

# One Department's Volunteer Experience

## LEARNING FROM THE EUGENE POLICE DEPARTMENT

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**L**ike most law enforcement agencies, the police department in Eugene, Oregon, faces ongoing budget woes and staffing shortages. Police managers are invariably searching for creative techniques to stretch dwindling resources and at the same time advance the department's community policing efforts. One effective and successful strategy the department has implemented is its volunteer program.

Volunteers have provided support to paid staff at the department for many years, but the program lacked continuity. Management of the department's volunteers was handed from one manager to another, all of whom were already juggling full plates. The program was not centralized, program statistics were not maintained, and citizens who called to inquire about volunteer opportunities were often met with confusion as they were transferred from one person to another.

The program's potential was not fully realized until the Eugene City Council approved funding for a full-time coordinator in July 1999. The Eugene Police Department had requested this funding to further community-involved policing efforts.

When the volunteer program was launched in 2000, the department had eight active volunteers. Five volunteers were college students, and the other three were retirees. Volunteer opportunities were focused on clerical support. Six of the eight volunteers assisted at the department's neighborhood police substations.

Challenges to managing a successful police volunteer program include ensuring

### ***Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS): National Efforts Shaped by Local Practice***

In response to new demands on police officers and in keeping with the philosophy of community policing, agencies are turning to civilian volunteers to enable officers to remain on the front lines and working to make communities safer. The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) program provides support and resources for law enforcement agencies interested in developing or enhancing a volunteer program and for citizens who wish to volunteer their time and skills.

**National Efforts:** VIPS is one component of the USA Freedom Corps, an effort to foster a culture of service, citizenship, and responsibility by calling on every American to dedicate at least two years over the course of their life to the service of others. This initiative promotes volunteerism with the message that "everyone can do something."

Programs sharing the common goal of helping communities prevent, prepare for, and respond to crime, natural disasters, and other emergencies are housed within the newly created Citizen Corps under the USA Freedom Corps. Four charter programs fall under the Citizen Corps umbrella: VIPS, Neighborhood Watch, Community Emergency Response Teams, and the Medical Reserve Corps. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is managing and implementing the VIPS program in partnership with and on behalf of the White House Office of the USA Freedom Corps and the U.S. Department of Justice.

Through this program, IACP seeks to do the following:

- Identify promising practices being used in existing VIPS programs and share this information with law enforcement agencies
- Increase the use of volunteers in existing programs
- Help citizens learn about and get involved in VIPS programs in their communities
- Help agencies without a volunteer program get one started

The program's ultimate goal is to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers. The platform for this initiative is [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org), which serves as a gateway to information for law enforcement agencies and citizens interested in law enforcement volunteer programs. VIPS defines a volunteer as a community member who provides supplemental or support services to a law enforcement agency without receiving immediate monetary benefit.

#### **What Citizen Volunteers Can Do:**

Law enforcement volunteer programs are not designed to replace sworn or civilian personnel. Rather, volunteers are used to supplement and enhance existing or envisioned functions to allow law enforcement professionals to do their job in the most effective manner. Volunteers have proven to be a valuable resource, performing such diverse and supportive functions as the following:

- Clerical and data support
- Special event planning
- Search and rescue assistance
- Grant writing
- Transporting mail between substations

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- Civilian patrol of local recreation or shopping areas
- Assisting at community fairs by providing fingerprinting and DNA kits for children

- Staffing community resource centers or substations in malls or tourist areas

As Attorney General John Ashcroft stated, "Volunteers can assist police in performing routine duties that are necessary to the efficient operation of their department. Though the work may not be glamorous, it is essential." These activities complement other traditional volunteer and community programs such as reserve officer units, chaplain programs, student internships, citizen academies, Explorer Posts, Neighborhood Watch, and citizen advisory boards.

**VIPS Web Site:** The IACP is building an online database of existing law enforcement volunteer programs at [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org). The database summarizes volunteer opportunities available in over 600 law enforcement volunteer programs. The database is a searchable resource for agencies that are looking to network and reach out to programs offering similar or desired volunteer roles. An online resource guide, providing sample policies, forms, job

descriptions, and training materials from some of these registered programs is also available on the site.

