to determine that at least 6% of our volunteers are veterans themselves, and many of them volunteer in capacities that allow them to connect to other veterans, either at the VA directly or at area senior centers and other sites. We intend to continue to nurture our relationship with the VA, so that we can provide high quality volunteer matches as they identify new needs. Our process for developing partnerships and volunteer assignments is detailed in the section below, Recruitment and Development of Volunteers.

### **Recruitment and Development**

RSVP of Hampshire & Franklin Counties takes pride in being known across our service area as a model volunteer connector organization. The reason for our success is the way we act as an agent for each of our volunteers, channeling their unique talents, skills, and experiences to meet real community needs. Due to our careful selection of volunteer stations and our personalized attention to each volunteer, volunteers know they will have a high quality experience volunteering through RSVP.

The high quality experience begins with our volunteer intake. We complete an in-depth interview with each prospective volunteer, learning about their work history, transferable skills, interests, motivations, and preferences. Using the information gleaned from the interview and intake form and our intimate knowledge of each station's needs and organizational culture, we suggest volunteer opportunities that we think will be a good fit for the volunteer, arrange interviews at the stations, and then follow up regularly with both the volunteer and the station to ensure the placement's success.

We assure high quality experiences for volunteers by carefully selecting and working with

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volunteer stations. We select stations that will engage volunteers in work that makes an impact and that demonstrate good volunteer management. In the initial stages of a volunteer placement we keep in close contact with both the volunteer and the station, helping to resolve any issues that arise, or finding a new placement for the volunteer if necessary. We cultivate close relationships with station staff through regular phone and email communication, site visits, and an annual meeting with station representatives to share ideas and resources. Station staff often consult with us as they develop new volunteer opportunities and rely on us to provide volunteer management support and training or to connect them with others who have experience in the areas that they are working on.

RSVP selects volunteer stations with an eye toward expanding our impact and promoting volunteerism. We focus our volunteer station recruitment on organizations that will support our primary focus area of Healthy Futures or other Focus Areas or Capacity Building. In addition to volunteer stations whose missions align with our National Performance Measure objectives, we seek stations that offer a diverse range of opportunities that interest our volunteers and that meet other community needs, such as school support, environmental restoration, senior programming, and hospital work. Along with mission alignment and a range of opportunities, we also strive for geographic diversity. In our rural area encompassing two counties, it is important that we offer quality volunteer opportunities in as many communities as possible.

RSVP maintains a presence in the Human Services field in our service area by participating in local service networks such as the Hampshire County Council of Service Agencies and the Franklin County Resource Network. By participating in these networks we keep abreast of the latest developments in community needs and think collectively with other agencies about ways to meet these needs, offering our knowledge about volunteer management and our services as a volunteer connector. RSVP has strong collaborative relationships with our area agencies on aging, which give us input about opportunities and needs in our senior populations. We communicate frequently and openly with our volunteer stations, which give us feedback about our program design and ways we can better meet community needs. In turn, we take that feedback and work with our Community Advisory Group and the Human and Regional Services Committee of our sponsor, the Hampshire Council of Governments (HCOG). Our Community Advisory Group (CAG) is comprised of RSVP volunteers, volunteer station representatives, Councilors from HCOG, and representatives from our area agencies on aging. Together with the Human and Regional Services Committee, the CAG advises RSVP about program development, resource development, volunteer recruitment, and program publicity. With the advice of these two groups in addition to federal RSVP guidelines, RSVP staff develop an annual

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strategy for station recruitment and volunteer assignment development that meets the needs of the local population as well as national measurements of impact such as the National Performance Measures. More details about the ways in which we respond to the community's changing needs and work with volunteer stations can be found below in the Program Management section of the narrative.

