

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1940 as a private, non-profit corporation with the mission of putting Stuttgart on the map. In its more than 70 years as an advocate of area business, the Chamber has established Stuttgart as an economic leader in southeast Arkansas. You could say the Chamber works on those issues that affect the "quality of life" in our community with volunteers being a critical piece in our community.

An estimated 286 RSVP volunteers will serve. The CNCS federal investment of \$38, 749.00 will be supplemented by \$40,116.

Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP will serve Stuttgart and Arkansas County in all Service Categories with the majority of volunteers serving in Health Futures, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Veterans, and Military families. RSVP volunteers will address needs related to Veterans, at-risk seniors and children, reinforcing social behavior, health and nutrition, administrative and clerical support for non-profits, and other community needs. The primary focus area of this project is Healthy Futures. The U S Department of Agriculture annual report released on September 5, 2013, ranked Arkansas first in low food security and with the federal nutrition program not reaching all food-insecure people. This shows the important role of charitable hunger relief programs in Arkansas County.

The mission of Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP is to engage volunteers over 55 years of age to lend their time and expertise in service to non-profits and organizations to strengthen the well-being of both self and community. We know now more than ever, volunteers, especially baby-boomers feel their time is precious. By offering unique experiences with additional flexibility we can make a difference by touching lives and lifting spirits.

## Strengthening Communities

Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP primarily serves the City of Stuttgart and surrounding communities located in Arkansas County with our primary focus on strengthening the community which affects the quality of life in our community. The vast majority of volunteer services is done in Stuttgart, where the RSVP office is located on the campus of the Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas.

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The population of Stuttgart is 9,277 making up approximately 49% of Arkansas County's total population (18,777). Arkansas County is the oldest county in Arkansas, and has a rich history behind it with the oldest records written in Spanish and dating back to 1796. The service area, Arkansas Delta Byways, is rural, with miles and miles of farmland separating neighboring homes as well as communities. Arkansas County has a land area of 988 square miles, making it one of the largest counties in the state. The large land area requires the county to have two county seats, Stuttgart and DeWitt.

The county is located in eastern Arkansas in a rural area typically known as the "Mississippi Delta", a region of high poverty, an undereducated workforce, and a generational history of single parent families. In our county there is no public transportation system such as cab service for our seniors, veterans or young mothers. The challenges of accessing the health care system for some of our veterans and seniors living in rural Arkansas go beyond having to wait months to land an appointment, several miles often lie between doctor's offices requiring endless hours of commute time. It is worse for those who can't drive themselves. RSVP volunteers well provide such assistance so the veterans and the elderly can remain in their homes providing them with a better quality of life.

The community consists of people form diverse backgrounds with 58.7% of the residents categorized as white, 36.5% as African American, and 3.5% Hispanic. The remaining 1.3% is distributed among races. More than 455,743 seniors over the age of 65 live in Arkansas with 1,442(15.6%) living in Arkansas County according to the US Census Bureau. The community lack of enough resources to help frail seniors find affordable transportation, food and information which in turn helps alleviate loneliness. RSVP volunteers well provide such assistance to help the elderly and disable remain in their homes with quality of life.

In 2013 the estimated income was \$39,883 for Arkansas County with 3,192 (17%) persons living below poverty level. Households that fall into the "low food security" category had more severe problems, experiencing "deeper hunger and cutting back or skipping meals on a more frequent basis with both adults and children." Majority of households experience food insecurity at times during the year, meaning that their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. According to a USDA September 2013 report , households with children headed by single parents with income near below the federal poverty line are in the more severe range for food insecurity. According

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to 2010 Census, 19.2% of adults have not completed high school. Children living in rural counties often enter kindergarten without basic numeric and language skills as well as social and emotional skills putting them behind their peers.

The RSVP program is well established and a long-term partner within the community. Senior volunteers are the preferred providers of services to area non-profit organizations and government agencies. We know that, now more than ever, volunteers, especially baby-boomers, feel their time is precious. Volunteers are encouraged to participate in community outreach programs such as fundraising, recruitment, speaking at local organizations, and educating each other in regards to the special needs of the military and the community. Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP seeks to find ways to more effectively prepare this vital "resource" to serve the needs of the people of the communities through its partnership with over 20 different agencies. Leaders will develop a strategic approach to managing volunteers, and appropriate training that expands our vision by creating a volunteer experience that is a challenging, transformative experience that gives an in-depth understanding of challenges facing our community members and their families. Community partners such as American Legion, State of Arkansas Veteran Service Office, Ministerial Alliance, Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Department of Emergency Management, local school boards and other groups will help fund, assist and provide moral and physical support to our community and provide volunteer opportunities in food banks, transportation for veterans, recycling centers, tutoring, volunteer reception centers, and a lot more .

