

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

An estimated 75 RSVP volunteers will serve. Of this number, 55 RSVP volunteers will be placed in outcome assignments. Some of their activities will include delivering meals, providing transportation, offering companionship, connecting seniors to food resources, and providing benefits counseling. The primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures. At the end of the three-year grant, at least 75% of the individuals served by the RSVP volunteers, in outcome based assignments, will report increased social ties and support. The CNCS federal investment of \$49,049 will be supplemented by \$22,795 in non-federal resources.

## Strengthening Communities

Athens Community Council on Aging's (ACCA) RSVP Project provides volunteer opportunities for individuals age 55 and over that address the needs of older adults in the Northeast Georgia (NEGA) region. This twelve county region is a diverse area consisting of distinct rural, suburban, and urban areas. In its 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, the US Census Bureau estimated the total population of the region at 578,209, with 12% aged 65 and older. According to the NEGA Regional Commission's Regional Plan 2035, the population is expected to increase to 1.15 million by 2035, with the portion of adults 65 and older increasing by 6.4%. This increase in the older adult population will result in an increase in the demand for services which support seniors living independently, and will also provide a greater pool of potential RSVP volunteers. In the State Plan on Aging for Federal Fiscal Year October 1, 2011 through September 30, 2015 the Georgia Department of Human Services Division of Aging Services (DAS) solicited public input on the services most needed by older adults. Transportation and home and community based services ranked as numbers 1 and 3, respectively. Additionally, 6% of respondents identified connection to volunteer opportunities as a needed service.

Compounding the needs of older adults in the region are the high rates of poverty found across all twelve NEGA counties. According to the NEGA Regional Commission's Regional Plan, in 2009, seven of the twelve counties had poverty rates higher than the national average of 14%. Furthermore, the DAS State Plan on Aging states that in the NEGA region, 12% of individuals age 65 and over were living in poverty. The American Psychological Association states that older adults of lower socioeconomic status have increased mortality, higher incidence of stroke and chronic kidney disease, lower health-related quality of life, smaller social networks and lower quality of social relations.

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Older adults living in consistent poverty face a number of issues threatening their ability to remain independent. Among these are limited transportation options, food insecurity, and social isolation. Many older adults lack access to critical transportation to the grocery store, pharmacy, doctor's appointments and social engagements. Nationally, 20% of Americans aged 65 and older don't drive and 15.5 million adults, aged 65+, live in areas where public transportation is inadequate or doesn't exist. In its 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment, the Athens Regional Health System identified lack of transportation as a barrier to health care, and included transportation as one of the community's top three health needs. A local Transportation Needs Survey conducted by the RSVP office at ACCA found that 88% of older adults surveyed said a new transportation program for seniors in the community was needed. In addition, 30.56% of the respondents who stated that they do not drive said they cannot afford a taxi or other form of private transportation.

Poverty, lack of transportation, and health issues limit older adults' access to appropriate food, leaving individuals at risk of hunger. Feeding America estimates that in NEGA 94,300 individuals, or 16% of the total population have been identified as food insecure, meaning they lack access to affordable and appropriate food. While regionally this number is in line with the national food insecurity rate of 15.8%, areas within the region experience food insecurity at much higher rates. For example, 20% of Clarke County residents, including 9% of residents age 50 and older, are food insecure. According to the AARP Foundation, food insecure older adults, when compared to food secure older adults, are 60% more likely to experience depression, and over 50% more likely to report a heart attack and develop asthma.

Social isolation greatly impacts quality of life for older adults, specifically those that are homebound. The DAS State Plan states that 24% of Georgia's older adults age 65 and over live alone, and 44% of ACCA's Meals on Wheels clients live alone, putting them at risk for isolation and loneliness, and other health factors which may decrease their ability to remain living independently. Perceived isolation has been linked to higher blood pressure, more susceptibility to flu and other infectious diseases, and earlier onset of dementia. Studies from the University College London and the University of Chicago have identified social disconnectedness and isolation as a health risk on par with smoking cigarettes and obesity, and have found that individuals who lack social ties and support suffer higher rates of morbidity and mortality.