RSVP volunteers have opportunities throughout the year to reflect on the meaning of their service for the community and for themselves. Our volunteer surveys asks RSVP volunteers to reflect on the highlights and challenges of their service. In regular conversation with volunteers, we ask them about the successes, challenges, and benefits of their volunteer experience. Our annual volunteer celebration provides an opportunity for volunteers to see the power of their numbers and reflect on their combined impacts on our service area. We provide detailed feedback to our volunteers in the Osteoporosis Exercise Program that we manage, letting them know improvement rates of their participants, as well as sharing with them qualitative feedback from participants. In each RSVP newsletter we feature an RSVP volunteer, and we give that person an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of service during the interview process and the writing of the piece. And each year we present a group of RSVP volunteers with the President's Volunteer Service Award for Lifetime Achievement. In preparation for presenting the awards we interview each recipient about the meaning of service in their lives.

RSVP volunteers report to us time and time again that engaging in volunteer service enhances the quality of their own lives. Serving with others provides critical social connection for many seniors who are retired and/or living alone. We recently featured a group of volunteers in our newsletter who became friends through volunteering and now regularly meet up and travel together, keeping them social, engaged, and active. For others, having a title, responsibilities, and recognition fulfills a need to be of use and to be respected. For many volunteers simply having a reason to get up and out of the house improves their quality of life. Making a difference to people, being valued, and engaging their hearts, heads, and hands are what keep our volunteers healthy. In our most recent volunteer survey, completed this summer, we asked our volunteers to tell us the reasons they volunteer. 83% indicated that they volunteer in order to stay active, 80% appreciated the chance to be with people, 67% said it allowed them to give back, 49% said volunteering allowed them to use their existing skills, and 32% indicated that volunteering gave them the chance to learn new skills. Clearly, our volunteers find a variety of benefits from their time spent in service, and we work closely with each of them to be sure that their personal goals for their volunteer time are met. Since the surveys were returned, we've been

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following up individually with those volunteers who indicated that they might be ready to add on to their volunteer duties or change their current ones, ensuring that each of them continue to be satisfied with their volunteer experience.

We believe it is important for all people affiliated with RSVP - project staff, volunteers, volunteer station supervisors, and community participation groups -- to receive training and technical assistance as needed. Project staff and station supervisors participate in trainings offered by the Massachusetts Service Alliance on such topics as volunteer management 101, professionalizing volunteer roles, and branding. Staff attend other local training events sponsored by the Council of Service Agencies and the Franklin County Resource Network. The RSVP Volunteer Coordinator participates in peer-led trainings through our area's Volunteer Coordinators' Network. The RSVP Director attends a CNCS national conference as well as other regional trainings each year. She also receives and provides peer support through the Massachusetts Senior Corps Association and the New England Council of RSVP Directors. Every other year, the RSVP Director serves on the planning and workshop selection committees of the Massachusetts Conference on Service and Volunteering, sponsored by the Massachusetts Service Alliance, to help ensure that conference content is relevant to Senior Corps directors and station staff. The Director, Volunteer Coordinator, and several station staff members attend the conference and bring back materials and insight to be shared with those who could not attend.

RSVP provides training and technical assistance to volunteer station supervisors both formally and informally. Formal trainings include a workshop about personalized recruitment as a tool for long-term volunteer engagement given by the Director and Volunteer Coordinator and an annual meeting where station representatives choose several relevant topics for the Director and Volunteer Coordinator to present. Recent topics have included volunteer recognition, recruiting baby boomers, and handling separation from service when a volunteer isn't the right fit for a program. The RSVP Osteoporosis Exercise Program Coordinator gives individual training to Osteoporosis Exercise Program host sites about program management, including checklists for starting and maintaining a class, safety and confidentiality checks of the classroom and registration materials, and how to recruit and support volunteer class leaders. RSVP staff provides regular one-on-one training and technical assistance to volunteer stations about such topics as volunteer project development, hours reporting, position description development, and avoiding prohibited activities. We provide training to the RSVP Community Advisory Group and HCOG councilors at their meetings by informally sharing information and answering questions.

