



AMERICORPS VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Telephone Reassurance

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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 so much for your willingness to share your lifetime skills to help others live healthy, independent lifestyles. We welcome you as a member of the growing community of individuals whose lives are enriched by their efforts to help others.

Sincerely,
Sarah Bass
Americorps RSVP Project Director

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 SOWEGA COUNCIL ON AGING

The SOWEGA Council on Aging (COA) 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 COA'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 SOWEGA/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

<i>The right to:</i>	The responsibility to:
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 5th 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. 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:

SOWEGA Council on Aging

335 West Society Avenue

Albany, Georgia 31701

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

or by email to 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: Telephone Reassurance

To enhance the lives of homebound individuals a volunteer group was established to provide weekly wellness calls to engage in friendly conversations, provide words of encouragement, and to assess if the individual has any specific needs.

Members of the group must be willing to:

- Agree to a COGENT background check
- Understand HIPAA and observe strict confidentiality practices
- Perform calls to assigned list of individuals
- Track time on provided call sheets; or online using this link:
<https://sowegacoa.wufoo.com/forms/m14bqgb30zx11ml/>
- Report hours monthly to volunteer office
- Do not discuss anything about the agency or its programs – if there are needs, refer them to the ADRC or report concerns to the AmeriCorps Senior Volunteer program coordinator.
- Communicate any concerns to Sarah Bass @ 229.854.7106 Sowega Council on Aging
- Refer seniors in need of:
 Caregiving, Transportation, Homemaker Services, Meals
 And other resources to our ADRC line: 1-800-282-6612

What are my volunteer duties?

- Be dependable, call on your designated day/time, reschedule as necessary.
- Establish rapport with assigned individuals on call list
- Document each call to help remember specific details about individuals and to report details of concerns as necessary
- Pay attention to individual's mental state or any significant changes in mood that you notice from week to week
- Discuss non-invasive topics such as recent outings or visitors, upcoming plans, or past events
- Stay away from political or religious discussions
- Remain courteous and patient with individuals
- Report concerns to the AmeriCorps Senior Volunteer program coordinator

AMERICORPS RSVP VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

TELEPHONE REASSURANCE SCRIPT

It's wonderful that you've signed up to be a volunteer caller for seniors. We want you and the people you are calling to get the most out of your conversations. Check out the below guide for all the details and tips you'll need to remember before, during, and after your call.

1. **Start by introducing yourself, and then get to know the person you're speaking with.** Identify yourself as a Sowega Council on Aging Volunteer who is assisting with well-check calls. Remind the client that had requested this service through our ADRC line or as a response to a letter that was sent out in the fall of 2022.
2. If you're unsure about what to discuss during your first call, below is a short script you can follow. It helps to use open-ended questions, and to come in with an open mind, open heart, and willingness to engage in storytelling.
 - o Hi this is _____, calling from the Council on Aging and I am your volunteer for phone calls. How are you today?
 - o How do you pronounce your name
 - o How have you spent your day so far?
 - o Tell me more about yourself.
 - o Ask questions provided from call log to make sure senior basic needs are being addressed – this is the information that needs to be reported back to the agency:
 - Does the client have access to meals for the week?
 - Does the client have the needed transportation for the week?
 - Is the client keeping a healthy diet?
 - Is the client content and happy most days?
 - Is the client keeping up with doctor's appointments ?
 - Is the client interacting with other people enough?
3. **Speak slowly and clearly, especially for seniors that may be hard of hearing.** It's good to check in once you first start speaking to make sure that the senior can hear you well, and that your cadence works well for them.

4. **Be in an area with minimal background noise.** If you are going to be late, or if you need to reschedule, notify the person in advance to let them know.
5. Give the senior space to share their thoughts, try not to interrupt, and don't be afraid to share your own stories.
6. **Try to steer the conversation towards positivity if you can!** Find moments to laugh — this is just a conversation and should feel natural even if it initially feels awkward :)
7. It goes without saying, but **no profanity or inappropriate topics.** If you are ever made to feel uncomfortable during a call, please let us know ASAP!
8. **Remember that we are all different.** The person you are speaking to may be of a different gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, and may hold different religious or political beliefs. Try not to assign values to those differences (better or worse, right, or wrong), and be open and flexible with others' values, beliefs, and perceptions.
9. After the phone call, **record your call notes(if any)!**
10. Last, but certainly not least, **have fun** and remember that you are engaging in a wonderful act of kindness!

