

Innovative Ideas: Engaging Volunteers in Unique Positions

Many law enforcement departments begin a volunteer program by determining the best way to use civilians to support the departments' overall operations. As programs evolve, new ways to engage committed volunteers and recruit new volunteers emerge. This issue of *VIPS in Focus* looks at the innovative volunteer activities of three departments, Aurora, Colorado, Police Department; Davenport, Iowa, Police Department; and Vineland, New Jersey, Police Department.

Aurora, Colorado, Police Department

Aurora, Colorado, a suburb of Denver, is the state's third largest city with a population of more than 325,000 residents. Aurora is located just minutes from the Denver International Airport, and major employers in the area include aerospace, technology, and health care companies. The Aurora Police Department (APD) serves the 154.1 square mile mostly suburban community with 669 officers and 138 civilian staff.

Volunteer Recruitment

The Aurora Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) program began in 1982. The program currently has 96 VIPS volunteers, in addition

to 29 Explorer Scouts, 41 Victim Service Unit volunteers, and one chaplain. Volunteers are recruited primarily through APD's citizen police academy (CPA). APD offers its CPA four times a year, two of which are targeted to senior citizens. Volunteers are not required to attend the CPA, but many do. After 60 citizen police academy sessions and 1,638 attendees, CPA graduates have formed an active citizen police academy alumni association with 135 members that meets quarterly and hosts a variety of events, such as community fingerprinting fairs, assisting at the CPA or D.A.R.E. graduation, DUI check point assistance, and providing role players for SWAT team training. The city and the police department place volunteerism as a high priority and allow plenty of space on the city websites to advertise volunteer opportunities.



Aurora Police Department volunteers take fingerprints for members of the public.

Screening Potential Volunteers

Once potential volunteers submit a completed application, they are fingerprinted, and interviewed by the civilian volunteer coordinator. The Aurora Police Department Local Records Management System is checked for Aurora contacts including victims, suspects, arrests, probation, summonses and warrants. Criminal histories are also checked with the Colorado Crime Information Center and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). All APD volunteers used to undergo a polygraph interview, but polygraphs became time and cost prohibitive. Today, volunteers sign a waiver agreeing to a polygraph examination if necessary at any point during their time as a volunteer with APD. Upon acceptance into the program, volunteers sign a contract acknowledging their responsibilities and indicating their commitment for either six months or a year.

Assisting Around the Department

APD's VIPS volunteers perform a variety of administrative duties to allow officers and staff to attend to their primary duties. Volunteers staff the front desk at APD's district offices and act as communications assistants. Filing, scanning, and shredding in the records department are popular volunteer job activities. Volunteers are also the primary operators of APD's fingerprinting program for members of the public. Volunteers take fingerprints and collect the associated fees twice a week. Volunteers only handle fingerprints for things like employment or volunteer applications. Residents pay \$11 for fingerprint services and non-residents pay \$22. Many non-residents find

this suburban department more accessible and are comfortable with the fee for the convenient and fast service APD volunteers provide.

Creative Activities

APD has partnered with the municipal district court for an innovative volunteer activity. Three days a week an APD volunteer verifies vehicle window tints at the court house. Aurora city code limits the amount of tint on car windows. If ticketed individuals remove the tint, the fine is waived. Upon arrival at the court house, a volunteer inspects the vehicle with a tint reader and verifies the individual is compliant with the city code. The volunteer is always accompanied by a court marshal to ensure safety.

APD also engages volunteers in creating composite drawings of suspects to assist investigators. Volunteers must complete an eight-hour training course on the composite drawing software and the first volunteer to participate spent many hours practicing with the program after completing the training. Requests for this service come from the department crime lab. Volunteers meet with the victim or witness and hold a one-on-one interview to create the drawing. Interviews average three hours depending on the age of the victim and his or her recollection of the incident. This volunteer activity began with one energetic individual and now 3 additional volunteers are scheduled for training to participate in the activity. The first composite drawing created by the original volunteer led APD officers to arrest a suspect charged with robbery and kidnapping within two weeks.

This volunteer has submitted 35 sketches, including one unidentified body, to detectives in the crime lab thus far.

Benefits of Volunteers

In 2010, APD volunteers collectively completed 25,831 hours of volunteer service which at a rate of \$21.36¹ provided an added value to APD's operations of \$551,750.16. Fingerprint services offered by volunteers have generated \$26,832.00 for APD's general fund.

Davenport, Iowa, Police Department

Davenport, Iowa, the third largest city in Iowa and the Scott County seat, is located in the Quad Cities metropolitan area and sits on the Mississippi River. Davenport is home to more than 100,000 residents. The Davenport Police Department (DPD) budget is \$20.7 million dollars for 168 sworn officers, 43 civilian employees, and 24 active volunteers.

