

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The previous grant holder voluntarily relinquished the grant and Public School Partnership (previously Center for the School of the Future) would appreciate this opportunity to support the RSVP program's smooth transition in a community with established relationships and great need. An estimated 150 RSVP volunteers will serve. Of this number, 41 95 RSVP volunteers will be placed in outcome assignments. The remaining RSVP volunteers will be placed in output assignments. The primary focus area of this project is Education. Some of their activities (6 Max) will include reading to and tutoring students, college and career readiness mentoring, providing meals and companionship to seniors. The primary focus area of this project is Education. The secondary focus is Healthy Futures. In this transition year, the grant will support RSVP members visiting with seniors and people with disabilities in order to deliver food and/or visit to reduce isolation. This grant will focus on the following primary outcomes: children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of social and/or emotional development; children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of literacy skills; students in grades K-12 participating in the mentoring or tutoring or other education program, including CNCS-supported service learning, who demonstrated improved academic engagement; students acquiring a GED; students entering post-secondary institutions; students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math. These outcomes correspond the following outcome numbers: ED23, ED24, ED27, ED26, ED10, ED5. This grant will focus on the following secondary outcomes in this transition year: Aging in Place. This outcome corresponds to the following outcome number: H9. If funded for three years, the CNCS federal investment of (Y1) \$51,700 + (Y2) \$51,750 + (Y3) \$51,750 = \$155,250 will be supplemented by (Y1)\$5,175 + (Y2)\$10,350 + (Y3) \$15,525 = \$31,050 in non-federal resources.

## Strengthening Communities

This grant will have two focus areas to provide a transition year from the current Healthy Futures grant focus and this proposed Education focus. With an Education focus, it is important to consider the children at risk for starting Kindergarten or first grade less school ready than their peers as well as the K-12 students at risk of dropping out of school. Utah recently added preschool classrooms to many elementary schools with little financial support for materials or personnel. These classrooms would benefit greatly from RSVP volunteers to read to the children, play with the children in areas to boost the children's social and emotional skills, help find funding for materials, and help train community volunteers so children have more attention and guidance from adults. At the K-12

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schools, the 2014 Utah Superintendent Report showed that Dropout rates for all Utah secondary students (15%) with the highest groups as follows: English learners (35%), American Indian Students (31%), Hispanic/Latino (26%); Economically challenged (24%); and Students with Disabilities (17%).

Student needs are not currently met because financial demands exceed available funding. With newly implemented federal and state curricula and test standardization that has occurred in the past few years, teachers receive professional development to improve classroom instruction for the majority of students in the class. This often leaves the students with special needs behind academically if they do not have specific resources or support such as trained volunteers who can provide supplemental mentoring or tutoring.

A wide range of research-based evidence shows that children who live in poverty do not perform as well as their more economically advantaged peers when all other factors are held constant. According to Ladd (2012), "Study after study has demonstrated that children from disadvantaged households perform less well in school on average than those from more advantaged households." As students fail academically in their early years, they are at greater risk for not completing high school. Research shows that student absenteeism, grade retention, and low academic performance are indicators for dropping out (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Jimmerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002), and that students from low-income families are less likely to complete high school (Bradly & Renzulli, 2011). Furthermore, students who do not complete high school are even more likely to remain in poverty (Gordon, 2010). Thus childhood poverty places students at greater risk for future poverty and perpetuating intergenerational poverty cycles. A study conducted by LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) showed that 82% of all prison inmates are high school dropouts. While national statistics highlighting the relationship between dropout rates and juvenile delinquency are certainly disturbing, the concern is particularly significant in Utah where decreased spending on education and an inflated school-aged population may present a unique challenge for educators. The National Institute of Corrections (2010) reports that Utah spends approximately \$25,000 per inmate annually whereas Davidson and Stewart (2009) reported Utah Schools' yearly per pupil allocation at less than \$5,700. In 2013, Utah continued to rank last in spending per pupil at \$6,193 (Superintendent's Report). It is also important to recognize that Utah has the highest ratio of schoolchildren per 100 people of any state in the union (Shumway, 2009) and the lowest ratio of wage earners to school children (Davidson & Stewart,

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2009). With a high number of children compared to tax-paying wage earners, the trend of low rates for per-pupil spending is likely to continue. For this investment in education and corrections, Utah's crime rate has, since 1995, exceeded the national rate (Thomas, 2008), and in Utah there were nearly 50,000 juvenile court filings in 2009 (Durham & Becker, 2010). In every year since 2007, approximately 6,000 Utah students have dropped out of school (Park, 2010).

Clearly, national trends in juvenile delinquency and educational attainment hold in Utah. Unfortunately, the demographics and funding priorities in Utah necessitate educators and correctional officers do more with less. To adequately address these issues, educators and correctional officers must understand who is at risk for dropping out (Kronick & Hargis, 1998; Morton, 1998) beginning in the primary grades and then build interventions that are designed for both the school climate and individual students who are at risk (Duttweiler, 1995). Schools provide the most efficient and likely environment for this type of identification, intervention, and coordination with the community to occur. Furthermore, schools must invest in efforts to coordinate and sustain intervention efforts with the local community. Without sufficient support from community leaders and parents, the gains made in schools will, ultimately, be left at the school door. To help address these needs we are requesting a total of 150 RSVP members, 41 of whom will work in outcome areas on the proposed project.

Utah's spending on school children is lowest in the nation (Davidson and Stewart, 2009) and there are too few resources to meet the needs of all school children. The school districts served by this project offer the federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program to 20-73% (Utah State Office of Education, 2013) of the student body depending on the specific site, illustrating the lack of resources and high needs in the community. Also, Cache County faces a poverty rate 4-5% higher than the rest of the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The per capita income of Cache County is \$19,670 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and with an average family size of 3.55, this places many families below the poverty line guideline of \$23,850 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Many schools use their School Improvement Plans (SIP) to guide programming as well as request extra funds.

