

# Volunteer Handbook



North Iowa Area Community College  
500 College Drive  
Mason City, IA 50401  
(641) 422-4256 | (888) 466-4222 Ext. 4256  
[rsvp@niacc.edu](mailto:rsvp@niacc.edu)  
[www.niacc.edu/rsvp](http://www.niacc.edu/rsvp)



## What is RSVP?

RSVP, or Retired Senior Volunteer Program, is part of the national service network of programs called Senior Corps that recruits adults 55 and older to use their talents and life experiences to help meet community needs through volunteer service. RSVP offers flexibility and choice to its volunteers as it matches the personal interests and skills of older Americans with opportunities to serve in their communities. Volunteers provide millions of community service hours across the United States.

RSVP of North Central Iowa is a non-profit organization dedicated to meeting community needs in North Central Iowa by placing volunteers whose wisdom can make a difference. RSVP is sponsored by North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) and serves Cerro Gordo, Franklin, Hancock, Mitchell, Winnebago, and Worth counties.

The focus of RSVP of North Central Iowa is literacy; however, the program is always exploring and developing new volunteer opportunities within the four-county area.

Program staff is responsible for volunteer recruitment, training, and recognition to ensure volunteers have a meaningful, purposeful, and rewarding experience. Ongoing education and support for volunteers is an important component of RSVP. Through careful monitoring, data collection, and evaluation by program staff, volunteers know of the impact they are making in addressing community needs.

## Mission

The mission of RSVP of North Central Iowa is to respond to community needs by providing meaningful and purposeful volunteer opportunities for people 55 and older.

## **Sponsorship – North Iowa Area Community College**

RSVP of North Central Iowa is sponsored by North Iowa Area Community College. The College serves as the fiscal agent for the program and employs program staff. The RSVP office is located in the Activity Center on the NIACC campus in Mason City. RSVP operates in conjunction with the Dean of Continuing Education, ensuring that RSVP has adequate workspace, efficient equipment, and clearly defined roles to operate within the College.

### **Who can become an RSVP Volunteer?**

Anyone who is 55 or older with a desire to be involved in their community by sharing their skills and talents can become an RSVP volunteer. There are no educational, income and experience requirements, or membership fees.

### **Volunteer Responsibilities**

When accepting a volunteer assignment with RSVP, responsibilities include:

- Attend volunteer meetings and trainings.
- Ask questions at your Volunteer Station if you are unsure about something. If you still have questions, please call the RSVP office.
- Arrange for a substitute volunteer if you know you will be absent.
- Notify your station if you will be absent.
- Sign the RSVP Attendance form so your hours can be properly recorded.
- Keep station business and client information confidential.
- If you are in an accident, notify the RSVP office and your station immediately.
- Notify the RSVP office if you are having problems at your station.
- Notify the RSVP office if there are changes in your contact information.
- Notify the RSVP office if there are changes in your health that affect your volunteer service.

Questions and concerns are always welcome! Please feel free to call the RSVP office at (641) 422-4256, to visit with an RSVP staff member at any time.

## **Volunteer Stations**

### **What is a Volunteer Station?**

A Volunteer Station is a public or non-profit entity that partners with RSVP. RSVP provides stations with volunteers who help fulfill their mission and serve their clients whether they are students, residents, or community members with a need.

Volunteer Stations agree to provide a safe environment for RSVP Volunteers and accept the responsibility of volunteer supervision. Key individuals from stations assist with volunteer training and recognition.

### **Fitting in at Volunteer Stations**

Volunteer Stations appreciate and value the time and talent volunteers offer. When volunteering, don't be shy – ask questions about the organization.

Below is a list of details you will want to know about the Volunteer Station:

- Know and understand your role at the Volunteer Station.
- Know what change you are working to make or the problem you are working to address.
- Understand the mission or purpose of the Volunteer Station.
- Know your supervisor and the station staff you work with. They will answer your questions and address any concerns you may have.
- Know what policies and procedures you are subject to as a volunteer, including the check-in procedure for your station.
- Learn the little things such as the location of the restrooms, coat racks, work space, parking area, etc.

