



# AMERICORPS VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Craft Station & PLARN

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## Welcome to the Americorps RSVP Program!!

The Americorps RSVP Program is a federally funded grant that exist under the Corporation for National and Community Service umbrella. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program pairs thousands of Americans aged 55 and older with organizations making change in communities across the country.

This RSVP program that you are a part of works in conjunction with the Sowega Council on Aging in an ongoing effort to address a variety of needs across a 14-county service area which include Baker, Worth, Calhoun, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Mitchell, Miller, Seminole, Terrell, and Thomas.

It is only with the help of our volunteers that we can get everything done!! What you do MATTERS and as a volunteer, part of your responsibility is to communicate your accomplishments. This information is then compiled and reported back to the Americorps Portfolio Managers at the state level to demonstrate the impact that our volunteers are having at the local level. Included in this packet will be a reporting document, instructions on how and when to submit your activities, and how to request supplies or anything else that you might need to facilitate your volunteer activities.

Thank you again for choosing the Americorps RSVP Program. Together, we can all make a difference.

Sincerely,

Sarah Bass  
Americorps RSVP Program Coordinator

## VOLUNTEER MANUAL

### RSVP

#### Lead with Experience

Every community in America faces the challenge of providing services where funds are limited. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is vital to meeting our local needs by providing an experienced volunteer workforce.

The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) offers individuals 55 years of age and older ways to give back to their community through hands-on involvement. Volunteer opportunities include helping older adults and individuals with disabilities in a variety of service.

The Americorps RSVP Program refers to the areas of service within a project as stations. Currently the Council on Aging has 7 areas of service that volunteers are eligible to work in. These consist of:

1. Craft Station
2. Telephone Reassurance Station
3. Wellness Station
4. Nursing Home Station
5. Ramp Building Station
6. Transportation Station
7. AARP Tax Aide Station

## ABOUT RETIRED SENIOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

RSVP gives adults over the age of 55 opportunities to make a meaningful difference in the lives of older adults and people with disabilities who want to remain independent and healthy. In the process, RSVP volunteers will help create sustainable, lifelong communities.

As a RSVP member, you will meet many others like yourself, people who care about their communities and who want to share their time, talents, and experience with others. Through RSVP, you will discover ways that your age and life experiences can help to build stronger communities. You have the opportunity to serve and get involved.

In return for your time and energy as a RSVP volunteer, you will make new friends, learn new skills, continue to be a vital part of your community, and be recognized for your efforts. We believe that being a RSVP volunteer will enrich your life and the lives of those around you.

Both RSVP and the volunteer station where you volunteer share the responsibility of providing policies and procedures that will make your volunteer experience a positive and enjoyable one. This handbook will address basic questions or concerns you may have as an enrolled RSVP volunteer. We welcome ideas and suggestions about improving our program, so please give us your comments and feedback.

RSVP was established in 1971 and is now one of the largest senior volunteer organizations in the nation, engaging more than 400,000 people aged 55 and older in a diverse range of volunteer activities. RSVP is one of the three branches of AmeriCorps which is a part of the Corporation for National and Community Service. The other branches include Foster Grandparents Programs, Senior Companion Programs, and the Vista Program.

RSVP volunteers choose how, where, and how often they want to serve. Many contribute a few hours a week; others 40 hours. It's all up to you. RSVP works with each volunteer to match the individual's interests and abilities with available opportunities in the community. Studies show that continued activity and civic engagement throughout the life span affects health in a positive way. RSVP enriches lives of older adults by offering opportunities to learn new skills and remain active while addressing critical needs of other older adults and those with disabilities.

## **BENEFITS OF BEING A RSVP VOLUNTEER**

- Satisfaction of knowing you are making a difference by sharing your, knowledge, wisdom, and experience with others
- Helping others live healthy and independent lifestyles
- Opportunity to use your skills, share your experience and met new people
- Better physical and mental health as you age
- Training
- Sense of accomplishment in remaining an active and vital part of the community
- Annual recognition for your volunteer contributions

## **FUNDING**

The corporation for National and Community funds RSVP programs through grants to local communities. The Sowega Council on Aging is the proud sponsor of the RSVP/Albany program.

A full-time RSVP project director recruits volunteers, identifies opportunities for service and works to ensure that both the volunteer and the individual or volunteer station receiving service have a positive experience. An active advisory council guides and evaluates the program. Serving on the council are volunteers, professionals in the field of aging and community representatives.

