



## **Retired & Senior Volunteer Program of Tompkins County**

# **Volunteer Handbook 2011**

**Lead, Inspire, Change the World**

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Member Organization

## **INTRODUCTION**

WELCOME TO RSVP! We are happy to have you join the over 400 people age 55 and older in Tompkins County who actively volunteer through our program. RSVP will help put your skills, time, and talents to work for nonprofit agencies and programs that serve critical needs in our county.

RSVP believes that the lifetime of experience and training you have acquired is a valuable resource. Volunteering also enables individuals age 55 and over to continue their active participation in the community. Volunteers say their lives are enriched by the personal contact with other community members who are in turn helped by the special attention they receive from RSVP volunteers.

The needs of Tompkins County nonprofit agencies and organizations are diverse and numerous. RSVP's top priority is to assure your personal satisfaction as a volunteer. We strive to offer volunteer opportunities that meet your skills and interests.

The RSVP staff hopes that you will keep us informed about your volunteer work. Your ideas, insight, suggestions, and recommendations for new volunteer activities are essential for RSVP to meet your needs as well as those of the community.

Thank you for joining RSVP and offering your time and talents to local communities.

## **CONTENTS**

This Volunteer Handbook provides you with important information about the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program of Tompkins County. The first and second sections cover the benefits of joining RSVP and general volunteer policies and procedures. The third section gives information about RSVP history and program leadership. Please retain this handbook for future reference. You may contact the RSVP Office at any time for an updated volunteer handbook.

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## **RSVP VOLUNTEER BENEFITS**

### **EVENTS & RECOGNITION**

Each November, RSVP holds an Annual Recognition Event to acknowledge the significant contributions given by those age 55 and over in Tompkins County. RSVP volunteers who serve a minimum of 2 hours per month, or 24 hours per year, are invited to this event.

All volunteers are welcome to other RSVP events and activities that are held periodically throughout the year. RSVP events provide volunteers with an opportunity to meet other volunteers and staff members of volunteer agencies, RSVP, and Lifelong. You will also have an opportunity to meet members of the RSVP Advisory Council and Lifelong Board.

Since 2009, RSVP volunteers have received gifts from several local businesses, donated by those businesses in thanks for the service that RSVP volunteers give to our community. Look for door prizes at events and weekly prize drawings.

### **COMMUNICATION LINKS**

Stay in the loop! There are several ways to keep up with new volunteer opportunities and to hear what RSVP volunteers are doing across the county.

RSVP publishes a quarterly newsletter titled “Reaching Out.” This newsletter is mailed to all RSVP volunteers and contains information on volunteer opportunities, scheduled events, and other matters of interest. Volunteer stations and volunteer stories may be featured – please contact the RSVP office if you have an idea or a contribution for the newsletter.

RSVP volunteers are welcome to join our email list to receive updates in months when the newsletter is not mailed. Please contact [rsvp@tclifelong.org](mailto:rsvp@tclifelong.org) to have your email address added.

RSVP is required to conduct surveys of volunteers to ensure their safety and satisfaction in volunteer sites. From time to time, you may receive calls from an RSVP staff member or volunteer to ask about your volunteer experiences. We may also call to let you know about new volunteer opportunities that match the skills and interests you mention on your registration form. You may request to be removed from our new volunteer opportunity roster at any time.

Volunteer opportunities are often broadcast on the Lifelong Radio Show which airs on Saturdays at 9:15 on News Talk WHCU 870.

The RSVP staff is always available to discuss your questions, ideas, or concerns. Please stop in during our office hours or call us at 273-1511. Our webpage at [www.tclifelong.org](http://www.tclifelong.org) contains RSVP forms, updated volunteer opportunities listings, and “Reaching Out” newsletters.

## **TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT**

Depending on available funds, RSVP can provide reimbursement for transportation costs to and from your volunteer station. Travel reimbursement from RSVP is not taxable income.

**Please request travel reimbursement only if the cost of transportation would otherwise prevent you from volunteering.** To request reimbursement, you must complete a Travel Reimbursement Form each month. Federal audit requirements mandate that these forms are signed by staff members at the agencies or programs where you volunteer.

Individuals not requesting RSVP travel reimbursement may be able to deduct the cost of travel from their income for tax purposes. Please consult your tax preparer or the Internal Revenue Service at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) or 1-800-829-1040 for more information.

### **Mileage Reimbursement**

Mileage can be reimbursed at 20¢ per mile up to a limit of \$20 per month per volunteer. The rate of reimbursement is evaluated on a regular basis and adjusted pending funds.