Healthy Futures being the primary focus area, 100 RSVP Volunteers envision our county as a place where everyone has all resources necessary to achieve maximum wellness. The Economic Research service of the U S Department of Agriculture annual report released on September 5, 2013, ranked Arkansas first in low food security. According to local telephone survey provided by Baptist Health, the top three health concerns for local residents are smoking, diabetes, and obesity. In an effort to meet the community health concern, 100 unduplicated RSVP volunteers with the help of local community action groups and agencies will join to explore ways to combine resources to feed and educate the low-income and senior families in need of emergency food assistances and with the help of the Department of Health who will complete clients assessment forms. The clients will complete the food insecurity survey on the bottom of the DHS form. The client brings completed DHS forms with survey questions answered to local food banks where volunteers complete in-take forms with name, address,

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number in household, income and sign-off on completed DHS forms. Clients receive emergency food and personal hygiene's products. Volunteers complete activity log and sign-off on forms. RSVP volunteers enter information from completed forms to food bank clients and volunteers activity spreadsheet. Community action groups meet on a quarterly basis to address the outcome from the data collected and if services need improvement to best meet the clients needs. Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP will provide leadership in local coalitions working on implementing solutions that improve the health of the community while taking on ownership of health problems. Working with local coalitions, volunteers will provide educational program and community outreach programs focusing on food security, health promotion and disease prevention events such as but not limited to Health Expo, local food drives, Stuttgart Employee Health Fair, Back-2-School Extravaganza, etc. This raises awareness of the importance of good nutrition and general overall health quality.

The Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce was honored with the 2010 Festival of the Year award by the Arkansas Festivals and Events Association. The first duck calling contest was held in November of 1936 and has grown to an annual attendance of over 60,000 raising over \$450,000 annually for the Chamber while generating over \$1 million a day in local business during the week of the Festival. In Addition to the World Championship Duck Calling Contest, there is a Duck Gumbo Cook-Off, a carnival midway, an arts and crafts display and commercial exhibits and collectibles. Over 120 volunteers help make this week-long festival a success that provides 90% of the Stuttgart Chambers annual budget. This is just one example that shows how important volunteerism is to the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce, making their sponsorship of the RSVP program a perfect fit.

All volunteer data will be maintained using the Volunteer Reporter software. New RSVP volunteers complete an application which provides name, address, date of birth, military service and their skills and hobbies with staff verifying their identification. A primary placement will be chosen for each member so that 72 unduplicated numbers of volunteers may be indicated. Volunteer stations are monitored annually to insure MOU compliance and unique and high quality opportunities for the volunteers. RSVP staff will provide each volunteer station with customized times sheets in order to facilitate their collection and reporting of volunteer hours for 286 RSVP members. Volunteer hours will be collected by the partner volunteer stations and reported for each volunteer on a monthly basis. Data will be entered by the RSVP staff using the volunteer reporter software. Questionnaires will be mailed on an annual bases to RSVP volunteers and work station managers to evaluate job

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assignments and performances. Outcome from the survey will be reported to Advisory Council and Stuttgart Chamber Board at the yearly programs of works review.

The Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP program is well documented by the community through the local newspaper, radio station, Stuttgart Chamber newsletter, local college newsletter and the RSVP newsletter. RSVP Volunteers will serve in an advisory capacity for organizations, or committees that promote services that meet community needs and build public awareness. The Advisory Council members are chosen from political, educational, senior citizens, and active community members. Members provide input into our program from various views and diversity, while monitoring progress to ensure local input into programs designed to provide yearly evaluation to the Chamber Board. RSVP will continue to provide volunteer resources and advertising campaigns to reach new organizations and new volunteer opportunities in the Stuttgart community. Several of our RSVP volunteers have been honored with the Citizen of The Year award. This award recognizes the efforts and contributions to the quality of life in Stuttgart. RSVP enhances the capacity of organizations and institutions in our community providing help and support that allows organizations to keep their doors open while bridging the gap both economically and overall diversity.

Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP program is well established in Arkansas County and is a long-term partner with over 22 organizations within the community. With our new focus areas, RSVP will be assessing the community needs to form new workstations such as Department of Workforce, Food Bank, Religious organization, etc. to meet the new performance measures. RSVP Volunteers enhance the capacity of organizations and institutions in our community providing help and support that allows an organization to keep their doors open while bridging the gap both economically and overall diversity.