## **HISTORY OF THE SCOA**

The Sowega Council on Aging (SCOA) was established in 1966 to meet the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of an ever-increasing number of older people in the fourteen-county service area.

One of the SCOA's oldest programs, the RSVP program, was established in 1973. RSVP was established as a result of Federal Funding Appropriations by Congress to the ACTION program, which facilitated the COAs initial successful application for funding.

## **VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS**

RSVP volunteers must be 55 years of age or older, be willing to serve on a regular basis without compensation and reside in or near the community served by RSVP. RSVP volunteers must also be willing to accept instruction and supervision as required. To be eligible for RSVP benefits, such as recognition, volunteers must fill out a registration form. Once enrolled, volunteers receive an orientation to the program and an information packet that includes the RSVP handbook and current volunteer opportunities. All volunteers log and submit their hours to program staff. Volunteers are responsible for updating their enrollment records if pertinent information changes. RSVP does not discriminate on the basis of race; color; national origin, including limited English proficiency; sex; age; religion; political affiliation; or on the basis of disability if the volunteer with a disability is otherwise qualified to serve.

## VOLUNTEERS WITH DISABILITIES

Every effort is made to develop volunteer assignments and environments that will be accessible to the persons with diverse physical disabilities. The SCOA/RSVP volunteer program complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. No person shall be denied employment, excluded from participation in, be denied benefits, or otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity on the grounds of race, color, creed, belief or religion, sex, national origin, mental or physical handicap, political affiliation, veterans' status, or past participation in the discrimination complaint process.

## VOLUNTEER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

<b><i>The right to:</i></b>	<b>The responsibility to:</b>
Be treated with respect.	Adhere to volunteer stations' policies.
A meaningful assignment.	Alert volunteer station's volunteer coordinator or RSVP director when you are unsatisfied with your assignment.
Effective training and directions.	Ask questions.
Predefined schedule.	Contact the volunteer station if you must be absent.
Grievance without threat or retribution.	Speak up when things are not right.

<p>Be heard as a volunteer station team member.</p> <p>Be recognized for your effort.</p> <p>A safe and professional atmosphere in which to work.</p> <p>Change or terminate your volunteer assignment.</p>	<p>Speak out in a constructive and effective manner.</p> <p>Report all hours and activities.</p> <p>Report safety hazards and unprofessional behavior in a professional manner.</p> <p>Be honest and speak up when your needs or your ability to volunteer changes.</p>
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## **ORIENTATION**

Orientation is an effective screening mechanism, since it is here that some volunteers realize the situation is not what he or she thought it would be.

Our program uses one to two hours for orientation.

### **The format for the RSVP orientation process:**

- Welcome and introductions and filling out all forms to be eligible for the program.
- Overview of the program (services provided, etc.).
- Goals as they relate to the use of volunteer services.
- Outline of volunteer opportunities available within the department or agency.
- Importance of the volunteer agency.
- Explanation (or tour) of facilities.
- An outline of policies and regulations which are considered important to both staff and volunteers.
- Handicap Accessibility policy.

## VOLUNTEER TIME

RSVP volunteers play a key role in the growth and development of the program. RSVP volunteers' hours are essential to the program receiving continues funding. In order to continue the success of Sowega Council on Aging/RSVP, it is most important that volunteers record every hour of volunteer service they perform for the RSVP program.

Volunteers must follow the procedure below:

- Active volunteers must complete monthly time sheets submitted by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month if they do not scan into the My Senior Center located at the kiosk inside the Senior Life Enrichment Center at 335 W Society, Albany, GA 31701.
- Hours may be submitted by fax, mail or email to [sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org](mailto:sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org). When submitting your hours, please be sure that your time sheet is signed. Additional time sheets may be obtained by contacting the RSVP office at:

SCOA

335 West Society Avenue

Albany, Georgia 31701

(229) 432-1124 or (229) 854-1706

or by email to [sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org](mailto:sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org).

The RSVP director maintains this data throughout the year and uses yearly totals for reports to state office. Timesheet forms can vary from station to station-some prefer to design their own forms. Forms are checked and approved by RSVP Director.