## **Policies and Procedures**

*All RSVP Volunteers are required to adhere to the following policies and procedures while volunteering with RSVP.*

### **Approval Policy**

All volunteers are subject to approval by the Volunteer Station prior to serving in their volunteer assignment.

### **Attendance Policy**

Volunteers must be on time. If you are unable to arrive at your scheduled time, please notify your station supervisor. If you are going to be absent, please follow the process outlined by RSVP staff for your volunteer assignment.

### **Background Check Policy**

RSVP of North Central Iowa reserves the right to perform criminal background checks on all volunteers working with vulnerable populations, such as but not limited to, Breakfast Buddies, Reading Buddies, Reading Coaches, and Pen Pals. A volunteer applicant under investigation for or charged with criminal acts will be disqualified from volunteering with such populations until the issue has been resolved. All volunteer placements are contingent upon a background check.

Minor violations, such as but not limited to, shoplifting will not prohibit a volunteer from serving with vulnerable populations. Anyone who has been convicted of, pleaded guilty or “no contest” to, or received a deferred judgment or suspended sentence to a felony or is placed on the Sex Offender, Child Abuse, or Adult Abuse registry will be automatically disqualified from volunteering.

If the background check is returned with questionable results, the Director will consult with a representative or representatives from the Volunteer Station to determine if a volunteer is suitable to serve with vulnerable populations. The circumstances of a conviction will be considered in relation to the nature and duties of the volunteer position.

### **Compensation Policy**

RSVP of North Central Iowa, North Iowa Area Community College, and all Volunteer Stations are prohibited from requesting or receiving compensation from beneficiaries of RSVP Volunteers.

### **Conduct Policy**

When volunteering, an RSVP volunteer must act in accordance with the Volunteer Station's guidelines for staff and/or volunteers. Any concerns regarding the guidelines should be taken to the station supervisor. If concerns are not resolved, the volunteer should contact the RSVP Director.

### **Confidentiality Policy**

Confidentiality is the cornerstone of a trusting relationship between volunteers, clients, Volunteer Stations, and RSVP. Some volunteer opportunities involve knowing sensitive information about the individuals being served. Issues or concerns regarding clients should only be discussed with the personnel such as a teacher, principal or program supervisor, or RSVP staff. One instance when you should not hesitate to share information with school personnel would be if you receive information that a student may be a danger to themselves or to others. Necessary steps must be taken to protect all involved, so don't second-guess your best judgment. Instead, tell school personnel who are trained to deal with these situations as soon as possible. It is important to never release the name or other information that may identify the client to anyone except the school and/or RSVP staff.

### **Drug and Alcohol Policy**

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 all volunteer placements through RSVP of North Central Iowa.

### **Fee for Service Policy**

RSVP Volunteers do not receive a fee for volunteer service from service recipients, their legal guardians, members of their family, or friends.

### **Inclement Weather**

In the case of inclement weather or poor road conditions, volunteers should exercise caution. Use good judgment in making a decision to travel to the volunteer assignment. Volunteers who will be absent due to weather should notify the Volunteer Station.

### **Insurance Policy**

RSVP provides excess insurance to all active volunteers. This policy covers injuries arising out of or in the course of the following:

- While attending an assignment-related training and/or recognition event.
- While on assignment at a registered Volunteer Station.
- Any incidental travel while on assignment, as long as it relates to the volunteer activity.

The following insurance is provided:

**Accident Medical Insurance:** This includes an accidental death benefit should an accidental bodily injury occur that is covered by the policy result in the volunteer's death. If there is no named beneficiary or surviving beneficiary, the covered person's loss of life benefits will be paid in one sum to the first surviving class of the following:

- Spouse
- Child or children
- Mother or father
- Sister(s) or brother(s)
- The estate of the covered person

If a volunteer wishes to identify a death benefit beneficiary different from the surviving class listed above, the volunteer should submit a written request to RSVP of North Central Iowa. Volunteers may change beneficiaries at any time.

**Liability Insurance:** All volunteers receive excess volunteer liability insurance. This policy provides protection if you are liable for bodily injury or property damage arising out of the performance of your duties.