Increasingly, the Internet is becoming one of the most popular media for volunteer recruitment. As such, the database also serves as a resource for citizens searching for volunteer opportunities in their community.

To be eligible for registration with VIPS, a program must involve volunteers who work directly with a state or local law enforcement agency through an in-house volunteer program or a program operating in concert with a law enforcement agency, such as a Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association or a Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Registered programs include agencies of all sizes and incorporate volunteers numbering from a handful to several thousand.

**VIPS Resources:** The national VIPS Program will also provide support to police agencies interested in starting a volunteer program. Here are just a few projects IACP is working on now:

- Developing a comprehensive resource guide on law enforcement volunteer programs that will identify common principles for establishing or enhancing a volunteer program and examples of di-

verse volunteer program models from across the country

- Developing a technical assistance component to help local agencies determine their volunteer needs, and to design a program that will effectively meet those needs

- Planning a series of regional symposia to introduce and share VIPS resources and provide a forum for regional networking

- Establishing mentoring relationships between agencies with well-established programs and agencies that are just getting started

- Facilitating regional training programs using the Regional Community Policing Institutes (RCPIs) of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)

The VIPS national effort, together with the other Citizen Corps programs, can enhance your local law enforcement agency's homeland security efforts and create safer communities.

*For more information on the national Volunteers in Police Service Program, please contact the VIPS staff at 800-THE-IACP or [info@policevolunteers.org](mailto:info@policevolunteers.org), or visit [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org).*

that there are a variety of interesting and engaging volunteer opportunities, that those opportunities are aligned with the department's mission, and that the assignments augment and complement the work in which paid employees are engaged.

Timely dissemination of information concerning volunteer activities, especially any new assignments, minimizes misunderstandings that could lead to concerns among bargaining unit employees. The Eugene Police Department has learned that it is essential to have a full-time program coordinator on board to manage the volunteers, work with staff to develop appropriate volunteer assignments, disseminate program information, and oversee day-to-day issues.

### ***Involving Seniors and Retirees***

Recruiting volunteers has never been an issue for the Eugene Police Department. In a typical month, between 10 and 20 citizens contact the program coordinator to inquire about volunteer opportunities. When the program was first launched, most of the volunteers who followed through with the application, interview, and background check were college students and young adults.

Because retirees have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share and often have some time to spare, the department hoped to tap into the local retirement community to further expand the program. Retirees would often inquire about volunteer opportunities, but once they learned that the majority of the opportunities were focused on clerical work, they would offer a polite "Thank you, but no thank you." Many retirees wanted nothing to do with duties involving filing, copying, and data entry. They wanted assignments that were out in the community and focused on interacting with people.

### ***Seniors on Patrol***

In 2000 Police Chief James R. Hill, now retired, suggested that the volunteer program implement a Seniors on Patrol program. Hill's vision was to develop a partnership between local retirees and the Eugene Police Department in an effort to enhance the department's community policing programs. After months of researching and planning, the department began recruiting volunteers to join the program. Once word got out to the community, there was an immediate surge of interest among local retirees.

The Seniors on Patrol program is open to seniors and retirees 55 and older. Volunteers must graduate from a five-day, 40-hour training academy and be available to serve a minimum of 16 hours per month.

The department held its first Seniors on Patrol academy in October 2001. A class of eight volunteers graduated from the academy and soon joined field trainers on patrol.

The Seniors on Patrol team functions as an auxiliary unit of the department. Working in pairs, team members wear department-issued uniforms that identify them as police volunteers. They operate specially marked department vehicles that are equipped with police radios and cell phones. These volunteers do not take enforcement action and have no powers of arrest beyond those of any private citizen. Their primary duty is to address neighborhood crime and safety issues by observing and reporting suspicious activity and providing a highly visible community policing presence. With the Seniors on Patrol teams tackling nonenforcement issues, police officers are better able to focus on front-line duties that require a sworn officer.