## **CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR VOLUNTEERS**

Under Serve America Act (SAA), all volunteer sites and/or grantees must conduct National Service Criminal History checks on participants and program employees in AmeriCorps, Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, Retired and Senior Volunteer Program as well as any other programs funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) under National Service laws.

Beginning April 21, 2011, the law required that programs conduct three-part checks including FBI, statewide repository and sex offender registry checks on individuals who will have recurring contact with vulnerable populations.

In order to ensure the safety and well-being of the clients, RSVP reserves the right to disqualify or restrict the duties of any person who has been convicted of certain crimes or whom RSVP, in its sole discretion and based upon information before it, otherwise deems not qualifies to hold a volunteer position.

ALL prospective volunteers must complete and sign the Volunteer Background Check Consent Form to release information authorizing the RSVP sponsor organization or its agent to conduct a criminal history search or to conduct any other search RSVP deems appropriate for the volunteer opportunity being considered in some situations. Without a completed and signed consent form, a person cannot serve in or be appointed to a volunteer position with RSVP.

Effective January 1st, 2023, all volunteers who consented to a background check upon enrollment of the program will be required to have an updated background check every three years.

## FITTING IN AT YOUR VOLUNTEER STATION

Knowledge is power. And in serving as an RSVP volunteer, knowledge will help to ensure that you are an important part of the team at your volunteer station. Do not be shy...ask questions.

Below is a list of “things” you will want to know about your volunteer station:

- Know your supervisor at the volunteer station. This is the individual who will answer your questions, supply you with the resources you need and address any concerns you may have.
- Know what policies and procedures you, as a volunteer, are required to follow (i.e., attendance, dress code, etc.).
- Know the type of clients the organization serves and the characteristics of the clients with who you will be working.
- Know and understand the mission or purpose of the volunteer station.
- Know and understand what your role is at the volunteer station. Know what change you are working to create or the problem you are working to address.

Learn the little things...location of restrooms, coat racks, workspace, parking, the lounge or lunch area and know the check-in procedure for your volunteer station.

## HIPPA GUIDELINES AS IT RELATES TO CONFIDENTIALITY

RSVP volunteers agree to keep all information regarding the agency they serve, their clients and staff in the strictest confidence. This includes written or verbal information. No pertinent agency information that you obtain as a volunteer may be disclosed through verbal or written communication with anyone.

A breach of confidentiality may consist of:

- Talking about a client by name with family or friends.
- Talking about a client in an inappropriate place.
- Talking about a client to his or her family members in an inappropriate place
- Telling an inappropriate person, the names of clients.

## CONDUCT

When volunteering, RSVP volunteers must be in accordance with the volunteer station's guidelines for staff and/or volunteer staff. This includes requirements for training, attendance, dress code or any other guidelines established by the volunteer station. Any concerns regarding the volunteer station should be addressed first with the volunteer station supervisor. If concerns are not resolved, please contact the RSVP Director. RSVP volunteers are subject to volunteer station policies regarding absenteeism and severe weather.

## **HANDICAPP ACCESSIBILITY**

Each volunteer station is required to fill out a Handicap Accessibility Self-Evaluation Certification. This will be updated every three years to ensure that Volunteer Stations are complying with federal regulations. Handicap Accessibility includes Building and Site Accessibility and Programmatic Accessibility.

### **Building and Site Accessibility Includes:**

- Accessible route
- Parking
- Ramps
- Entrance and interior doors
- Elevators
- Stairs and lifts
- Restrooms
- Drinking fountains
- Hazardous areas and warning signals
- Assembly, meeting, and conference areas
- Public telephones
- Picnic areas
- Exhibits, signs, and information displays
- Seating, tables, and work areas
- Other building elements and specialized features

### **Programmatic Accessibility Includes:**

- Policies and procedures that limit the participation of individuals with handicaps in the organization's programs and activities
- Information and training for staff
- Use of contractors
- Transportation
- Telephone communications
- Documents and publications
- Meetings

Breaching the code of confidentiality, as set forth by Sowega Council of Aging's RSVP, will result in the termination of all volunteer assignments.



## **SAFETY AND SAFE PRACTICES**

RSVP volunteers, at all times, must be appropriate for the roles they perform, in order to complete their job safely. Should medical, physical, or other conditions change, at any time, it is the duty of the RSVP volunteer to inform the RSVP Director so the appropriate changes may be made with regards to volunteer activities.