**Auto Liability Insurance:** All volunteers must maintain a valid driver's license and auto liability coverage at least equal to the state-required minimums.

In the case of an accident, auto or otherwise, the volunteer should:

- Report the incident within 24 hours to the RSVP Director, who will notify the insurance company.
- File appropriate claim forms with their own primary insurance provider including Medicare or Medicaid.
- Keep insurance statements and itemized bills, as they will be needed to file a claim.

### **Leave of Absence Policy**

If a volunteer needs to temporarily suspend their volunteer service, they may go on a Leave of Absence (LOA) for up to three years. Volunteers may return to active service at any time by notifying the RSVP office. Each summer, RSVP will contact volunteers who are on a LOA to determine if they want to remain on a LOA, return to active volunteering, or withdraw from the program.

While on a LOA, volunteers will continue to receive the RSVP newsletter and other correspondence from the program, such as information regarding new volunteer opportunities or service projects. At the end of three years on a LOA, volunteers will be automatically withdrawn from RSVP.

### **Limited-English Proficiency Policy**

RSVP of North Central Iowa will make reasonable efforts to assist limited-English speaking individuals who want to become RSVP Volunteers. Program staff will utilize resources on the NIACC campus, such as Spanish instructors, to assist with translation. If available, additional community resources will be utilized for individuals with native languages other than Spanish.

If all local options have been exhausted, program staff will utilize additional resources such as the Personal Interpreter program through Language Line Services, an over-the-phone interpretation service.

### **Non-Discrimination Policy**

RSVP does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy), disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, creed, religion, actual or potential parental, family and marital status or veteran's status in its programs, activities or employment practices.

### **Orientation and Training**

All new volunteers will receive an orientation, which will cover an introduction to RSVP and an overview of NIACC. Before serving at a Volunteer Station, volunteers will receive training appropriate to their position and a position description. Training opportunities will also be provided throughout the year. All volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend all trainings.

### **Personal Identifiable Information (PII)**

RSVP of North Central Iowa collects and stores the following volunteer information: Name, address, phone number(s), date of birth, and email. RSVP requires the social security number from volunteers who work with vulnerable populations; however, social security numbers are destroyed after background checks are conducted. PII is stored in hard copy volunteer files and the Volunteer Reporter database in the RSVP office. The Volunteer Reporter database is password-protected and in addition, each employee's computer is password-protected. The file cabinet and office are both locked at the close of business each day.

RSVP employees, including the Director, Volunteer Coordinator, and Administrative Assistant, are the only individuals with access to volunteer files and Volunteer Reporter. If the hard copy files or the database are breached, and PII is accessed, the Director will notify volunteers via email. If volunteers do not have email, they will be notified by standard mail. In addition, the Director will notify the CNCS Program Officer and the CNCS Office of Inspector General.

### **Policy Changes**

Policies in this handbook are subject to change without notice. The Advisory Council will review the handbook as needed. The most recent volunteer handbook is posted on the RSVP website: [www.niacc.edu/rsvp](http://www.niacc.edu/rsvp).

### **Process of Appeal**

All appeals to action affecting an RSVP volunteer must be made in writing to the RSVP Director with a copy sent to the Chairperson of the Advisory Council. The Advisory Council will review the complaint and if necessary, conduct an investigation with the appropriate individuals, including the RSVP Director and the volunteer making the appeal. Additional persons may be involved such as other volunteers, station and/or RSVP staff.

The Council will determine what action should be taken to correct the situation. The Chairperson will respond in writing to the appealing volunteer explaining the Council's decision and necessary action.

### **Publicity**

It is the intent of the program to make the public aware of RSVP volunteer service through ongoing publicity including newsletter and newspaper articles on volunteers and service, which may include photographs as well as radio spots. RSVP retains the right to use photographs of volunteers taken by staff or shared with staff by volunteers or Volunteer Stations.

### **Reporting Volunteer Hours**

RSVP is required to track all volunteer hours served with the program and report them to the Corporation for National & Community Service. Below are the requirements for submitting, tracking, and reporting volunteer hours:

- RSVP utilizes hard copy files and the Volunteer Reporter database to track and store volunteer hours.