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RSVP volunteers participate in trainings led by RSVP and by their volunteer stations. New volunteers first meet with the RSVP volunteer coordinator, who conducts an intake that includes training about serving as an RSVP volunteer as well as general RSVP policies and procedures as included in our volunteer manual. RSVP offers extensive training for our Osteoporosis Exercise Program leaders including an initial two-day training to prepare volunteers to lead the classes and familiarize themselves with the program manual, followed by regular training updates three times per year, on-call access to our Program Coordinator and Program Consultant, and yearly site visits by our Program Coordinator. These trainings are led by the Osteoporosis Program Consultant, a certified fitness and wellness instructor who has led the program's trainings since its inception 15 years ago. After each new leader training and leader meeting, participants are asked to complete evaluation surveys, which are compiled by the Program Coordinator so that she and the Program Consultant can make changes to the curriculum and program manual as needed. Volunteer stations offer trainings specific to their agencies, such as health insurance counseling, money management, Computer Learning Center instruction, and on-the-job training as people try things that are new to them. Most of these programs are state or national programs with training and evaluation protocols established by master trainers and either taught to the sites or presented by visiting trainers on at least an annual basis. RSVP provides support to stations with less formal programs to help them establish training programs, including job descriptions and volunteer manuals.

As part of our intake and placement process, our volunteer coordinator follows up with each new volunteer following their training and the start of their service to evaluate how successful the training and placement has been. The volunteer coordinator then shares any feedback gleaned from those conversations that can help stations with their continuous improvement efforts. We also survey volunteers about the ongoing training and support they receive from the stations so that we can ensure their information and support needs are being met and that stations are informed if any gaps or concerns are identified, without the volunteer having to be put on the spot if they feel uncomfortable providing that feedback directly. More informally, as we see and speak with volunteers throughout the year we always ask how their service is going, so that they have the opportunity to share any concerns or kudos that their stations should hear about.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the population of Franklin County is 94.2% White, 1.1% African American, 1.3% Asian, and 3.2% Hispanic/Latino of any race. The population of Hampshire County is similar at 88.7% White, 2.5% African American, 4.5% Asian, and 4.7% Hispanic/Latino of any race. The population 55 and older is even less diverse, which is reflected in our current volunteer group,

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which is almost 98% white. As the diversity of our older population slowly increases, we are partnering with area agencies on aging and senior centers to determine how best to engage volunteers from a variety of backgrounds. Initially, we are making sure to offer a wide range of volunteer opportunities that will appeal to many different types of volunteers, including opportunities that can accommodate those with disabilities. Though we do not formally track the disabilities of our volunteers, we are careful to inform volunteers of the physical requirements of each potential volunteer placement, so that they may self-select appropriately for their situation. We also work one-on-one with stations to ensure that volunteers with any special needs can have those needs met so they can have a successful volunteer experience.

RSVP believes that bringing together people of diverse backgrounds is an important way to strengthen our community. Our philosophy of community service is that it's not a one-way street with one person giving and the other person receiving the service. Rather, it is the process and the relationship of one person connecting with another that creates the transformative moment - that creates impact. You can't have one person serving in a vacuum -- service is all about bringing people together. One way in which we bring together people of diverse backgrounds is by having outside volunteers serving alongside service recipients. This happens at the survival centers, at the regional food bank, and at our elder nutrition sites, and it means that people from different socioeconomic backgrounds are working together. We work with our local community action agency to offer volunteer opportunities to and service for people of various socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. We also partner with the local VA Medical Center to provide volunteer support to local veterans, as described in the Strengthening Communities section of the narrative. In addition, the 2010 Census indicated that Hampshire County has the second highest percentage of same sex couples living together of any county in the country; we are undertaking a collaboration with one of our area agencies on aging to reach out to GLBT elders in order to better meet their volunteer and social service needs. Currently, we are providing materials and presenters as requested at the area agency on aging's GLBT community roundtables and events so that GLBT elders know that our organization is available to serve their needs.

We will continue to build our corps of volunteers through ongoing recruitment, retention, and recognition efforts. We have three core recruitment strategies. The first is word of mouth. Current RSVP volunteers are our best ambassadors for the program, and we provide each of them with an item, such as a pin, to identify them as an RSVP volunteer. We also provide brochures and other recruitment materials as requested. We know that in order for our volunteers to refer their friends

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and neighbors, we need to create the best quality program we can. In this way, all our efforts at creating a high quality volunteer program have the dual purpose of facilitating recruitment. Volunteer stations and community partners also provide regular referrals of their volunteers who may be seeking additional or different opportunities than the ones offered by that individual site. 24% of current volunteers heard about RSVP from another RSVP volunteer, 12% heard about us from a friend or family member, and 30% found out about RSVP from one of our many volunteer stations or community partners, so our focus on positive word of mouth is quite successful.