### **Bus Passes**

RSVP can provide 15-ride TCAT bus passes for volunteers, up to a maximum of 30 rides per month. TCAT bus schedules and information are available at [www.tcatbus.com](http://www.tcatbus.com) or by calling 277-RIDE (7433).

### **Gadabout**

Gadabout provides low-cost, door-to-door transportation for Tompkins County residents aged 60 years and older. RSVP volunteers eligible for Gadabout may arrange free transportation to and from their volunteer station. Simply tell the driver you're on your way to an RSVP assignment, and Gadabout will bill the RSVP office directly for your travel. Gadabout transportation can be arranged by calling 273-1878, Monday through Friday, at least 48 hours in advance.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL INSURANCE**

RSVP of Tompkins County provides two types of supplemental insurance, free to all of its volunteers. These policies provide coverage for RSVP volunteers while they are driving to and from their volunteer site and while they volunteer:

**Excess Volunteer Liability Insurance** provides protection if you are liable for personal injury or property damage while volunteering. This insurance coverage kicks in only after any other insurance to which you are entitled runs out. Exclusions apply.

**Excess Automobile Liability Insurance** provides an extra layer of protection for personal injury or property damage claims arising while you drive to and from your volunteer site or during your volunteer service. This insurance coverage kicks in only after any other insurance to which you are entitled runs out. Coverage does not include damage to your own vehicle; other exclusions apply.

If you are injured or injure another individual while volunteering, notify the RSVP office and your volunteer agency supervisor immediately. For further information on this insurance coverage, please see the brochure titled "Volunteers Insurance Coverage," available at the RSVP office and at [www.cimaworld.com](http://www.cimaworld.com). Note that RSVP of Tompkins County does not offer Excess Accident Medical Coverage, also described in this brochure.

## **VOLUNTEER POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

### **RSVP ELIGIBILITY**

RSVP volunteers must be 55 years of age or older, willing to serve on a regular basis without compensation, and reside in or nearby Tompkins County. They must also be willing to accept instruction and supervision as required.

### **RECRUITMENT POLICY**

RSVP recruits and enrolls new volunteers through visits to employers, senior residences, and community groups. RSVP is also featured in local media several times a year, but most new RSVP volunteers hear about us by word of mouth. RSVP volunteers and the agencies they serve are encouraged to support recruitment by referring prospective RSVP volunteers to the office.

People interested in volunteering through RSVP may complete and return a New Volunteer Registration Form, available at [www.tclifelong.org](http://www.tclifelong.org) or at the RSVP office, or contact the RSVP office to set up an interview. RSVP staff will meet with volunteers to complete the registration process and to suggest volunteer opportunities that match their skills and interests.

You can only report hours to RSVP for positions that you take after becoming an RSVP member. If you are already volunteering when you join RSVP, you should not report hours for that position(s). Certain exceptions may apply: 1) if RSVP travel reimbursement is necessary for you to continue volunteering, or 2) if your position within an agency substantially changes after you join RSVP. This distinction is important because RSVP aims to supplement the work of active volunteers.

### **VOLUNTEER REGISTRATION**

All volunteers must complete a Volunteer Registration Form, which will remain on file at RSVP. This form collects detailed information on a volunteer's skills and interests to match with potential volunteer opportunities. Your contact information is private, and will not be shared with volunteer agencies or other outside parties without your permission.

The volunteer registration form asks volunteers who drive to and from, or during, their volunteer service to attest that they will hold a valid driver's license and automobile insurance that meets state minimum standards. You may also be asked to provide a copy of your driver's license or insurance documentation in order for RSVP to provide you with excess automobile liability insurance.

Your emergency contact and insurance beneficiaries are listed on the registration form in case an accident occurs while you are volunteering for RSVP. Please call the RSVP office if these contacts change.

### **VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT**

The RSVP office maintains a catalog of regular volunteer opportunities, which is updated every 6 months. You may review this document as part of your initial interview with RSVP staff, or come with a few choices already selected. It is available for download at [www.tclifelong.org](http://www.tclifelong.org) and in the RSVP office. If none of the listings match your interests, RSVP staff can also help you develop new volunteer positions and contact agencies that are not affiliated with RSVP.

Each volunteer station has its own process for beginning to volunteer – such as a special application, group orientation sessions, or a one-on-one meeting with the agency’s volunteer coordinator. Staff in the RSVP office will help you learn more about individual opportunities and get you connected with the agencies you choose to serve.

If you have any ideas, problems, or concerns regarding your volunteer placement, please contact your agency supervisor or a member of the RSVP staff. Every effort will be made to improve your experience at a volunteer station or to help you find alternate volunteer opportunities.