Recruitment and Screening

Davenport's Volunteers in Police Service program began in 2005, and is managed by a civilian volunteer coordinator and overseen

by a sergeant and a corporal. Volunteers are recruited primarily through word of mouth, but newspaper articles, television stories, and a video on the department's website have also helped in recruiting volunteers. Interested individuals may submit their applications electronically through the department's website. Potential volunteers complete forms to check their employment and criminal records, and they are required to have a valid Iowa driver license and superior driving record. Prospective volunteers are interviewed by the volunteer coordinator and sworn supervisors. Volunteers must be county residents and commit to providing a minimum of 16 hours a month.

Upon acceptance, volunteers meet with the volunteer coordinator for four hours of orientation. Orientation includes an introduction to department command staff; an overview of the volunteer manual; and department policies on integrity, ethics, work place harassment, unbiased profiling, and the incident command structure policy. Volunteers sign a confidentiality agreement, and receive training on interacting with the mentally challenged. Volunteers are trained in the incident command system, defensive driving, and all-terrain vehicle driving. DPD provides volunteers with radios, flashlights, vests, and uniforms, including summer and winter jackets. They are also provided with ID badges.



Davenport VIPS patrol vehicle

¹ 2010 National dollar value of a volunteer hour. http://www.policevolunteers.org/resources/references/?fa=value_vol_time

Volunteer Involvement

Volunteers are a strong presence in the community and assist in deterring crime by identifying and reporting city code violations and attending training programs to learn about law enforcement. Volunteers provide assistance during neighborhood and city wide activities and act as the eyes and ears of the department. Volunteers assist with runaway reports, extra patrols, and background checks. Volunteers provide investigative support for the criminal investigation division and administrative support for the department.

DPD volunteers step up wherever they are needed. Two volunteers carefully logged more than 300,000 pieces of evidence when the department moved buildings. DPD interns conduct background checks on landlords, collect stolen bikes, and work in the traffic unit. Currently DPD has one graduate and one undergraduate intern and the volunteer coordinator's long term goal is to incorporate local Davenport colleges and universities into the VIPS program.



Davenport VIPS prepare for their patrol shift.

Crime Prevention

Crime in Davenport is down more than 35 percent over the last five years and specific programs can receive some of the credit for that effort. DPD offers the Landlord Education Assistance Program (LEAP) to property owners in the city. This crime free multi-housing program is a partnership between law enforcement and rental property managers to help tenants, owners, and managers keep drugs and illegal activities out of rental property and overall crime down in the city. The program provides critical crime prevention information to the landlord, surveys the property, and informs tenants of their rights and responsibilities.

The department offers free background checks to landlords on prospective tenants. DPD has presented LEAP to more than 1,000 landlords and has been so successful that additional volunteers have been recruited on for the sole purpose of conducting background checks. All DPD volunteers are trained how to process background forms and all volunteers start with a mentor to assist them for the first six months. Landlords submit completed forms via fax or email. Volunteers use the information provided by prospective tenants to check the record databases of NCIC, sex offender registries, and protection orders. Volunteers run a check of the city of Davenport, Iowa state courts, and surrounding state court records. Volunteers call the prospective tenants' current landlord and employer. Each form takes an average of 30 minutes to complete, which includes typing comments into the form that will be returned to the landlord. Volunteers staff the background office two to three days a week for about five

hours and every shift has six volunteers. Volunteers process 40 to 50 background checks a day and landlords receive results within 24 hours. Volunteers completed 7,640 background checks on prospective tenants last year. An officer is seated outside the background office to receive applicants that require the attention of the department. Last year 200 of the possible tenants had outstanding warrants and 40 were identified as unregistered sex offenders. These volunteer efforts led to 92 arrests.

Added Value

In 2010, DPD volunteers contributed 7,872 hours valued at \$168,145.92 using the national hourly value of volunteer time. Volunteers recovered 143 stolen bicycles, processed almost 1,500 parental responsibility forms, and recorded more than 1,000 hours assisting with property and evidence.

Vineland, New Jersey, Police Department

Vineland, New Jersey is located halfway between Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Atlantic City, New Jersey. The largest city in the state by square mileage boasts 60,000 residents. Vineland is home to many small businesses, Cumberland County College and a regional medical center. Vineland police patrol an area of 69 square miles which includes a dense downtown area, suburban developments, and farmland. The Vineland Police Department (VPD) serves this community with 145 sworn officers, 30 civilian support staff, and seven volunteer chaplains.