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While there are over 2,000 federal, state and private benefit programs available to address many of the issues faced by older adults, access to these benefits may be limited due to lack of awareness or the perceived complication of the enrollment process. In its 2012 report, *The Senior Disconnect: Millions are Losing Billions in Benefits*, the National Council on Aging (NCOA) stated that the most common assistance requested through the US Administration on Aging's Eldeercare Locator service was financial benefits. Furthermore, 71% of individuals using its BenefitsCheckUp© were not receiving all of the benefits they were eligible for, including Medicare and SNAP.

RSVP volunteers are in a unique position to affect change in all of these areas. Through the Volunteer Transportation program, volunteer drivers will provide trips to medical appointments, grocery stores, fitness classes, and social events. Removing barriers to transportation not only provides access to these vital services, it also allows opportunity for socialization between the drivers and riders, decreasing the rider's sense of loneliness.

Lunch Buddy and Buddy RSVP volunteers provide additional opportunities for social support through regular visits to share meals or engage in activities. Lunch Buddy volunteers meet with their "Buddy" each week to share donated meals and spend time socializing. Volunteers may also be matched with "Buddies" based on shared interests such as gardening, crafts, and games. These volunteers visit regularly, and give their buddy the opportunity to engage in activities they may otherwise miss out on, or are no longer able to do on their own.

Meals on Wheels volunteers provide both nutrition support and social support. In 2014, ACCA participated in the Meals on Wheels America More Than a Meal study, conducted by Brown University's Center for Gerontology and Healthcare Research and funded by AARP Foundation. This study found that older adults receiving a daily delivered meal had greater improvements in health and quality of life when compared to older adults receiving weekly, frozen meals or no meal. Specifically, Meals on Wheels clients reported improvement in feelings of isolation and loneliness, and decreases in worry about being able to remain in their home.

GeorgiaCares volunteers provide benefits counseling, by phone, to older adults in the region. Volunteers receive extensive training to provide current, unbiased information to those seeking

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information about Medicare, SNAP, and other benefits. These volunteers are also able to assist older adults with the application process, and help them identify appropriate benefit plans.

RSVP volunteers may also choose to serve with ACCA's supplemental monthly food route, Take Out Tuesday, assist with food packing and distribution at the Mobile Food Pantry, or serve in the community garden.

### **Recruitment and Development**

Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA) has a long and successful history of volunteer management, annually leveraging over 23,000 volunteer hours in service to older adults in the Northeast Georgia region. RSVP volunteers receive both agency orientation training as well as pre-service training, conducted by the station, which is specific to their volunteer role. Agency orientation provides the volunteer with a broad overview of the programs and services of ACCA and gives new volunteers an opportunity to meet staff, clients, and fellow volunteers. Agency pre-service training includes review of the Volunteer Handbook, and the in-depth Client Protection Practices Training which educates volunteers on HIPAA regulations, confidentiality, elder abuse prevention, clients' rights and responsibilities, and the ACCA Code of Ethics. Program specific trainings are conducted with the goal of giving volunteers a clear understanding of the community need addressed by the program, how their service increases agency capacity to meet this need, and instruction on their roles and responsibilities as volunteers. Orientation and station trainings are offered in a variety of formats, include on-line, classroom, and one-on-one training with station staff.

In addition to these initial trainings, RSVP volunteers are offered trainings designed to build new skills, develop leadership potential, and reflect on the meaning of service to their community. Quarterly trainings feature a relevant speaker, provide program updates, celebrate volunteer achievements, and announce upcoming opportunities. Training will be relevant to Healthy Futures, based on volunteer feedback, and will include topics such as public speaking or managing stress. Trainings will be a forum for service learning and a platform for volunteers to speak about their experiences. RSVP volunteers seeking leadership development opportunities are encouraged to attend the annual Senior Leadership Academy. Volunteers also receive a quarterly newsletter highlighting program updates, successes, and opportunities.