Our second strategy is broad-based recruitment. We make sure people have many opportunities to learn about RSVP, so that after hearing about us from several sources they will then take the next step of contacting us for more information about how to get involved. Our broad-based recruitment efforts include regular features in an elder issues insert in our local paper, regular radio spots, our newsletter, our website, volunteermatch.org, community health fairs, and strategically placed posters, fliers, and brochures. We give out brochures and promotional items at community events in order to draw people in, and we stock brochures and fliers at important community sites such as medical offices, libraries, and community centers. Our third strategy is targeted recruitment. Our staff has participated in trainings to learn how to target media messages to specific groups, particularly baby boomers and skilled volunteers. We use this knowledge in our social media as well as in printed materials, which were recently redesigned by the same volunteer with marketing expertise who designs our surveys. We also give presentations about the benefits of volunteering at area retirement communities and senior centers.

We retain volunteers by taking the time in the initial stages to make a good placement, and then following the volunteer throughout their service, making regular contact to varying degrees as each individual requires. We conduct regular check-ins with volunteers, and change or add volunteer placements as needed. We form a personal relationship with each volunteer through phone calls, birthday cards, and visits to volunteer stations. Our quarterly newsletter, monthly e-newsletters, website, and Facebook page keep people engaged with RSVP. We know that providing good customer service and helping our volunteer stations support our volunteers result in volunteers maintaining long-term affiliation with RSVP. Currently, 90% of our volunteers have served with RSVP for one year or more, and 17 individuals have volunteered with RSVP for twenty years or more.

Recognizing volunteers is an important part of our volunteer management strategy, and we have a range of recognition techniques. Our largest recognition effort is our annual volunteer celebration. We invite volunteers, volunteer station supervisors, and community supporters to a lunch celebration.

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The event includes guest speakers, entertainment by an RSVP-affiliated group such as the singing group at a local hospice program, a service project, and the presentation of the President's Volunteer Service Award for Lifetime Achievement. Almost half of our volunteers attend the luncheon each year, and they tell us they look forward to the opportunity to connect with us and one another while we celebrate their service. We also recognize volunteers by featuring one volunteer's story in each of our newsletters, and by pitching personal interest stories about volunteers and their service to media outlets. We invite volunteers to share their stories in panel discussions sponsored by RSVP. We recognize volunteers by speaking at volunteer celebration gatherings at their volunteer stations and through thank you notes and birthday cards. Though birthday cards seem like a small thing, we get numerous phone calls and even thank you notes back from volunteers, letting us know that they appreciate the personal touch of a card on their special day. For some, it is the only birthday card they receive, so the significance is even greater. RSVP staff also offers verbal appreciation for their service every time we speak to any RSVP volunteers on the phone or in person.

### **Program Management**

Focused management and cultivation of volunteer stations and volunteer assignments are what make RSVP of Hampshire & Franklin Counties so effective. Through the RSVP Community Advisory Group, the HCOG Human and Regional Services Committee, and community networks such as the Council of Service Agencies and the Franklin County Resource Network, RSVP stays on the cutting edge of community needs. We maintain a portfolio of volunteer stations that is both deep in its ability to impact community needs and broad in its geographic reach and diversity of volunteer assignments. We select all volunteer stations based on their demonstrated ability to successfully manage volunteers, including: responding to volunteers in a timely manner; providing supervision, training, and safety; treating volunteers with respect; maintaining compliance with RSVP regulations; and assisting RSVP with tracking volunteer hours and impacts. When applicable, our volunteer stations are responsible for conducting criminal record background checks on RSVP volunteers referred to them. Through individual consultations, we help volunteer stations develop volunteer assignments that meet identified needs and provide a meaningful experience for the volunteer. This includes developing personalized skills-based volunteer assignments for volunteers wishing to contribute particular professional skills.