Conversation Starters for the Elderly

Conversation starters are simple questions or statements that can get your loved one talking. Having a few to pull out during car rides, during visits, or while waiting for appointments can ensure you are always offering the opportunity for your loved one to share a memory, opinion, or recommendation. Here are some examples of conversation starters that might inspire you as you think of your own.

Talk About Their Childhood

Speaking about childhood can often bring feelings of peace and comfort. Even better, when you ask the right questions, you might end up hearing a story you hadn't heard before and getting to know your loved one even better.

- What did your childhood bedroom look like?
- Describe your childhood best friend.
- What was the best thing your mom made that you loved to eat?
- Where was your favorite place to meet friends in town?
- What was your favorite vacation you took when you were a kid?
- What was your favorite subject in school and why?
- Describe your least favorite (or favorite) teacher.

Talk About the Present

You don't have to stick to reminiscing-based questions when starting a conversation. You can also check in with your loved one by asking questions about the present. Their answers to your questions can give you a peek into how they are feeling emotionally and physically.

- How are you feeling today?
- What has been the best part of your week?
- What can I help you with this week?
- Have you had any visitors this week?

Talk About Life Events

Major life events stay in our memories long after they happen. You can get a new perspective on how your loved one recalls these events by asking them to talk more about their memories.

- Describe your wedding dress (or your wife's wedding dress).
- Tell me how you proposed.
- Who was your first date? What did you do?
- What kind of celebration did you have at your graduation?
- Tell me about your favorite vacation.
- Do you remember any of your first days of school? Tell me about them.
- Tell me about your pregnancy.

Gather Their Wisdom

Ask for Their Recommendations

Finally, you can empower your loved one by asking for their help or their recommendations. You can solicit their advice about a situation you are working through or one on the horizon.

- Where should I plan to go on our next family vacation?
- What's the best advice for someone who is getting married?
- What's the secret to a happy and healthy life?

Talk About Their Family

Consider bringing out old family photos and diving into family history that you might not remember or know. Point out specific photos and ask who is in them, where the photos were taken, and what your loved one remembers about that day.

- What do you remember about your grandmother?
- Tell me about your grandmother's house. What did it look like?
- What was your favorite thing to do with your cousins?
- What do you remember about this photo?

Other Questions to Start the Conversation


Remember, nearly anything can be the basis of a conversation. You'll love getting to know more about your loved one's past when you pick some good questions for reminiscing as well. Here are a few more to inspire you.

- What was it like when you first met your spouse?
- What were your nicknames growing up?
- What was your favorite bathing suit you ever wore?
- What were your favorite things to do as a child?
- When you were a kid, what did you imagine your life would be like?

RSVP Telephone Reassurance Call Log

Volunteer Name

Date

 / / 
DD MM YYYY

Client Name

First Last

Client ID #

Start Time

 :
HH MM AM/PM

End Time

 :
HH MM AM/PM

Check All That Apply

- Does the client have access to meals for the week?
- Does the client have the needed transportation for the week?
- Is the client keeping up a healthy diet?
- Is the client content and happy most days?
- Is the client keeping up with doctor's appointments?
- Is the client interacting with other people enough?

If client indicates any issues with any of the above please instruct him/her to contact 1.800.282.6612 for proper assessment to the correct resources.

Call Notes



MONTHLY CALL LOG

VOLUNTEER NAME: _____

MONTH: _____

Name:	Notes:
Date:	
Start Time:	
End Time:	
Total Minutes:	

Name:	Notes:
Date:	
Start Time:	
End Time:	
Total Minutes:	

Name:	Notes:
Date:	
Start Time:	
End Time:	
Total Minutes:	

Name:	Notes:
Date:	
Start Time:	
End Time:	
Total Minutes:	

TOTAL MINUTES: