

Volunteers

Concepts and Issues Paper

March 2005

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of the Document

This paper was developed to accompany the *Model Policy on Volunteers* developed by the IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center. This paper provides essential background material and supporting documentation to provide greater understanding of the developmental philosophy and implementation requirements for the model policy. This material will be of value to law enforcement executives in their efforts to tailor the model to the requirements and circumstances of their community and their law enforcement agency.

B. Background

Because of the arrival of community policing, volunteers have become a common presence within law enforcement agencies. Many volunteer with their law enforcement to fulfill civic responsibility and to give back to officers that provide for their safety. Volunteering in law enforcement benefits the agency, the volunteer, and the community. Agencies are designed and staffed to provide law enforcement services to the community, but there is always more to do. Volunteers allow law enforcement agencies and officers to focus on policing and enforcement functions by providing supplemental or support services, such as administrative assistance or citizen patrols.

Investing in a volunteer program can help the agency's staff fulfill their primary functions and provide services that may not otherwise be offered. Volunteers can help provide services that the public wants but that sworn or civilian staff may not have the time or ability to furnish. Volunteers can also enhance law enforcement-community relations. A community member who volunteers with your agency will gain a better understanding of the agency itself and law enforcement as a whole. These volunteers can serve as your agency's ambassadors to the community and can in turn provide valuable feedback to the agency.

A volunteer program will not reach its full potential without the involvement and support of paid employees, sworn and civilian. One of the challenges facing law enforcement agencies with volunteer programs is helping employees understand the purpose and value of the volunteer. The best way to do that is to involve employees in the program's planning and development and continually educate them about the program.

II. PROCEDURES

A. Administration

Although establishing a volunteer program can help to free up sworn and civilian staff, such a program is not wholly self-sufficient. The success of a volunteer program is strongly tied to how well the program is managed. Often, a department employee is charged with managing the volunteer program on top of several other duties and is unprepared to address personnel issues that may arise. Although many duties related to managing a volunteer program are of an administrative nature, such as scheduling and maintaining appropriate records and paperwork, the volunteer coordinator is still managing a frequently large number of unpaid employees. A volunteer coordinator must receive some type of training regarding personnel and volunteer management to address any issues that may arise. Volunteer coordinators should have a complete understanding of the department's policies and be able to convey them to a person who may be unfamiliar with the language and culture in a law enforcement setting.

The volunteer coordinator or his or her designee is responsible for maintaining personnel records for each volunteer. These records should include written letters of reference.

It is imperative for the volunteer coordinator to maintain an up-to-date volunteer handbook to outline operational guidelines, procedures, and policies about the governance and function of the program. Specific issues to address include the following:

- Confidentiality
- Time requirements
- Training
- Use of equipment
- Uniforms
- Release

The volunteer coordinator is responsible for planning periodic recognition events. Recognizing the effort and dedication of volunteers can be easily overlooked. Recognizing your volunteers helps convey the message that they play an important and valued role in the agency and can help retain volunteers. Although many volunteers do not expect recognition, their efforts should not be taken for granted. This recognition need not be expensive or time-consuming to be meaningful.

The volunteer coordinator should be involved in and kept apprised of any issues and documentation related to discipline and termination of a volunteer.

Liability. The model policy on volunteers does not address the issue of liability; however, liability concerns related to volunteers in a law enforcement agency are common. There is no universal solution to liability concerns, as applicable laws will vary by state and jurisdiction. You should consult with your local government attorney to determine what coverage is and can be provided. Other agencies and departments in your unit of government that use volunteers are likely to have dealt with this issue. Ask them for advice.

Liability concerns must be addressed prior to the implementation of a volunteer program. There should be a complete understanding regarding the liability of the department as well as the individual while volunteering.

Costs. Establishing and maintaining a volunteer program is not a cost-free endeavor; however, the return on investment can be substantial. The costs associated with establishing and maintaining a volunteer program will vary depending on the scope of opportunities you offer. Costs to consider include the following:

- Personnel (salary and benefits for the person managing-volunteers)
- Screening
- Training
- Work-space requirements
- Supplies
- Equipment
- Uniforms
- Recognition

B. Hiring

Recruitment. Many organizations make the mistake of recruiting volunteers before the volunteer program has been planned and fully developed. It is imperative to know your agency's needs and the resources that can be dedicated to volunteers prior to seeking volunteers.

The purpose of a law enforcement volunteer program is to supplement and support, not supplant, current agency employees. The first step in establishing a volunteer program is to conduct an agency needs assessment. These needs may include supplemental duties that sworn employees do not have the time or willingness to perform.

It is imperative to include employees in the program's planning and development process. Employees can help identify activities and functions that can be performed by a volunteer. The identification of activities performed by a volunteer is limited only by your creativity and the ability to provide program structure, management, and guidance.

The characteristics of your agency and community will influence the need for, acceptance of, and availability of volunteers. Factors to consider include agency size, community size, citizen demographics such as the age and transience of the population, and the presence of higher education institutions, philanthropic organizations, and tourist destinations.

Research on volunteerism has consistently shown that people who are asked to volunteer are far more likely to volunteer than those who are not asked¹. To have a successful volunteer program, you must seek out individuals who are qualified for the work they will be performing. Frequently, staff and current volunteers who share information with their peers serve as the best

mechanism for recruitment. This word-of-mouth recruitment can be invaluable, as volunteers frequently become protective of the program's reputation and share the agency's desire to maintain its respect and integrity.

Screening. Screening is critical. Law enforcement agencies must screen individuals before bringing them on board as volunteers². Regardless of the function the volunteer is serving, their actions while volunteering, and outside of volunteering, will reflect on the department. A community member is unlikely to distinguish volunteers from paid employees and will expect volunteers to provide the same high level of service and demonstrate the same high level of professionalism.

The level of screening will depend on the role the volunteer will be serving; individuals with access to confidential information or agency equipment may require more intensive screening. The model policy on volunteers recommends that agencies conduct a documented investigation of any volunteer applicant's background, including traffic and criminal records, employment history, and references.

Selection and Placement. Two issues should be considered in determining the selection and placement of a volunteer. First, you need to understand the specific needs of the agency. Second, the skills of a potential volunteer should be considered. Don't assume that a volunteer is interested in using the same skills or serving the same function as he or she may serve professionally. An unhappy or unfulfilled volunteer is more likely to leave your agency, thus wasting your investment in recruiting and training.

C. Responsibilities

Volunteers must be prepared for the pace and atmosphere of a law enforcement agency. It is the responsibility of the volunteer coordinator to help volunteers acclimate to and navigate the agency's environment.

Examples of the activities currently undertaken by volunteers in law enforcement agencies include the following:

- Administrative duties
 - Enter data
 - Type reports, file, answer phones, and perform other office tasks
 - Help front-counter personnel by answering citizen inquiries, directing citizens to the proper police unit, and performing routine administrative tasks
 - Help the telephone reporting unit take reports of minor and no-suspect crimes (such as theft from auto)
- Citizen patrols
 - Read parking meters
 - Provide bike patrols in community parks
 - Patrol shopping centers during the holiday season to assist with stranded motorists or lost children
 - Write citations for violations of handicapped parking restrictions
 - Participate in marine patrols
 - Check homes of residents on vacation
- School-related activities
 - Assist in school-based programs such as DARE
 - Assist with after-school programs
- Neighborhood Watch
 - Join or start a Neighborhood Watch program
- Research
 - Conduct research using department and regional computer programs
 - Compile crime data for specific area problems

- Collect statistical data
- Participate in the following:
 - A citizens advisory board
 - Search-and-rescue activities
 - Role-playing and training scenarios for officers
 - The department's speakers bureau
 - Graffiti abatement programs
- Provide assistance to the following:
 - Citizens police academies
 - Crime analysts
 - Courts
 - Police athletic league activities
 - Special events
 - Crime prevention programs
 - Fingerprinting
- Other duties
 - Staff community policing sub-stations
 - Provide support for traffic and crowd control
 - Provide short-term care of juveniles in protective custody
 - Staff a department booth and distribute information on police services at community events
 - Become reserve or auxiliary officers
 - Join Explorer posts (young adults)
 - Complete internships (students)
- Apply special skills:
 - Counselors can provide support to victims of crime and assist with crisis intervention
 - Mechanics can help maintain police vehicles
 - Faith leaders can become involved in chaplain programs
 - University researchers, statisticians, and criminologists can help law enforcement agencies conduct research
 - Public health officials can help officers develop public safety plans and train for biohazard management
 - Architects, landscapers, and building engineers can suggest ways community centers can improve or modify buildings and landscape designs to prevent or reduce crime
 - Security specialists can conduct free security reviews for local schools, after-school programs, or places of worship
 - Marketers and artists can help local law enforcement design community public safety campaigns and supporting materials
 - Bilingual individuals can assist with translation
 - Computer programmers can help their local law enforcement agencies develop or improve Web sites and record management systems

The activities volunteers are permitted to engage in should be determined by your agency in consultation with your local government attorney to ensure that applicable local and state laws governing law enforcement activities are being followed.