Staff from each new station meet with at least one member of the RSVP staff to go over RSVP requirements as spelled out in the MOU, including prohibited activities and accessibility, and to discuss volunteer placements, hours reporting, evaluation of impact, and other essential partnership activities.

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The RSVP director reviews the renewal dates of MOUs twice a year in order to update MOUs in a timely manner, and then reviews the MOU and discusses any changes with the main station representative at each station due for renewal. The volunteer coordinator consults with station staff before placing any volunteers in a new volunteer position to ensure that it abides by RSVP regulations and that no prohibited activities are involved.

Each year as RSVP prepares a new grant application and then prepares progress reports for the current grant, RSVP staff meet to discuss the status of each station in terms of their compliance to RSVP regulations, their portfolio of impact assignments for volunteers, and their volunteer management strengths and weaknesses. The director, volunteer coordinator, and osteoporosis exercise program coordinator serve as point person for roughly a third of the volunteer stations each, staying in regular contact with the representatives at each site, ensuring that all reporting is completed in a timely manner, answering questions and handling concerns as they arise, and visiting the sites annually or as needed. In this way any concerns are caught early and can be managed with minimal disruption to station staff or volunteers.

The majority of our station supervisors report their volunteer hours online, which allows RSVP to download the hours directly into Volunteer Reporter, our database, and which enables stations to clearly see who their RSVP volunteers are and what positions RSVP has them listed for and to include messages about any changes that need to be made. We have recently updated our written hours reporting forms so that they also pull current data directly from the database, making it equally easy for those stations still using written forms to review how we have volunteers listed and make any changes as they arise. And each time a staff member visits a station, she brings along an updated list of volunteers and assignments to review with the station for accuracy. Our annual survey also captured this information from the volunteers, so that we can be sure that what the volunteers say they are doing matches with what the stations are reporting. Monthly hours are reviewed by the Data Entry Clerk to ensure accuracy, and any changes or discrepancies are resolved by the Volunteer Coordinator as needed.

For the past several years since the new National Performance Measures were introduced, RSVP staff has been working to evaluate existing programs and partnership with an eye toward gradually shifting them to be in-line with the new regulations. Non-focus area stations with minimal volunteers have been graduated as their numbers and need for RSVP support has dwindled, with the understanding that if appropriate volunteers happen to present themselves to RSVP, we will be happy to let them know about the former RSVP stations with opportunities that might fit their interests.

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Larger stations with a mixture of opportunities both in and outside of the focus areas are being worked with on an individual basis to encourage their volunteers to participate in at least one output- or outcome-based assignment in addition to their other placements. We are also helping stations to focus their volunteer recruitment efforts on focus area positions and to develop new positions as interest and need dictates.

New volunteers interested in non-focus area opportunities are either encouraged to also serve in a focus area or, if that does not interest them, we help them to connect with a volunteer site without them joining RSVP and participating in our extensive placement process. Our philosophy is that all volunteers deserve help to get their foot in the door, even if they do not become RSVP volunteers. We have also been carefully updating our volunteer information through the recent survey and conversations with stations and individuals, so that all volunteers still active in our database are actively volunteering and are aware of ways in which they can participate in focus area service activities if they are not already doing so.

This gradual alignment with the National Performance Measures is allowing us to use natural attrition and focused recruitment to shape our program rather than needing to cause disruption to current volunteers and stations. As we enter the three-year period of this grant, we will continue to work on the individual volunteer and station level to ensure that we meet and exceed our output and outcome goals. At the start of the grant period, the RSVP staff will meet to discuss the current status of each station and their portfolio of volunteer opportunities to determine where we need to focus our recruitment efforts and realignment efforts, if any. We plan to review our progress at a staff meeting at least every six months throughout the grant period. We will also continue to work with our community groups and stations, as described in the previous two narrative sections, to respond to community needs as they arise within the context of our RSVP grant.