ACCA's RSVP Project is located in Athens, Georgia, the metropolitan hub of the twelve county Northeast Georgia (NEGA) service area. Located in Clarke County, Athens is home to the University of Georgia and is regularly identified by national media as a top retirement destination. The remaining

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11 counties have experienced growth in recent years due to their proximity to Atlanta and Athens. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau listed the total population of NEGA at 568,587, 12% of which are 65 and older. According to the NEGA Regional Commission's Northeast Georgia Regional Plan 2035, the population is expected to increase to 1.15 million by 2035, with the portion of adults 65 and older increasing to 6.4%. Athens-Clarke County reports 64.3% white, 26.6% black, and 4.0% Asian. The project has a diverse volunteer base including individuals from different educational levels, abilities and disabilities, and income levels. This diversity adds value to the program by bringing a mixture of experiences and skill sets. A variety of recruitment avenues are used to encourage diversity including events at churches, senior centers, civic groups and government agencies. The project places a special emphasis on targeted recruitment of retirees new to the area and local veterans. AARP, Forbes, and MONEY Magazine have all identified Athens as one of the best places to retire. According to the 2010 census, there are over 34,000 veterans residing in the NEGA area, and 37% of those are age 65 or older. RSVP staff present on volunteer opportunities at the Athens Convention and Visitor's Bureau's Athens Area Newcomers Club, and have begun building relationships with both the local VFW and Department of Veteran's Affairs to engage more local veterans in national service. Project staff participate in events such as the Georgia Department of Veteran Service's Supermarket of Veterans Benefits in order to increase veterans' knowledge and awareness of opportunities with RSVP. Public awareness, support, and outreach for RSVP is strengthened through regular communication about volunteer opportunities and impact via ACCA's website and quarterly publication, press releases, local senior expos, volunteer fairs, and community events. Senior Corps staff educate the Advisory Council and ACCA staff on available opportunities so that they are able to speak on behalf of the project and expand the reach of recruitment efforts.

SC Staff are working closely with ACCA's Director of Volunteer Services to develop an inclusive Recruitment, Retention, and Recognition plan for all agency volunteers. Within this plan, RSVP volunteers will receive personalized recognition that highlights individual accomplishments such as number of meals and hours served, and feedback from clients on the impact the volunteer has had in their lives. Ongoing recognition will be provided at training and celebration events, as well as personalized recognition such as emails, calls, and hand-written thank you notes. Public recognition of RSVP volunteers' work appears in ACCA's quarterly publication and on the website, as well as on closed circuit monitors throughout the facility. SC Staff identify and nominate RSVP volunteers for recognition with local and regional awards, such as the Junior League's Community Service Awards. Enrollment recognition benefits include a volunteer photo ID card, RSVP tote bag, and an RSVP t-

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shirt.

Key to volunteer retention is regular communication with volunteers and stations to ensure volunteers feel supported and have the resources and training needed to be successful in their role. RSVP and Station staff maintain this communication through site visits and phone calls, as well as annual satisfaction surveys. The RSVP Volunteer Survey evaluates overall volunteer satisfaction with the program, as well as the volunteers' enjoyment of their roles. In FY14 82% of volunteers stated that they were satisfied with the program, and 98% felt their service makes a positive difference in the community and the people they serve.