### **THE SKILLS & INTERESTS ROSTER**

RSVP maintains a skills and interest roster, a listing of active volunteers according to their specified skills and interests. As the office receives notice of volunteer opportunities from local agencies, we may call volunteers in the appropriate skills and interests categories notifying them of the new opportunities. Remember, there is no obligation to take on any volunteer opportunity about which we send you information. You may request to be removed from our new volunteer opportunity roster at any time.

### **FEDERAL GUIDELINES FOR RSVP**

As part of a national program, RSVP of Tompkins County must comply with guidelines established in the Code of Federal Regulations and by the Corporation for National and Community Service. See 45 CFR 2553 and [www.seniorcorps.gov](http://www.seniorcorps.gov) for further details.

- No RSVP volunteer, employee of Lifelong, or RSVP volunteer station may take any action, when serving in such capacity, that would result in the identification or apparent identification of RSVP with partisan or nonpartisan political activity.
- No RSVP volunteer may participate in labor or anti-labor organization or related activity.
- RSVP volunteers and staff may not give religious instruction, conduct worship services, or engage in any form of proselytization as part of their duties. If an organization conducts such activities, the activities must be offered separately, in time or location, from RSVP-affiliated activities.
- An RSVP volunteer may not perform any service or duty or engage in any activity which would otherwise be performed by an employed worker or which would supplant the hiring or result in the displacement of employed workers, or impair existing contracts for service.
- Under no circumstances may an RSVP volunteer receive a fee-for-service from service recipients, their legal guardians, members of their family, or friends. No person, organization, or agency may request or receive any compensation for services of RSVP volunteers.
- RSVP volunteers are not employees of Lifelong, RSVP of Tompkins County, the Corporation for National and Community Service, or the Federal Government.

## **VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT**

All RSVP volunteers are expected to attend scheduled in-service training sessions, to accept instruction and supervision as required, and to observe the rules and regulations of the agency you serve. In-service training hours can be reported as RSVP volunteer service hours. If you are unable to make a scheduled training or volunteer commitment, please notify the volunteer coordinator where you serve.

RSVP volunteers treat colleagues and the individuals they serve with dignity and respect, honoring confidentiality where necessary. Please report safety concerns to the volunteer coordinator where you serve. If you are injured or injure another individual while volunteering, please notify the RSVP office and your volunteer agency supervisor immediately.

## **REPORTING HOURS TO RSVP**

Benefits of RSVP membership are available only to active volunteers. To remain active, RSVP volunteers must have a complete registration form on file in the office, and report their volunteer hours on a monthly basis. The RSVP office keeps track of each volunteer's volunteer hours to recognize individuals for their total service each year, to verify hours for travel reimbursement, and to report aggregate data to our funders. Please keep RSVP informed about your volunteer activity!

RSVP receives records of volunteer activity from three sources:

**Volunteer Station Logs** are monthly time sheets submitted to the RSVP office by the agency where you serve. Agencies generally ask volunteers to sign in and out, or record their total hours, each time they volunteer. Check with the volunteer coordinator where you serve to find where the form is kept and how he or she would like you to complete it.

Volunteer Station Logs must be sent to the RSVP office by the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month to keep our records up-to-date and to avoid delays in processing travel reimbursement requests. Federal audit requirements mandate that these forms are signed by staff members at the agencies or programs where you volunteer. If your volunteer station does not have this form, they can contact the RSVP office to receive the most up-to-date version.

**Off-Site Volunteer Logs** are submitted monthly by volunteers who work on RSVP projects from home, usually for the RSVP craft guild or bulk-mailing group.

**Travel Reimbursement Forms** must be filed with the RSVP office each month *if you choose to request mileage reimbursement or TCAT bus passes*. Federal audit requirements mandate that these forms are signed by staff members at the agencies or programs where you volunteer. Lifelong cannot honor requests for reimbursement that are more than 60 days old. Your days of service will be verified against Volunteer Station Logs, and checks mailed once your balance reaches \$10 or more. *See page 4 for details about travel reimbursement.*

If we do not receive hours from you for three months, you may receive a check-in call from an RSVP staff member or volunteer. If you have resigned from a volunteer position, we would like to conduct a brief exit interview to learn how to better match or support volunteers for that position in the future. This also provides a chance to learn about new opportunities in the county.

## **VOLUNTEER SEPARATION**

Volunteers are requested to contact the RSVP office if their interests change or if they experience difficulties with their volunteer positions. At a volunteer's request, every effort will be made by

RSVP Staff to improve his or her experience at a volunteer station or to help him or her find alternate volunteer opportunities. RSVP volunteers are free to withdraw their participation from RSVP and volunteer station activities at any time.