### **Recruitment and Development**

For more than forty years, Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP has overseen the development of programs which provide unique and high quality volunteer opportunities. Partnerships have been developed with volunteer stations that provide opportunities for members to learn new skill while developing leadership potential. Staff works with each volunteer who has a desire to learn new skills while making a positive contribution to the community with opportunities to enhance leadership skills and broaden the senior volunteer experience. Volunteer stations are required to be handicapped accessible, so handicapped individuals can volunteer or participate in activities at volunteers stations

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and community events. The volunteers are Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP's most valuable asset, making volunteer recruitment, retention and recognition a top priority.

There are many identifying aspects of diversity not always related to race or ethnicity. Diversity within age groups can enhance civic engagement if we utilize the respective talents of each individual and groups. New volunteers are most often recruited by existing volunteers who have shared their experiences and inspired others to serve. It's Our Turn is a new volunteers program working to meet the critical needs of the local veterans. This approach includes appropriate training that expands the volunteers' vision by creating a volunteer experience that is a challenging experience that gives an in-depth understanding of military service members and their families. From providing transportation to helping fill out benefit forms, we focus on veterans, seniors, and persons with disabilities. We hope to bridge gaps of veterans and persons with disabilities in our community and provide them with volunteers. Together we can make a difference by touching lives and lifting the spirits of those who served in our military and their families.

One area that appeals to baby boomer volunteers is enabling them to reinvest in their communities and in themselves with instant gratification. While working the program, we hope to recruit these volunteers by providing them with the opportunity to give back to the community and have the flexibility and knowledge to work with short term assignments. Research indicates that baby boomers are seeking new opportunities that offer unique experiences, challenging positions and flexibly. Recruitment strategies to be used include the following : keeping a high profile in the media, partnering with American Legion, Ministerial Alliance, American Legion Auxiliary, Arkansas Department of Health, State of Arkansas Veteran Service Office, and other groups networking with local community groups.

Once recruited, each volunteer completes a volunteer survey in which they indicate their hobbies and interests and the best times and days for them to participate in volunteer activities. Orientation is conducted for all new volunteers. We have developed a handbook for volunteers containing volunteer stations, job descriptions, volunteer guidelines, information on volunteer insurance and time sheets. The project director meets with each new volunteer to discuss work stations that might be of interest to them. After selecting the capacity in which they want to serve, the director and work station manager meet with the volunteer to discuss their job skills and requirements.

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Strategies for retention include these: orientation for all new members, follow-up with volunteers after recruitment, reviewing hours reported monthly to identify volunteers that are not reporting and make personal contact, local newspaper articles on Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP and their volunteers. Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP Facebook page and newsletters stimulate interest in upcoming events and volunteer opportunities. Open, two-way communication is the key to retaining our volunteers.

Volunteers are encouraged to attend education training offered at the local college and the extension service. The college offers free computer classes for anyone and volunteers are encourage to attend. The American Red Cross offers training for volunteers in CPR and first aid classes . Most of the volunteer assignments are currently on-the-job training positions provided by partnering agencies, Arkansas Department of Human Services, Office of Emergency Management, Arkansas Department of Health Services, Arkansas Veterans service, VA Volunteer Service Program Manager Salvation Army, Arkansas Division of Volunteerism etc. are just some of the agencies. RSVP makes use of local coalitions to meet the training needs of most volunteer assignments with one-on-one orientation by station supervisors with group training provided by partnerships and the RSVP staff. RSVP staff attends all training as required by CNCS and participates in other professional development opportunities.

We recognize the outstanding contribution the volunteers make in our community and on the Grand Prairie by hosting six events throughout the year. Volunteers receive recognition during the annual Stuttgart Chamber Banquet, National Volunteer Week, Senior Corp Week, Mayor's Day, and Veterans Day Celebration and are treated to a holiday potluck complete with food, fun, and fellowship during December. One of the highest honors an RSVP volunteer can receive is being crowned the RSVP Ambassador, who is selected by their peers and the RSVP Advisory Council. One of the first duties of the RSVP Ambassador is to ride in the annual Christmas Parade.

### **Program Management**

As an active participant in community development, and virtually the only volunteer organization with a large number of volunteers readily available to assist, Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP is sought out by organizations needing volunteers. The project director works with volunteers to determine which projects will be of interest and provide meaningful volunteer opportunities. All

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volunteer stations are in compliance with our Memorandum of Understanding with annual site visit from staff. Questionnaires are mailed on an annual basis to RSVP volunteers and work station managers to evaluate job assignments and performances for impact statements.