We have been managing volunteers and measuring outcomes in Healthy Futures, our Primary Focus Area, for some time, partly because RSVP has been able to shift our volunteer placement portfolio to fit with the National Performance Measures gradually and minimally. RSVP has been managing the Osteoporosis Exercise Program for the past fifteen years, expanding it to serve more than 600 total participants at 24 sites in Hampshire and Franklin Counties (up from 130 participants at 11 sites in 2008). In this time, our outcomes have been remarkably consistent. Last year, 97% of survey respondents indicated that participating in classes increased their friendships and social connection, while 78% were able to avoid falls and 97% avoided broken bones. Of the 118 participants who had a second bone density test since they began the classes, 33% improved their bone density, and

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52% maintained their bone density. This was an impressive feat, as several respondents mentioned, considering that many participants are in their 80s or even 90s. The 65 volunteer class leaders express a high degree of satisfaction with their service, due both to the support RSVP provides and the successes of their participants, who are equally appreciative of their group leaders.

RSVP also has a well-established and dedicated group of more than 40 brown bag volunteers who served more than 600 seniors last year. Many of these volunteers have a deep commitment to ending hunger in their community, and they volunteer with congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, and community food pantries in addition to their brown bag duties. Brown bag recipients are surveyed each year to determine the impact of the program. Last year, 84% of respondents indicated that the brown bag program enabled them to eat somewhat or much more nutritious food than they would otherwise. 61% of respondents indicated that the program allows them to get enough to eat, while an additional 15% said it helps them get more food, but still not quite enough.

Other programs in Healthy Futures, including companionship, transportation, the computer learning center, money management, SHINE, and emergency food distribution, are long-standing community programs that RSVP has been supporting for years if not decades. Because we partner with such well-established, carefully managed programs, we are able to focus on ensuring our volunteers are having a good, productive experience and to rely on program staff at the stations to help us complete evaluations of the program or simply allow us to access the evaluations they already complete. Our goal is to continue to expand the programs in which we evaluate outcomes once all of the current evaluation systems under this new grant are established and running smoothly.

As mentioned above and in previous narrative sections, RSVP is careful to ensure compliance with RSVP regulations as it relates to completing and maintaining a current MOU with all stations and having an RSVP Advisory Council. We have recently begun identifying additional council members who have expertise in areas such as marketing and fundraising to help further strengthen our program and position in the community. RSVP is also careful to ensure that all volunteers are eligible to serve in RSVP. Volunteers complete an information form that includes their birthdate, which is entered into the Volunteer Reporter database once they become an RSVP volunteer. The database allows us to quickly and easily check that our volunteer and station data is complete and up-to-date. Staff members regularly update information, add notes to individual files for easy data sharing amongst staff, and run reports to check compliance issues, hours data, and data necessary for completing required reports.

### **Organizational Capability**

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The Hampshire Council of Governments (HCOG) is a voluntary association of cities and towns. We took on the role of facilitating regional collaboration after county government was abolished across much of Massachusetts in the late 1990s. Our mission is to contribute to the overall prosperity and quality of life in the region by helping cities and towns save money, improving quality of services, and being a voice for Western Massachusetts beyond the region. With that broad mission, we have gained experience in a wide range of community issues. HCOG has considerable experience working with seniors, having owned and operated a 120-bed nursing home for many years. As part of that nursing home we implemented our "Bridging the Gaps" program which engaged both seniors and students in community service. Over the years our human services department has tackled a variety of community needs, including health and wellness. Our Tobacco Free Community Partnership and Wellness Program are impact-based programs, funded by state contracts. We have run those programs for the past twenty years. HCOG has been successfully managing the RSVP program for the past six years, growing the volunteer corps by more than 200 volunteers during that time. Each progress and financial status report has been on target and our last site visit from CNCS was positive.

