



## HISTORY OF RSVP

RSVP is an outgrowth of efforts by private groups, gerontologists, and government agencies over the past decades to address the needs of retired persons in America. The White House Conference on Aging in 1961 called attention to the continuing need of older people for useful activity. One of the outcomes of the conference was the passage of the Older Americans Act of 1965. In the same year the Community Service Society of New York launched a pilot project on Staten Island, which involved a small group of older adults in volunteer service to their communities. It was named SERVE (Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience). The success of this program, which demonstrated beyond doubt the value of the services of older volunteers, led to an amendment to the Older Americans Act, creating the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program in 1969.

RSVP was launched in spring of 1971 with an appropriation of \$500,000.00 under the auspices of the Administration of Aging (AoA). In July of the same year, RSVP was transferred from AoA to the federal agency, ACTION, which had oversight of federal domestic volunteer programs. Eleven projects were started in the summer of 1971.

The initial success of RSVP caused Congress to increase the appropriation to \$15,000,000 in 1972, to expand RSVP nationally, a national conference of State Executives on Aging was sponsored by ACTION to solicit their ideas and assistance in developing RSVP projects within their states. Subsequently, the State Agencies on Aging received development grants from ACTION for a two-year period to assist communities to develop grant proposals for local RSVP projects. Under these grants the state agencies employed RSVP Resource Specialists to provide expertise in community and program development.

In the first half of calendar year 1973, ACTION was gradually decentralized. Program and fiscal responsibility for all RSVP projects was given to the ten ACTION regional offices. This process occurred concurrently with growth of the program to a total of 590

RSVP projects by June 30. It was accomplished with the cooperation and assistance of State Agencies on Aging whose RSVP Resource Specialists had worked closely with ACTION national, regional, and state office staffs.

The period of greatest growth for RSVP occurred in the years 1972 through 1974. By June 30, 1974, there were 666 projects nationwide operating on a federal appropriation of \$15,000,000. In 1988, the RSVP had grown to 750 projects supported by federal funding of almost \$30,000,000. In addition, there were six RSVP projects entirely supported by non-CNS funds. Approximately 400,000 senior volunteers served in 1988. Non-CNS support had grown to \$27,100,000 at the end of 1987 -- \$14,700,000 from state and local governments and \$12,400,000 from the private sector.

Initially, the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program was authorized in 1969 under Title VI, Part A, of the Older Americans Act, as amended. Following the transfer of RSVP to ACTION, Public Law 93-113, the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, was enacted on October 1, 1973. RSVP operates under Title II, Part A, Section 201, of this Act, as amended.

In 1993, the Corporation for National Service came into being when the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 were signed. This new Act lowered the age for participation in RSVP from 60 to 55 and eliminated a requirement that volunteers no longer be in the work force. Congress stated its expectations for the Corporation through a statement of purpose (42 U.S.C. 12501) that, in part, included using national and volunteer service by Americans of all ages to:

1. Meet the unmet human, educational, environmental and public safety needs of the United States without displacing existing vendors;
2. Renew the ethic of civic responsibility and the spirit of community throughout the United States;
3. Expand and strengthen existing service programs with demonstrated experience in providing structured service opportunities with visible benefits to the Participants and the community; and
4. Provide tangible benefits to the communities in which national service is Performed.

The operations of three entities came together to form the Corporation for National Service – ACTION (the federal Domestic Volunteer Agency), the Commission on

National and Community Service, and the Office of National Service. The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program became one of three Existing volunteer programs for older adults to be administered by The Corporation under the banner of “National Senior Service Corps.”

RSVP came to Summit County in 1972 under the sponsorship of the United Community Council, now the United Way of Summit County. This relationship continued through December 1981. Our first volunteers and stations were enrolled in January 1973. The Senior Workers’ Action Program (SWAP) received approval from ACTION to become the sponsoring agent for RSVP of Summit County in January 1982. This partnership has continued into the new century. Dedicated volunteers contribute over 100,000 hours of their time annually, and have done so for several years at more than 80 sites. The Corporation for National Service replaced ACTION as primary source of funding in 1993. At that time the minimum age for joining RSVP was changed from 60 to 55 years of age. CNS provides 70% of the funds to operate RSVP, with the balance received through Akron’s Community Development Program, the Ohio Department on Aging, private contributions and foundations.

Recently, special grants have been awarded to RSVP to facilitate and raise levels of literacy in the primary grades and intergenerational programming. This has offered an excellent means of also promoting inter-generational activity and opportunities to become mentors.

## PURPOSE AND GOALS OF RSVP

**Purpose:** Under the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) the Corporation for National Service provides grants to qualified agencies and organizations for the dual purpose of engaging persons 55 and older in volunteer service to meet critical community needs; and to provide a high quality experience that will enrich the lives of volunteers.

**Goals:** RSVP promotes the engagement of older persons as community resources in planning for community improvement and in delivery of volunteer services. Achievement of RSVP's purpose is facilitated by coordination of the resources of CNS, the RSVP sponsor, and the community to fulfill the goals of RSVP:

- Develop a variety of opportunities for community service for older people willing to share their experience, abilities, and skills for the betterment of their community and themselves.
- Ensure that volunteer assignments are made consistent with the interests and abilities of the volunteers and the needs of the community served.
- Ensure that volunteers are provided needed orientation, in-service instruction, individual support and supervision, and recognition for their volunteer service.
- Provide reasonable opportunity for community and volunteer involvement and support in development, operation, and appraisal of the RSVP project.
- Develop local support to supplement available federal sources and insure that program expenditures are incurred at the lowest possible cost consistent with the effective operation of the project, as required by CNS legislation.
- Cooperate with agencies and organizations involved in the fields of aging and voluntarism.
- Develop a sound, locally controlled senior volunteer program with continuing community support.