An agency may separate an RSVP volunteer from service at the conclusion of a volunteer assignment or if they find that the volunteer is not a “good fit” for their needs. The RSVP Director may separate a volunteer from RSVP in writing for cause, including but not limited to misconduct, inability to maintain a volunteer assignment, or consistent inactivity for 6 months or more.

### **VOLUNTEER APPEALS**

If a volunteer is unsatisfied with any action of an agency to which he or she is assigned, including involuntary separation from service, he or she may meet with RSVP staff (and agency staff as needed) to clarify reasons, resolve conflicts, or find an alternate assignment.

If a volunteer disagrees with any action of the RSVP office, he or she may appeal to the RSVP Director in writing within 30 days, stating his or her reasons. If the volunteer is unsatisfied with the RSVP Director’s response, the volunteer may bring that concern to the Chair of the RSVP Advisory Council within 30 days, for discussion and direction by the Council. The volunteer will receive a written response from the RSVP Advisory Council within 60 days outlining the Council's findings and any remedial actions taken.

## **ABOUT RSVP**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The dual purpose of RSVP is to engage 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. RSVP promotes the engagement of older persons as community resources in planning for community improvement and in delivery of volunteer services.

### **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program is an equal opportunity program, and complies with Federal and State laws prohibiting discrimination. RSVP does not discriminate in accepting or in any placement of volunteers based on the basis of race; color; national origin, including limited English proficiency; sex; age; political affiliation; religion; or on the basis of disability, if the volunteer with a disability is qualified to serve.

### **LOCAL & NATIONAL TIES**

RSVP is a national program led by the Corporation for National and Community Service, Senior Corps division, and sponsored locally by Lifelong. Nationwide, RSVP involves more than 430,000 adults in more than 740 programs in the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

RSVP of Tompkins County has helped volunteers connect with nonprofit agencies since 1977. From January to December 2009, RSVP volunteers served at over 60 nonprofit agencies and programs in Tompkins County. Together, they provided over 65,000 hours of service to our community.

RSVP of Tompkins County receives approximately 40% of its funding through the federal government. Support comes locally through Tompkins County, the City of Ithaca, New York State, United Way, and generous individual contributions. RSVP of Tompkins County and our local sponsor, Lifelong, both hold annual fund drives to supplement their funding sources. Additionally, RSVP of Tompkins County receives a special grant from the IRS to implement a free tax counseling program for seniors, low income individuals, and people with disabilities.

### **ADVISORY COUNCIL**

The RSVP Advisory Council functions in an advisory capacity to the RSVP Director and the Lifelong Board of Directors. This Council assists in matters affecting planning, funding, and public relations. Moreover, the Council assists in making significant program decisions including local policies for RSVP of Tompkins County. Other responsibilities of the Advisory Council include obtaining information and advice on community interests and needs, and evaluating the effectiveness of RSVP.

The RSVP Advisory Council consists of 15 members. Additionally, the RSVP Director and the Executive Director of Lifelong serve in an ex-officio capacity. At least four of the elected members must be 55 years of age or older, including two experienced RSVP volunteers. Elected members serve up to two three-year terms in a row.

Volunteers are encouraged to contact any member of the Advisory Council with concerns they may have. Volunteers may also request items to be placed on the Council's agenda. Meetings are held eight times each year. For more information on the meeting schedule, please call the RSVP office.

New members for the RSVP Advisory Council are sought each fall. Members are elected to a three-year term of office starting in January. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer representative on the Advisory Council, please contact the RSVP Director.

### **OFFICE OPERATION**

The RSVP office is located at 121 W. Court Street in downtown Ithaca, in the white house next to Lifelong's activities building. The RSVP staff includes a full-time Director and a part-time Assistant. RSVP staff members are employees of Lifelong. Volunteers of all ages, including RSVP volunteers and college student interns, serve in the RSVP office doing various jobs such as data entry, record keeping and calling RSVP volunteers or stations. Please drop in with questions, ideas, or to meet with us during office hours, posted on [www.tclifelong.org](http://www.tclifelong.org). Additional hours are available by appointment by calling 273-1511. Free parking is available on site.

In the event of inclement weather, especially during the winter months, please listen to radio stations WHCU or WTKO to find out if the office and other RSVP-related activities are canceled. If the Ithaca City Schools are closed, Lifelong and RSVP are closed. Voicemail is available at the office to take your messages when the office is closed.

Thank you for becoming part of RSVP, and for offering your lifetime of experience to help meet critical needs in Tompkins County. We hope you will have a great time, meet new friends, and witness the impact your service has on the community. You are always welcome to call or stop by the RSVP office with questions, comments, or suggestions.