HCOG has sound financial management systems which allow us to manage the RSVP grant well. Each year department heads, including the RSVP Director, prepare their budgets and submit their drafts into the accounting system. The Finance Department reviews all draft budgets and aggregates them to create an agency-wide budget. The Finance Department submits this budget to the Finance Committee, which reviews and discusses any adjustments it thinks should be made. From there, the budget is presented to the full board, and the Chairman submits the budget to our member towns for review. After a public hearing on the budget, the Executive Committee of the board compiles the feedback from all stakeholders and presents a report to the full board containing recommendations for action. The full board then adopts the budget. The board maintains oversight of the budget throughout the fiscal year, approving all expenses in the form of weekly warrants, and reviewing income statements and cash flow reports on a monthly basis. All checks are prepared by staff in the Finance Department and signed by the Director of Finance. We have extensive experience managing state grants as well as Medicare and Medicaid payments, and our experience managing the federal grant for the RSVP program over its tenure with us has been successful.

Key staff responsible for RSVP program management are the RSVP Director, the HCOG Executive Director, RSVP Volunteer Coordinator, RSVP Osteoporosis Exercise Program Coordinator, the HCOG Assistant Director of Finance, and the RSVP Data Entry Clerk. RSVP also contracts with an Osteoporosis Exercise Program Consultant for paid and in-kind donated training and program

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planning. The RSVP Director oversees the development and ongoing coordination of the program, including public relations, program evaluation, project development, staff supervision, financial management, and volunteer management. The HCOG Executive Director provides support and guidance to the RSVP Director and the program as a whole. The RSVP Volunteer Coordinator manages the recruitment, placement, retention, and recognition of our volunteers. The RSVP Osteoporosis Exercise Program Coordinator manages program implementation and volunteer coordination for that special program. The HCOG Assistant Director of Finance integrates RSVP into the agency's accounting system and assists the RSVP Director with budget development and budget management. The RSVP Data Entry Clerk tracks volunteer hours and manages electronic and physical files for volunteers and volunteer stations. The Osteoporosis Exercise Program Consultant plans and leads two new leader trainings and three current leader meetings each year and works with the Program Coordinator to develop training materials, including the manual, and oversee the fidelity of the program at all sites.

The RSVP Director, Lindsay Bennett-Jacobs, is in her fourth year as director. She has a background in national service and volunteerism, having served as the director of a regional volunteer connector as well as an AmeriCorps member and VISTA. She has a BA from Smith College and an MDiv from Vanderbilt University. The HCOG Executive Director, Todd Ford, has been with the Council for four years. He has a background in local government and the private sector, having served as Planning Director for two Massachusetts communities and president of a sustainable urban design firm. He has a BA from St. Lawrence University and an MA in Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning from Tufts University. The RSVP Volunteer Coordinator, Pat Sicard, has been with the program for six years. Her experience includes having served as Director of Volunteer Services at two hospitals and Director of Senior Services for a local council on aging. She has a Masters of Education. The RSVP Osteoporosis Exercise Program Coordinator, Linda Brunelle, is completing her first year with the program. She has a Masters of Public Health and has been working as a health educator and yoga instructor with older adults for over twenty years. HCOG Assistant Director of Finance Melissa Szumski has more than fifteen years of accounting and financial management experience. RSVP Data Entry Clerk Barbara Tessier has been with the program for eight years and has extensive experience supporting Senior Corps programs. Glafyra Ennis-Yentsch, the Osteoporosis Exercise Program Consultant, inaugurated the program fifteen years ago and has worked in the field of senior fitness since 1978. She is a certified senior fitness instructor through the American Senior Fitness Association and has also worked as the Outreach Coordinator at a local

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senior center since 1998.

HCOG has sufficient organizational capacity to successfully support the RSVP Program. Our office building, located in the heart of our service area in downtown Northampton, provides the RSVP staff with ample office space in our human services suite. We provide the staff with all office furniture, and staff share common equipment such as the fax machine, postage machine, and photocopier. The program also has access to a conference room and a meeting room for hosting meetings of varying size. We assure that the RSVP program has adequate supplies by budgeting accordingly. Our purchasing department has well-defined procedures for purchasing, including on-line submission of requisitions and purchase order numbers. Personnel management support is afforded by our board's personnel committee. Each member of our staff has a written job description that explicitly defines their role in our organization. Our internal policies include a travel policy, workplace information security policy, and personnel policies. The RSVP program has additional policies and procedures governing such program management issues as volunteer separation, volunteer fair labor, and staff and program prohibited activities. RSVP is also in the process of codifying our existing data collection and evaluation practices into a written data collection plan.