### Program Management

Athens Community Council on Aging's (ACCA) RSVP project has been a well-respected volunteer organization in the NEGA community for over forty years. The RSVP project is proud of the mutually beneficial relationships that have been created and maintained with Volunteer Stations throughout the years. The collective impact on the community served is due to both ACCA and the RSVP project's experience and success in comprehensive program management and oversight. Volunteer stations are chosen based on alignment with RSVP performance measures, community needs, and ability to incorporate needs of older adult volunteers. New station training is conducted by SC staff and provides information on CNCS and RSVP, the scope of the project, and regulations of the program. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is created for each station, and reviewed at least every three years. The MOU contains the basic provisions to guide the working relationship between the project and the station, including the responsibilities of each party and prohibited activities. A signed, current MOU is required for a volunteer to be placed at a station and SC staff monitor MOU expiration dates monthly to ensure all stations are in compliance.

Regular site visits by SC staff ensure stations are operating in compliance with program regulations, and that neither station staff nor volunteers are engaging in prohibited activities. Site visits are conducted when a new station is established, and at least once a year thereafter. Visits are documented on a standardized form that identifies station staff and volunteers present, the date of the visit, the reason for the visit, and if any follow up is needed. In the event that the site visit results in identification of areas for improvement, additional training will be provided by SC staff. If compliance issues are identified at a station immediate corrective action, ranging from additional training to station discharge, will be prescribed in accordance to program Policies and Procedures.

Documentation of the site visit becomes part of the station file, and is noted in Volunteer Reporter. Project staff and volunteer stations work together to create meaningful job descriptions for RSVP

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volunteers that incorporate RSVP performance measures and community needs. RSVP staff manage volunteer stations and assignments through site visits, as needed phone calls and scheduled and as needed trainings. Documentation of communication is maintained in the Volunteer Reporter software. This on-going communication and collaboration with stations ensures that volunteers are performing their assigned service activities, and both the stations and volunteers are satisfied with their experience. Additionally, SC staff work closely with station and agency staff to coordinate meaningful training and recognition events for RSVP volunteers.

Impact-based programming is required for all ACCA programs, utilizing logic models through a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process. Program and agency outcomes are established annually by administration and program staff. RSVP outputs are reviewed monthly and outcomes are evaluated annually based on established work plans. Progress toward, and achievement of, performance measure outcomes are measured through client surveys which incorporate key questions from the CNCS Independent Living Performance Measure. In addition, project performance is measured through volunteer and station surveys. Program staff meet routinely to ensure progress towards identified outcomes, identify immediate program needs and review monthly reporting with updates on program hours. SC staff work with ACCA administration to review progress related to program budget, in-kind contributions, marketing, and community outreach.

The Advisory Council plays an important role in program assessment and meets bi-monthly to review progress, provide accountability, conduct annual review of the program and offer suggestions for improvement. The results of the RSVP program evaluation are reported in an annual report to the ACCA Board of Directors, administrative staff and local funding sources.

To demonstrate the concrete impacts of the project, this information and data is managed systematically through Volunteer Reporter, ACCA proprietary database, Excel, online software, and hard copies. Volunteer Reporter software keeps track of volunteer demographics and output, station information and MOUs; backup data is available in Excel. Hard copies of data are kept in a secured closet. Surveys are distributed through hard copy, email or online survey software with results collected and compiled in Excel.

### **Organizational Capability**

The Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA) has, throughout its history, coordinated a wide variety of programs and services for older adults and adults with disabilities in Northeast Georgia. ACCA's history of successful program administration and innovative service delivery has made it one of the leading agencies of its type in the Southeast. ACCA has been the primary provider of aging

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services in Northeast Georgia since 1967 and has sponsored CNCS programs since 1973. ACCA is a contracted provider of the NEGA Area Agency on Aging's Home and Community Based services, and provides services reimbursed by Medicaid, private insurance, and individual client fees. The organizational capacity of ACCA to support RSVP is evidenced by sound fiscal management and success in securing and managing a large variety of funding. Funding exists from federal grants such as the Social Services Block Grant, Title V, and the Older Americans Act, as well as local grants, the United Way, and private donations. Total federal revenue from FY2015 was over \$1.5 million. ACCA provides administrative support, financial management, and record keeping to RSVP.