- The Volunteer Reporter database is password-protected and in addition, each employee's computer is password-protected. The file cabinet and office are both locked at the close of business each day.
- RSVP will provide Volunteer Stations and volunteers with an Attendance Form to record and report volunteer hours. Volunteers will write their name and record the amount of time they serve each time they serve during a month.
- Representatives of Volunteer Stations, including any paid employee of the station, should submit hours via the RSVP Attendance Form. Forms can be mailed, emailed, or faxed.
- Volunteers can track and submit their own hours when they serve outside of a volunteer station (such as the Walking School Bus Program). They can also submit hours via the RSVP Attendance Form. Forms can be mailed, emailed, or faxed.
- If volunteers do not track their hours on the Attendance Form, they can email or mail their hours to RSVP. Ideally, they should include the date the hours were served, how many hours were served, and how the hours were served by including the activity or the Volunteer Station.
- If hours are submitted via email:
  - The sender must use an email system that indicates a recognizable user name that is registered with the sponsor or RSVP as a current volunteer.
  - The email must be addressed to the RSVP Director, Volunteer Coordinator, or Administrative Assistant.
  - Emails should be printed and stored with any attachments that indicate hours served.
- RSVP staff including the Director, Volunteer Coordinator, or Administrative Assistant will review hours submitted.
- Volunteer hours are entered into Volunteer Reporter each week and reconciled with hard copy documentation.

Hard copies of all hours submitted to RSVP will be stored for the appropriate length of time according to the federal grant requirements. Volunteers serving hours during a program year are considered active and invited to participate in recognition events and remain eligible for the supplemental insurance coverage.

### **Reasonable Accommodations Policy**

RSVP of North Central Iowa, along with the volunteer stations, will provide reasonable accommodations for qualified volunteers upon request.

## **Recognition**

Recognition efforts for volunteers will be conducted throughout the year. Each spring, RSVP will host a Volunteer Celebration to acknowledge volunteers and their efforts.

In addition, RSVP of North Central Iowa will track and monitor service hours in order to recognize volunteers. Individuals who have achieved a certain standard, which is measured by the number of cumulative hours served over the course of a lifetime, will be honored at the celebration.

Award levels are as follows:

Bronze	100 to 249 lifetime service hours
Silver	250 to 499 lifetime service hours
Gold	500 or more lifetime service hours

Awards will be presented annually at the Volunteer Celebration.

## **Reimbursement Policy**

Due to limited resources, RSVP of North Central Iowa does not reimburse for transportation or meals associated with volunteer assignments. Exceptions may be made depending on the availability of funds. If a volunteer wishes to be reimbursed for mileage or meals associated with volunteering, they must submit a written request to the RSVP Director.

## **Risk Management Plan**

The following policy and procedures have been adopted to ensure the safety of volunteers and program participants:

### **Approved Meeting Places**

All tutoring and mentoring will take place on school grounds. The teacher will assign a location for volunteers and students to meet. Doors and/or blinds where the meeting takes place must remain open. Possible locations may include the library, a conference room, a corner of the classroom, or another room at school.

### **Appropriate/Inappropriate Touch**

Some child development authorities are concerned that society has become so afraid of providing physical nurturing to children that children's emotional growth will be adversely affected. RSVP Volunteers may find themselves in the unique position of providing students with appropriate wholesome affection. The reality is that being a volunteer who mentors and tutors students may involve some physical contact.

Some younger students literally demand physical affection and may cling to their RSVP volunteer. Volunteers can use these opportunities to teach students about social boundaries in terms of physical contact. They can be role models helping students understand those boundaries.

Volunteers should adhere to these guidelines when working with students:

- Touching should be in response to the needs of the student and not the needs of the volunteer.
- Touching must be with the student's permission – resistance from the mentee must be respected.
- Touching must avoid the breasts, buttocks, and groin area.
- Touching must be open and not secretive.

Reading Coach volunteers should be aware that parents of students who have been identified for the Reading Coach program will receive a letter which will include information regarding appropriate and inappropriate touch, permission for their student to participate, and RSVP contact information.