HCOG writes an annual report each year. Department heads are asked to compile data for this report about their departments' accomplishments and impact. We have completed a strategic planning process through which we engaged many stakeholders in assessing our performance. Armed with that assessment, each year we set organizational and department-level goals and action plans to enable us to more effectively and efficiently serve our community. These goals are reviewed at all levels, both informally on a quarterly basis and more formally on a yearly basis. The RSVP Director uses the annual strategic planning process as a support to the grant application and renewal process.

HCOG staff and the RSVP Director work together to manage project resources, both financial and in-kind, to ensure accountability and efficient and effective use of available resources. The RSVP Director submits a warrant of project expenses to the Finance Department each week. The warrant is reviewed by the Assistant Director of Finance and approved by the Executive Director and HCOG Executive Committee. Finance Department staff enter the expenses into the agency's accounting system and prepare the checks, which are signed by the Director of Finance. The Assistant Director of Finance draws CNCS funds each month based on submitted expenses. She provides the RSVP Director with a monthly income and expenses report which the RSVP Director reconciles with her records and enters into a spreadsheet that tracks budgeted versus actual expenses. The RSVP Director

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and the Assistant Director of Finance regularly review the budgeted versus actual expenses and make budget adjustments as necessary, submitting amendments to CNCS when required. Each year the RSVP Director works with the Assistant Director of Finance to create a project budget for the following year.

In-kind donations from HCOG, including office space, some project staff benefits, and pro-rated HCOG staff salary and benefits, are calculated each month. Pro-rated HCOG staff salary and benefits are calculated based on actual time spent working on the project as recorded on staff timesheets. In-kind donations from stations and other outside individuals and businesses are recorded on in-kind donation vouchers that are submitted to the RSVP Director and include a description of the contribution, its purpose and value, the manner in which the value was determined, a certification that the donation does not come from federal funds, the signature of the donor, and back-up documentation when available. The RSVP Director signs off on these vouchers. She reports all in-kind contributions to the Assistant Director of Finance each month, who enters them into our agency's accounting system. The original forms are kept in the finance office. The RSVP Director and Assistant Finance Director regularly review budgeted versus actual in-kind contributions to make sure we are meeting the grantee share requirement.

Every effort is taken to make sure resources are used efficiently. The HCOG purchasing department gets bids for common items such as office supplies and printing services, and selects the best bid. RSVP uses these approved vendors whenever possible. Other purchases are made after researching prices to ensure value.

Over the years our RSVP project has grown so that additional cash and in-kind resources are needed to sustain and grow the project. The RSVP Director keeps a close eye on grant opportunities that we are eligible for and applies for them. In this way the program secured a Programs of National Significance grant from CNCS in 2010 and receives occasional small grants from area agencies. The RSVP Director works with the HCOG Councilors to secure contributions to the program, including table sponsorships and prizes for the annual volunteer celebration. She trains the Councilors to act as ambassadors for the program and provides them with materials and lists of area businesses. The Councilors then go out into the community and solicit donations. Donors are recognized in the event program and in our newsletter and receive a personal thank you. When bringing on new volunteer stations, and in ongoing communications with current stations, the RSVP Director secures in-kind donations of services such as space for hosting training events, meetings, and Osteoporosis Exercise Program classes; and volunteer training, meals, and recognition. These contributions are agreed to as

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part of the Memorandum of Understanding that RSVP signs with each volunteer station, with the understanding that they are not a requirement of becoming an RSVP volunteer station and can be renegotiated at any time. Each year the RSVP Director negotiates the contribution that HCOG makes to the project, and the contribution that our Osteoporosis Exercise Program consultant makes to that program. There is a culture of collaboration among organizations in our community, so we collaborate and share resources whenever possible, and continually cultivate our relationships with program partners so that we may call on them for help when needed.

### **Other**

N/A

### **PNS Amendment (if applicable)**

N/A