The use of illegal drugs or alcohol or being under the influence of the same, while performing hours of service is prohibited and shall be cause for termination of the volunteer placements through Sowega Council on Aging/RSVP.

## **VOLUNTEER SEPARATION**

Volunteers who do not report at least one hundred hours of service a year become inactive as an RSVP volunteer. Volunteers who become inactive will be withdrawn from all RSVP roles, in accordance with the program policy on volunteer separation. Inactive volunteers may be re-enrolled in the program by contacting the RSVP Director for placement. Volunteers may terminate their volunteer assignment at any time by notifying the RSVP Director. The RSVP staff will assist the volunteer in locating an alternative volunteer placement when requested.

The RSVP Director of an RSVP volunteer station may separate an RSVP volunteer for cause, including, but not limited to, excessive or unauthorized absences, misconduct, a breach of confidentiality or an ability to perform assignments or accept supervision. All decisions regarding separation will be discussed and agreed upon by the RSVP Director and the RSVP volunteer station supervisor.

### **PLEASE NOTIFY US IF:**

- You change your address or telephone number.
- You wish to change your emergency contact person.
- You wish to change your assignment, add an extra assignment, or have a problem at your current assignment.
- You will be unable to volunteer for a while and wish to be placed on the inactive list
- You are involved in any accidents connected with your assignment.

## **GRIEVANCE FOLLOWING DISCIPLINARY ACTION**

If a volunteer feels that he or she has been disciplined or dismissed without just cause, a grievance may be filed according to the following procedure:

**Informal Grievance:** A volunteer should appeal to the Project Coordinator within three working days after an action he or she feels is unjust.

If no agreement is reached within two working days, the volunteer may then contact the Project Director, who will schedule a conference within five working days. If the volunteer and Project Director cannot reach an agreement, the Project Director will refer the volunteer to the sponsoring agency's Executive Director.

**Formal Grievance:** To file a formal grievance, a volunteer must contact the sponsoring agency's Executive Director within five working days of his or her meeting with the Project Director. The Executive will meet with the volunteer to hear the volunteer's grievance and will forward a recommendation to the Advisory Committee of the Board of Directors.

The Executive Director will consider the volunteer's testimony, the staff's statement, the Project Coordinator, Project Director, and Advisory Board's recommendations and give the volunteer his or her decision in writing within three working days.

## **VOLUNTEER COMPLAINT PROCEDURE**

Sowega Council on Aging complies with the obligation set forth in the following laws and regulations:

- Older Americans act
- Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended
- Executive Order 11246 as amended
- Revised Order No. 4

Sowega Council on Aging maintains a policy of nondiscrimination on the grounds of race, color, creed or religion, political affiliation, sex national origin, age (except as otherwise required by law, regulation or grant conditions), physical or mental disabilities in regard to provision of services. The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program is sponsored by Sowega Council on Aging and is subject to the same client complaint procedures.

If you feel that you have been subjected to discriminatory practices, you may file a written complaint within 180 days from the date of the alleged discrimination to:

**Sarah Bass, RSVP Director**

**Sowega Council on Aging**

**335 West Society Avenue**

**Albany, GA 31701**

**229-432-1124**

**Izzie Sadler, Executive Director**

**Sowega Council on Aging**

**335 West Society Avenue**

**Albany, GA 31701**

**229-432-1124**

## **IN CLOSING**

Sowega Council on Aging/RSVP hopes your volunteer experiences and assignments will result in a sense of pride and accomplishment. We appreciate your efforts and are happy you have chosen to join us in our commitment to help our community. It is a challenging task at times; however, others who have walked with path can tell you how rewarding it is.

## **Your Station: Craft**

To fulfill the needs of local hospitals, adult day care centers, and nursing homes, a volunteer group was formed to construct teddy bears, bibs, and wheelchair bags. These items offer comfort and convenience to patients and residents alike. Other crafts may be included in this station as necessary to serve the community.