Program and Executive staff are trained on RSVP program requirements, including statutes, regulations and OMB circulars to ensure a clear understanding of program requirements and compliance with the requirements. Additionally, program staff regularly participate in CNCS web-based trainings, subscribe to CNCS newsletters to stay up to date on changes at the national level and prioritize attendance at regional training events.

David Lorren, Senior Corps Program Coordinator, serves as the Project Director and began working with ACCA in March 2015. David holds a B.S. in Recreation and Leisure from the University of Georgia, and has over six years of experience in program management. The SC Program Coordinator is responsible for the daily management of the Senior Corps programs with the support of the Program Specialist, and supervision of the Director of Operations. Emory Griffith, SC Program Specialist, has been with ACCA and the SSC program for 9 years. The Program Specialist provides clerical support to the Coordinator. Erin Beasley, Director of Operations, Strategic Programming and Partnerships, previously served as the Senior Corps Program Coordinator, and now serves as administrative manager of the SC project. This position directs the planning, coordination and implementation of all activities of the project, and is the direct supervisor of the Senior Corps Program Coordinator. Erin holds a B.S.Ed. in Health Promotion and Behavior from The University of Georgia College of Public Health.

Eve Anthony, Vice President/Chief Operating Officer and interim CEO, has been with ACCA since December 2000 and has a Professional Certificate in Gerontology from Kennesaw State. Chief Financial Officer Andrew Neighbors joined ACCA in December 2013. Andrew holds a BBA from The University of Georgia and brings 15 years of management level finance and administration experience. The Executive staff, CEO, COO, and CFO, provide administrative and financial accountability, monitor the program, and assist with the completion of grants and reports. The full-time, permanent CEO position will be filled no later than the start date of this project.

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The Finance department is supported by the Financial Processing Specialist, Stephanie Tiller, and Vickie Long, Financial Reporting Specialist. The Financial Processing Specialist handles accounts payable and procurement duties, while the Financial Reporting Specialist is responsible for processing payroll, grant reporting, and drawdowns. RSVP staff and the ACCA Finance department staff carefully manage project resources through monthly budget reports and quarterly meetings to review the budget and progress toward non-federal match requirements. For additional accountability, budgets are also reviewed monthly by the Executive Staff. In addition, Senior Corps staff work closely with ACCA's Executive staff to explore additional grant opportunities and in-kind resources.

Nita Norris, Personnel Director, has been with ACCA since 2001, and assists with recruiting, orienting, and supporting program staff. Susan Jacobs, Director of Volunteer Services, is a graduate of the University of Georgia and joined ACCA in 2015. In her role, Susan assists program staff with recruitment and recognition efforts. Chad Conner, Director of Marketing, also joined ACCA in 2015 and has over four years of experience with marketing and communications in public health and healthcare organizations. Chad works with program staff in developing marketing and recruitment materials, identifying innovative PR and marketing opportunities, and ensuring RSVP is represented in ACCA's social and print media.

RSVP is supported by a variety of agencies, organizations, and individuals offering in-kind contributions such as space, transportation, recognition, and meals. The program receives cash support from Athens-Clarke County, agency-wide fundraising, and private donations.

The RSVP project is located at the main office building of ACCA. There are computers, printers, phones, locked file cabinets, and storage space. The agency provides administrative, financial, and personnel forms. The Personnel Manager assists with recruiting, orienting, and supporting program staff.

ACCA operates under established Policies and Procedures including personnel; travel, financial, health and safety, and disaster preparedness policies, as well as program specific policies. ACCA's personnel policies require a performance appraisal 6 months after the date of hire and once annually thereafter. These include self and supervisor assessment and are maintained in the employee's permanent file. Any performance requirement deemed unsatisfactory at the performance appraisal must be improved within 6 months.

### **Other**

Not applicable

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**PNS Amendment (if applicable)**

Not applicable