D. Position Description

Comprehensive position descriptions detailing the specific duties and expectations of volunteer positions should be drafted. The descriptions can be helpful in screening, selecting, and evaluating potential volunteers. A position description can be used to determine if the volunteer is meeting department expectations. As with other guiding documents, the position descriptions should be periodically reviewed to ensure that they are accurate.³

Training. All volunteers should receive an orientation to the

agency before taking on any responsibilities. This orientation can supplement the information provided in the volunteer handbook. You may consider including the following items in the orientation:

- A welcome from the chief executive or another top official
- An agency history
- The agency structure and organizational chart
- A tour of the facility
- A glossary of language and abbreviations they may encounter
- Emergency procedures
- Timesheets and other required forms
- Program policies and procedures
- Procedures they should follow if they receive a complaint
- Where he or she should report
- Employees he or she will be working with
- Where to store belongings
- Where to park

There may be additional mandatory training required by your state or local government. Upon completion of the orientation, you may consider asking the volunteer to sign an agreement acknowledging applicable policies and procedures and a commitment to a certain schedule or number of volunteer hours and shifts.

Some agencies include their citizen police academy (CPA) as a required or suggested supplement to their orientation. Attending a CPA can help provide a broad understanding of agency operations and its various units.

Training should be linked to the specific tasks the volunteer is expected to complete and should be tailored to address the expectations and responsibilities associated with the volunteer's specific role. Supplemental and ongoing training will keep volunteers apprised of policy and programmatic changes and further develop their skills.

E. Position Requirements

Fitness for Duty. Volunteers should be held to the same standards as that of paid employees working in a similar capacity.

Dress Code. Volunteers working within the department should be expected to meet the same dress standards and expectations as paid employees working in a similar capacity. It should be clear to community members that interact with a volunteer in a public setting, such as directing traffic or conducting a citizen patrol, that the volunteer is representing the department in an official capacity. While volunteers may wear uniforms similar to that of paid officers, the uniforms must be distinct from that of sworn officers (in shirt color, for instance) and clearly identify the individual as a volunteer.

Confidentiality. It is imperative for volunteers to understand and appreciate the sensitive nature of information they may encounter prior to beginning their duties. Volunteers should only have access to information for which they have received the appropriate security clearance. This access emphasizes the need to complete a thorough background investigation during the initial screening process.

Property and Equipment. Expectations related to the care and maintenance of property and equipment should be the same as that of a paid employee. Identification cards issued to volunteers should only be used by the volunteer while on duty and should not be used for any other purpose.

F. Disciplining & Evaluation

Disciplining Volunteers. You must develop procedures related

to disciplining and releasing a volunteer before establishing a volunteer program and make these procedures clear to potential volunteers. Volunteers serve at the pleasure of the CEO and interests and rights related to disciplinary procedures and release is not the same as those of paid employees. A volunteer can be released at any point without cause.

Evaluation. Regularly assessing the needs of the agency can help guide the direction of the program to ensure that volunteers are being used to support and supplement staff in needed areas. The model policy on volunteers recommends that an evaluation of the volunteer program should be conducted yearly. Assessing the costs and benefits of the program can help decision-makers create budgets and distribute resources. As such, it is important to document the resources required to manage, implement, and maintain your volunteer program. A volunteer program is not a free endeavor, but the return on investment can be substantial. You may consider collecting the number of volunteer hours contributed, identifying services such as home vacation checks that would otherwise not be provided and the number of activities completed, if applicable.

Due to the sensitive nature of volunteering in a law enforcement agency, many agencies choose to routinely assess their volunteers. This decision should be made at the agency level. It is important to discuss what evaluative information is documented and what paperwork you choose to complete with your local government's attorney. This can be a valuable tool to help you do the following:

- Select a volunteer for formal recognition
- Identify and prevent potential problems
- Determine new responsibilities and roles
- Obtain feedback about the structure and management of the program

If an evaluation is completed, the person most familiar with the work of the volunteer should complete this personnel evaluation. Many agencies choose to update their personnel files and complete another traffic, arrest and criminal records check at the time of evaluation to ensure their information is current and that the volunteer has not violated any laws that would compromise their standing as a volunteer.

G. Additional Resources

Additional information about law enforcement volunteer programs is available through the IACP's Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program at www.policevolunteers.org or 1-800-THE-IACP. The Web site includes a directory of law enforcement volunteer programs, sample documents and resources to assist in the establishment and enhancement of a volunteer program. Much of the information contained within this document is further discussed in the IACP/VIPS document *Volunteer Programs: Enhancing Public Safety by Leveraging Resources*.

Endnotes

¹ Independent Sector. *Giving & Volunteering in the United States 2001*.

² Sample screening forms are available on the Volunteers in Police Service Program's Online Resource Guide at www.policevolunteers.org/law/resources/.

³ Sample position descriptions are available on the Volunteers in Police Service Program's Online Resource Guide at www.policevolunteers.org/law/resources/.

Every effort has been made by the IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this model policy incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that no "model" policy can meet all the needs of any given law enforcement agency. Each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of federal court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives and demands; often divergent law enforcement strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities among other factors.

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