Vineland Police Department chaplains meet to discuss their assignments

Growing the Program

The chaplain program began in 2007 after one year of planning with the chief of police and the now senior chaplain. Interested ordained chaplains submit a letter of intent to the chief of police and include a completed department application along with a membership application to the International Conference of Police Chaplains (ICPC). Approved application packages are forwarded to the senior chaplain. Applicants' criminal history and driving record are checked and interviews take place at their local worship center. Accepted chaplains are provided an orientation from the chief and the senior chaplain who, among other procedural topics, cover the referral assistance program for employees. APD provides chaplains with a membership to ICPC, uniform that differs in color from officers, funding to attend regional training conferences, and invitation to attend any department sponsored in-service training. Chaplains participate in a ride-along with a sergeant as a part of their training. Chaplains can continue ride-alongs by attending daily roll call. VPD chaplains are required to complete a curriculum provided by ICPC. The City of Vineland is self insured and procedures are in place to cover chaplains while in transit and on duty.

Station House Adjustment Program

In 2005, the New Jersey Attorney General mandated the directive Station House Adjustment Program to local law enforcement as a tool to redirect first time juvenile offenders of minor offenses away from formal court proceedings. Generally, when a young person is arrested for a minor crime such as a city code violation or petty disorderly conduct offenses, he or she is offered the opportunity to participate in the station house adjustment program. This program involves the offender, the parent or guardian, and the arresting department's juvenile officer. The program requires that the victim agree to let the offender participate and the juvenile and their family must agree to participate and complete this program to avoid prosecution. The station house adjustment program takes the best interest of everyone involved into account, better serves victims, and resolves the matter locally. The process provides an opportunity to get to the root of the problem, gives errant youth an opportunity to understand the seriousness of his/her behavior, and provides an immediate consequence to the unlawful action. Possible outcomes include mediation, restitution, community service, letter of apology or essay, or parental restriction of driving privileges. A guide for law enforcement provided by the Attorney General's office can be viewed here, <http://www.nj.gov/oag/s-a-guide>.

Applying Mandates Locally

VPD instituted the mandate; however the arresting officer had to remain at the station until all parties have discussed the matter and agreed to participate in the station

house adjustment program. This can be time consuming. Thus, VPD has included the station house adjustment program in the chaplain general order. Upon arrest, a chaplain will be called to meet the juvenile at the station, along with the parent or guardian. Chaplains, with their training, have the ability to counsel juveniles and their parents. Chaplains will explain their role in the process and outline the rules and options for the adjustment program. The chaplain will meet the minor at their community service (if recommended) and be present when the service is completed. Many juveniles have continued volunteering at their service location. None of the juveniles who have successfully completed the station house adjustment program have been known to reoffend.



The Vineland Police Department Chief of Police with the Chaplain Team

Value Added

The chief of police calls regular meetings with the chaplains. Chaplains are required to commit a minimum of eight volunteer hours a month to the department. In 2010, chaplains have provided 1050 hours of service valued at \$22,428.00 using the national hourly value of volunteer time.

For More Information:

Aurora Police Department

Bobbie Hillebrand
 Volunteer Coordinator
 Phone: 303-739-6346
 E-mail: bhillebr@auroragov.org
 URL: www.auroragov.org

Davenport Police Department

Ron Clouse
 VIPS Coordinator
 Phone: 563-326-6141
 E-mail: vips@ci.davenport.ia.us
 URL: www.cityofdavenportiowa.com

Vineland Police Department

Gary Holden
 Senior Chaplain
 Phone: 856-692-4976
 E-mail: gwholden@comcast.net
 URL: www.vinelandcity.org

VIPS Products and Resources:

VIPS Add Value While Budgets Decrease

This publication recognizes the current state of law enforcement budgets and provides suggestions on ways to integrate volunteers to allow sworn and civilian staff to focus on more pressing law enforcement matters. It includes program profiles that offer innovative ideas and activities in law enforcement volunteer programs. *(Available November 2011)*

VIPS Program Directory

Law enforcement agencies can register their volunteer programs and search for others with the online VIPS program directory. Citizens also can locate volunteer opportunities with law enforcement agencies in their communities.

VIPS to VIPS

VIPS to VIPS is a moderated discussion group that allows members to post questions and share information. The purpose of VIPS to VIPS is to provide agencies a forum for cross-site mentoring, the exchange of ideas, and to problem-solve challenges. Participation in VIPS to VIPS is limited to contacts from programs registered with the national VIPS programs.

All resources and products can be found at www.policevolunteers.org.

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program works to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers. VIPS serves as a gateway to resources and information for and about law enforcement volunteer programs. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.



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