### **Members of the group must be willing to:**

- Understand HIPAA and observe strict confidentiality practices
- Work cooperatively with members of the group
- Make use of each individual talent
- Provide quality products
- Keep record of hours
- Report hours monthly to volunteer office
- Maintain professionalism and patience
- 

### **Duties may include:**

- Cutting fabric
- Sewing
- Stuffing (teddy bears)
- Hand sewing
- Other crafting projects as appropriate
- Record all hours worked
- Turn in finished product to Lead



## PLARN INFORMATION:

### PURPOSE:

The Americorps RSVP Volunteer Program has initiated a PLARN recycling project for the purpose of expanding activities within the existing CRAFT station to

- 1.) Fill the needs of individuals looking for volunteer opportunities to assist the Council on Aging in the 14-county service area.
- 2.) As a means of producing items to sell in an effort to support fundraising activities for the RSVP RAMP building program.
- 3.) As a way to make sleeping mats for the local homeless population.

The purpose of the PLARN initiative at this time is to repurpose single use plastic bags into TWO ITEMS.

1. **MARKET BAGS** – These bags are to be produced and sold or given as tokens of appreciations for donations over \$10.00. These bags are to be made using the Council on Aging brand asset colors: White, Yellow, Blue and Green.  
The goal is that people begin to use these “Re-Usable Shopping Bags” in the serviced community areas and that an association forms with the project

and the items that are produced from said project. All proceeds that are produced from purchases, at this time, will go to our Ramp Building Station.

The Market Bags will be produced from ONE pattern to be supplied from the Volunteer Coordinator. (TO BE DETERMINED)

While we are deciding on which pattern to use, we are asking that all PLARN balls be made using 1.5" strips. Each ball should be made using the strips from the same bags. For example, we should have YELLOW plarn balls, BLUE plarn balls, WHITE plarn balls, and GREEN plarn balls.

2. **SLEEPING MATS** – These mats are to be produced to be given out in the community to the homeless population. These mats can be made from any of the collected bags that are not the colors of the Sowega Council on Aging. These mats can be made from, for example, GREY Wal-Mart bags, BEIGE Publix bags, Target bags and any other bags that do not belong in the color family of the Council on Aging. Matt making instructions can be found @ <https://youtu.be/5JNe-hce0sY>.

## **SOURCING:**

(for Craft Lead Volunteer & PLARN lead Volunteer)

1. **PURCHASES** – for any purchases, such as Crochet hooks, cutting mats, scissors, rotary cutting wheels, etc.– all request for purchasing of items related to the project need to be emailed to the volunteer coordinator, Sarah Bass at [sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org](mailto:sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org). Sarah will order the materials and have them directly shipped to each location or will bring the purchased items to the site.

## **FINISHED ITEMS**

1. If your site only produces PLARN balls, contact the volunteer coordinator to arrange shipping or pickup of balls to be sent/transferred to the Albany location so that the balls can be turned into finished products.



2. If your site produces **MARKET BAGS** – the volunteer coordinator will make arrangements to have the bags picked up and brought to Albany or supply the site with the boxes and postage to ship the items to Albany.
3. If your site produces **SLEEPING MATS** – please coordinate with the volunteer coordinator, either the mats can be brought to Albany and distributed among the homeless population or if you prefer to give them out in your community, this can also be an option. The site volunteer coordinator will need to keep a count of how many mats are produced each month and supply this information to the volunteer coordinator.

#### **RECORDING HOURS:**

#### **@ SATTELITE STATIONS**

Volunteer Leaders will be responsible for supplying a sign in sheet each time the group meets that includes the time, date, and duration of work. These sign in sheets will need to be scanned and emailed to the volunteer coordinator @ [sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org](mailto:sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org) on a weekly basis or mailed monthly on the 1<sup>st</sup> to reach the volunteer coordinator no later than the 5<sup>th</sup> of the following month:

Sowega Council on Aging

Attention: Sarah Bass

P.O. Box 88

Albany, GA 31702

**@ SCOA REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTER**

**LOG IN INSTRUCTIONS:**

SCAN CARD

SELECT VOLUNTEER ON THE LEFT OF THE SCREEN

SELECT THE AMERICORP RSVP STATION ICON

SELECT RSVP CRAFT STATION

ENTER EXPECTED HOURS

ENTER EXPECTED MINUTES

HIT OKAY

HIT FINISH

Also, please feel free to share photos of the group activities so that we can post them to the Council on Aging Facebook page, as well as to the RSVP portfolio manager so that there will be a record of all work.

Please direct any and all other questions related to this endeavor to the volunteer coordinator, Sarah Bass at:

[sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org](mailto:sarah.bass@sowegacoa.org)

or call 229.854.7106