The project director reports to the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors on a monthly basis, providing them a programmatic and financial report. Through the use of Volunteer Reporter which tracks volunteers' information and hours of service, performance data, volunteer stations and mailing database. The local college provides RSVP with work-study students each year who work directly with the project director in managing the data entry on tracking volunteers and volunteer stations making sure volunteers are placed in stations that have signed MOU's and ensuring all volunteers are eligible to serve in RSVP. If disruption of volunteer services or if the advisory council feels the need to graduate the workstation, first it's verbal communication followed up with a written letter of notification and the volunteers are contacted by the director. Each volunteer is visited by the director and reassigned to a new wok station. All files of supporting documentation are maintained at the RSVP office with procedures reviewed annually while ensuring all programs are in compliance of federal regulations. Software is updated as revisions become available. Board of Directors will conduct an annual evaluation of the RSVP program and staff, assuring that goals and objectives are being met and that a significant impact is being made on the community. The project director is responsible for managing information and data for the programs. This task is made easier by utilizing computer software. A file of supporting documentation is maintained as well. Software is updated as revisions become available and staff is competent in their uses.

Financial management is accomplished with the support of the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce which will provide financial oversight as validated by yearly audits. The program director and executive vice- president of the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce oversee a budget that uses available resources as well as in-kind contributions and donations, providing a workable system of checks-and-balances. A bookkeeper, provided by the sponsoring agency, performs the day-to-day financial duties, with the executive vice-president of the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce signing checks. The bookkeeper and Project Director keep accurate records and supporting documentation. All expense vouchers are signed off by the Program Director and the Executive Vice-President of the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce. Systems are in place to provide accountability for all funds by keeping all Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP monies in a separate banking account and the director provides a monthly financial report to the Chamber Board.



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In the fall of 2011, Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP had a large in-kind donation of an office suite at the local college free of charge. The college pays all utilities while providing computer technical support and free internet service. RSVP program has use of the Phillips County College of the University of Arkansas and the Grand Prairie Center. Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP receives funding from state and local governments. The state funding was increased to \$7,365.00 in 2013. The City of Stuttgart contributes \$10,000 each year and Arkansas County makes a contribution in the amount of \$1000. The Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce provides local fundraising and local civic clubs make financial contributions as well.

### **Organizational Capability**

The Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce has been the sponsoring agency for Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP since 1973. The role of the board of directors and the executive vice-president of the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce are clearly defined and correspond with that of the key Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP staff positions, as they both work to ensure the continuous improvement of the project for the benefit of volunteers as well as the community as a whole. Sponsorship support includes financial support to meet the sponsor match, providing a Finance Manager, an annual evaluation of the Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP Program Director, issuing checks for expenses, and technology assistance. Program performance is assessed through surveys and combined into a program evaluation by the Advisory Council and results are shared with the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce Board. Memoranda are signed, filed with each station, and updated in Volunteer Reporter ever (3) years and station visited by director via telephone or in person quarterly. Volunteer Reporter has easy access to volunteer information and job descriptions with a database for assignment and record keeping. Impact Statements are filed under each volunteer station and enable the staff to develop and manage volunteer assignments that address specific community needs. Resources, both financial and

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in-kind, are kept on record by the director. The bookkeeper uses quicken an accounting software to track and pay invoices with the executive vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce signing-off on the original vouchers (in-kind or bills) to manage the monetary portion. The Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP Director reports monthly to the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors with Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP Highlights of Events and provides a monthly, as well as year-to-date, financial report with bank reconciliation from previous month banking transactions.

The project director is the only full-time position and the person primarily responsible for overseeing the program with over 10 years of experience managing grants. The director received certification as a Certified Grant Specialist from the National Grant Writers Association which has provided a detailed overview of grant administration as well as grant research and development. Having completed the required criteria, The director is hereby recognized as a Leadership Stuttgart graduate from Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas. Stuttgart North Arkansas County RSVP has three part-time staff with the support of the local college. The administrative assistant has been with RSVP over 6 years and works directly with the volunteers and the volunteer stations providing services while reinvesting in the community. The local college provides RSVP with work-study students each year who work directly with the project director in managing the data entry on tracking volunteers and volunteer stations making sure volunteers are placed in stations that have signed MOU's and ensuring all volunteers are eligible to serve in RSVP.

The Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP has an excellent track record of successfully managing over 286 volunteers with 22 volunteer stations. The organization has worked with seniors for more than forty years and has clearly demonstrated an ability to carry out impact-based programming and manage federal and state grants. In addition, this organization has adequate facilities, equipment, supplies, purchasing procedures, as well as personnel management support and policies. With the acquisition of Stuttgart Arkansas County RSVP new office, we expanded volunteer educational training and host short term volunteer projects. Systems for self assessment, evaluation, and continuous improvement are in place with annual review from the sponsor and volunteer surveys. Results of the evaluation and surveys will be reviewed by the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and recommendations or changes are reflected in the yearly program of work.

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### **Other**

n/a

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

n/a