

## **Volunteer Orientation**

Orientation is the process of making volunteers understand and feel comfortable with the workings of our agency. Many of you supervise volunteers, and part of that responsibility is orienting them during their first few days of service. Vince Volunteer, bright eyed and enthusiastic, appears at your doorstep, ready and willing to do the job. What next? How can you begin to develop a healthy volunteer-staff relationship?

A brief “official” orientation has been done on behalf of the agency by the Community Resource Manager. You should still take some time to welcome the new volunteer and provide them with background and practical information that they will use to relate what they are doing with the overall function of our department. No matter what form your orientation takes, it may be helpful to think of the volunteer as a visitor in a strange land. Law enforcement is probably new to him or her. The sights and sounds may be exaggerated and unfamiliar. Incidents that you take for granted may make the new volunteer uncomfortable and/or full of questions.

The simplest way to develop the agenda for an orientation session is to ask yourself, “If this were my first day at work, what would I want to know about this place?” Provide a brief tour, during which you may want to include where volunteers sign-in, where to put coats and/or purses, where the restrooms are located, where the vending machines are, and the proper telephone for them to use, including how the phone system works and a phone number for family members to reach them. The tour should include introductions to key people the volunteer needs to know, whether they be persons in their chain of command, office staff they should know, or other volunteers.

The Community Resource Manager has given the new volunteer a handbook with general program guidelines. You will need to help the volunteer become familiar with rules or procedures that are specific to your program or unit.

Some of our more established volunteer programs delegate training and orientation to another, more senior volunteer. If this is true in your area, the volunteer responsible for orientation should introduce you, the supervisor, early in the new volunteer’s service. At this time you can clarify your own relationship to the volunteer. Are you the first person to ask if there’s a question? Under what circumstances do you want to be notified?

A good orientation will help the volunteer contribute productively. Remember that a volunteer who fully understands your program or your unit will serve as an effective communicator with our community, while a confused volunteer can present quite the opposite picture.