### **Recruitment and Development**

Training will include RSVP-specific quarterly sessions all RSVP volunteers will be encouraged to attend. Training will be coordinated by the PSP program staff who will lead training as well as have guest speakers. Director Rikki Wheatley has a Masters in Special Education with years of training

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adult learners about working with students with different types of special needs including poverty and disabilities. PSP Program Coordinator, Krista Gurko, has a Masters in Special Education and years of teaching and training adults to work with students experiencing trauma and keeping a life-span development approach for all learners. Wheatley and Gurko have created and lead training sessions for adults in the areas of poverty, school relationships, student learning, and more.

Training topics will include those that will help prepare volunteers for working with struggling students including: best practices child development, working with children and families of diverse backgrounds, navigating school administration, school community councils, supporting students in College and Career Readiness, and working with students who have a variety of characteristics such as disabilities, limited English proficiency, or being a member of an ethnic or racial group shown by research to struggle with school completion. Additionally, PSP is part of the larger National Service group at Utah State University called Center for Civic Engagement and Service Learning -- training is often shared between these groups and RSVP would be invited to attend these opportunities. These trainings often include topics such as donation gathering and volunteer management. RSVP volunteers will also be notified of community training opportunities such as those offered by the Cache Interagency Council.

The community served includes two rural districts in Utah. Recruiting RSVP volunteers followed by training and recognizing them will be crucial to the success of this grant over all three years. In the first year, working with the current grant holder to determine recruitment methods that worked will be an important start. This will help ensure that current RSVP members have the option to choose their stations from a mix of old and new station options. Volunteers who want to transition from Healthy Futures focused stations to Education focused stations will be offered training to help them be successful. Recruitment will consist of flyers in the community including veterans services and senior centers, working with collaborating organizations to invite their patrons to volunteer, radio advertising, online advertising, and word of mouth. There will be a diverse set of needs at the stations leading to opportunities for RSVP volunteers with a wide range of personal and professional experience. These will include volunteers who identify as a member of one more minority groups in terms of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and English language learners.

Recognizing RSVP volunteers will be done officially at an annual banquet where all RSVP volunteers

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will be celebrated through a program of events and provided a nice meal. They will be provided with appreciation gifts. Additionally, RSVP volunteer accomplishments will be shared with community members and each other through outreach materials such as a website or quarterly newsletter. We will aim to retain RSVP volunteers by providing consistent meetings to support them and get feedback about their experience at their stations and if they are receiving the information they would like to have.

### **Program Management**

Overall management of the RSVP project will consist of clear descriptions of expectations and goals for the volunteers as well as training to help them be successful. An addition to reviewing CNCS and RSVP Handbooks, having a project Handbook of Volunteer Expectations and Responsibilities for Public School Partnership' RSVP project will provide an overview of the plan and how important the volunteers are in making sure partnerships with the volunteer stations are successful. With a contract between the RSVP volunteers and the program staff, it will be clearly shown that there are expectations that will be important for volunteers to abide by if they expect to continue at their stations and as a part of the team that has access to project benefits. If they do not abide by the expectations, they will have a clearly defined system of penalties including warnings, suspensions, and termination.

Volunteer stations will be approached with a full disclosure of what the RSVP program offers and a contractual Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will clearly list the responsibilities of the PSP RSVP project, the Volunteer Station supervisor, and the RSVP volunteer. Site visits with the supervisors and with the volunteers will be crucial to ensuring the relationship is going well and has the support needed from the PSP RSVP staff.

There is an excellent track record of creating and maintaining CNCS requirements that the Director has shown for over 10 years and the Project Coordinator has shown for 1.5 years. Although it's a different program, there are similar expectations that have been successfully met on another grant project: the AmeriCorps\*VISTA Public School Partnership at Utah State University. It has been a successful participant in the AmeriCorps\*VISTA program for over 14 years and has supported approximately 175 VISTA member service years in that time. In addition, we have successfully managed an AmeriCorps\*VISTA Operational grant for eight years. To complement the work of the AmeriCorps\* VISTA project, we have participated in a variety of federally and locally funded school

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and community improvement and research-based projects. All VISTA members have been coached to identify and complete activities that align with Performance Measures supporting K-12 readiness. All VISTA members have successfully completed these, often far exceeding expectations and greatly benefiting the schools they serve at as well as their own professional development. These have been managed monthly and reported quarterly as per CNCS expectations.

### Organizational Capability

Working within the Utah State University system, Public School Partnership has excellent infrastructure for providing fiscal oversight and the day to day operational support for meeting RSVP grant requirements. Evidence of the dollar value of funds managed can be found on the USU website by visiting the following link: <http://controllers.usu.edu/htm/annual-reports> . USU also undergoes an annual audit process the results of this process are publicly available and can be found here: <http://controllers.usu.edu/htm/single-audit-reports> . USU also has a very large policies and procedures process that ensure accountability for funds as well as activities and employee timekeeping. Examples of these procedures can be found here: <http://controllers.usu.edu/htm/forms-policies-procedures>. These include procedures for accounting, personnel management, and purchasing procedures. Utah State University also manages facilities. Years of successfully working with the CNCS AmeriCorps VISTA grant process indicates similar procedures. Staff positions will include a Director, part time operational staff, and a consulting position to guide the project. Director will: provide oversight to all aspects of the programs, including planning and development, budget, staff and volunteer recruitment and training, program promotion, and data management. See budget narrative for more information on these as well as cost per volunteer and non-federal share procurement.

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### Other

No other sections to enter at this time.

### PNS Amendment (if applicable)

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No PNS Amendment at this time.