### **Reporting Inappropriate Contact**

Should your student tell you of abuse or should you observe signs of abuse, please inform the RSVP Director immediately. Do not hesitate to bring any questions or concerns to the Director who will help you through this process.

Keep in mind, you are not a mandatory reporter; however, if a child discloses to you information about abuse, please follow these guidelines:

- Support their decision to talk with you and reassure them you are a safe person to talk to. Reaffirm that you will help them.
- Be aware of your own reaction and biases.
- Remain calm and receptive to what they share.
- Clearly document exactly what the child told you and how you responded.
- Document all conversations regarding the disclosure in detail.

Determine what happened:

- Follow the child's lead on what they are willing to discuss.
- Who was involved (the alleged perpetrator)?
- How does the student know them?
- When did it happen?
- Were there any other children/victims involved?

Report the incident:

- Tell the child you are required to inform the RSVP Director and that it is his or her job to help.
- Contact the RSVP Director immediately, who will inform the student's school principal.
- Call the Abuse Hotline at 1-800-362-2178, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Be ready to provide identifying information and the whereabouts of the child. You may remain anonymous.

Continue to be a constant supportive person in the life of this student. This is a time when they need your support and trust the most.

There are things you should not do when talking with a child regarding abuse:

- Avoid repeated questioning, which can be detrimental to a child.
- Avoid leading questions.
- Avoid expressing negative emotions regarding the incident.

### **Contact Outside of the Program**

All contact between volunteers and students is restricted to the school and school grounds during the academic year. In general, no additional contact should be initiated outside of this setting in any form, such as but not limited to, face-to-face meetings, phone calls, email, text, or use of social networks.

If a volunteer would like to mentor a student outside of the RSVP programs and school setting, this is possible through the Youth Task Force One-on-One Mentoring Program. RSVP staff will make a referral and help with the process.

### **Contact after the Program Ends**

Breakfast Buddy, Reading Buddy, Reading Coach, and Pen Pal programs end when the school year ends. If you and a student you've been serving wish to maintain a relationship, the best way to do that is through the One-on-One Mentoring Program. Please note, continued relationships will be considered informal and outside of the RSVP program.

Pen Pal Volunteers should be aware that all parents will receive a letter in the spring regarding writing letters after the close of the program. Parents will be asked to notify RSVP if they do not want their student exchanging letters with their Pen Pal and RSVP staff will inform volunteers before the parties. If you do not hear from RSVP and you wish to continue writing letters, feel free to discuss this with your Pen Pal. If you do not want to continue writing letters, that is also acceptable. Many students indicate they want to continue writing but do not always follow-through.

## **Safety Policy**

Concerns regarding safety at a Volunteer Station should be reported to the station supervisor and RSVP Director as soon as possible. If a volunteer is involved in an accident while on assignment, they should notify the RSVP office within 24 hours. Should a volunteer's medical, physical, or other condition change at any time, it is the duty of the volunteer to inform the RSVP Director so that appropriate changes may be made with regard to volunteer activities.

## **Special Limitations Policy**

While representing RSVP, volunteers are prohibited from engaging in the following activities:

- Religious instruction or proselytization
- Conduct worship services
- Labor or anti-labor activities
- Electoral activities
- Voter registration or voter transportation to polls
- Efforts to influence legislation
- Activities which would otherwise be performed by an employee, result in the displacement of an employee, or impair existing contracts for service

## **Volunteer Status**

Volunteers will remain active throughout the program year in which they serve. At the end of each year, volunteers will be asked if they want to continue their volunteer service. They may choose to remain active, go on a temporary leave of absence (see policy), or withdraw from their service with RSVP. Volunteers may also change their volunteer status at any time by notifying RSVP staff.

## **Withdrawal/Dismissal Policy**

A volunteer may withdraw from service at any time. The Volunteer Station may also request the removal of a volunteer. Volunteers may be dismissed for reasons including, but not limited to, absenteeism, misconduct, breach of confidentiality, or serving under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.

Discussion of dismissing a volunteer will occur between RSVP staff, Volunteer Station staff, and the volunteer to clarify the situation and resolve conflicts. All decisions regarding the dismissal of a volunteer will be agreed upon by the RSVP Director and the Volunteer Station Supervisor.