Examples of specific duties include the following:

- Patrolling neighborhood streets, bike paths, and pedestrian paths

- Transporting marked police decoy vehicles as part of a neighborhood speed reduction program

- Using radar guns to observe and log speeders as part of a traffic safety program where educational letters are sent to the registered owners of vehicles observed traveling at a rate of more than 10 miles per hour over the posted speed limit

- Documenting license plates of parked vehicles in which packages and other valuables are in plain view and then mailing letters to the registered owners of these vehicles to alert them of the potential for vehicle break-ins and to offer crime prevention tips

- Conducting house checks for residents of Eugene who request the extra patrol while they are away from home on vacation

- Transporting department vehicles to and from Fleet Services for maintenance

- Participating in a variety of department-sponsored crime prevention and community policing efforts

Although the majority of the program's funding and resources come from the department, the Eugene-Springfield New Car Dealers Association generously donated a Ford F-150 pick-up truck to the program.

### **Additional Senior- and Retiree-Focused Volunteer Assignments**

Once the Seniors on Patrol team was operational, several other senior- and retiree-focused volunteer opportunities were implemented.

**Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician:** The department's only certified child passenger safety technician is a volunteer who graduated from a 40-hour training program sponsored by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Acting as a community resource, this volunteer attends local car seat clinics and checks for correct installation, damage, recalls, and size and age appropriateness of car seats.

**Graffiti Tracking:** Based on requests from the Special Investigations Unit, volunteers photograph graffiti and assist with downloading and electronically storing digital photos.

**Speakers Bureau:** The volunteer speakers bureau offers crime prevention presentations on fraud, consumer scams, and identity theft to service clubs, retirement communities, church groups, and other groups. The volunteers developed a 13-page crime prevention handout that is distributed to everyone who attends the presentations. In 2002, speakers bureau volunteers gave 38 presentations to an estimated 955 community members.

### **Other Volunteer Opportunities**

The Eugene police volunteer program has steadily expanded since its inception. As volunteer positions and opportunities are developed, new volunteers of all ages enthusiastically join the program. Each of the department's five divisions has ongoing volunteer assignments. In total, there are nearly 30 different volunteer positions.

In 2002, 79 volunteers contributed nearly 10,000 hours of service. The department's volunteers range in age from 15 to 80, with nearly 60 percent over the age of 50. A number of the department's dedicated volunteers work full-time in paying jobs but still

## **Volunteer programs can help agencies stretch resources and keep officers on patrol.**

manage to volunteer a few hours each week. The department has developed partnerships with local high schools and colleges to give students opportunities to learn while earning school credit. Citizens interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement, whether as a civilian or a sworn officer, seek volunteer opportunities to explore career options firsthand, meet employees, and get a foot in the door.

Nineteen volunteers are graduates of the department's citizen police academy (CPA). The CPA is a 13-week program designed to educate the public about Eugene's police operations. The academy provides citizens with an understanding of the officer selection process, training standards, police procedures, investigative techniques, the community policing philosophy, and much more. Many CPA graduates have such a positive feeling about the department after graduating that they want to do what they can to help support the department, and volunteering is a great way to assist. Additional examples of volunteer assignments include the following activities:

**Financial Crimes Unit.** Volunteers help detectives track victims of forgery, identity theft, and credit card fraud, and track suspects in bad check (insufficient funds/account closed) cases by entering information from police reports into a database.

**Forensic Evidence Unit.** This is the department's most popular volunteer position. There are usually between 20 and 25 people on the waiting list to volunteer. Volunteers file adult arrest fingerprint cards, do data entry, file developed film and latent

prints, sort and enter fingerprint card information into AIRS (area information records system), and stock lab van supplies.

**Interagency Narcotics Enforcement Team.** Volunteers assist with selected day-to-day office and administrative tasks, including management of the team's tip line, which involves documenting calls and doing any necessary follow-up by phone or computer.

**Kids Safety Town.** Kids Safety Town is an accident prevention program for children entering kindergarten. It is a comprehensive educational program that introduces preschool children to safety awareness. This nationally certified and accredited program emphasizes pedestrian and bicycle safety. The program also covers school bus safety, poison prevention, basic fire prevention, car passenger safety, and water safety. Volunteers assist in the planning and administration of Kids Safety Town, help coordinate the daily group activities, and photograph program activities.

**Neighborhood Watch.** Volunteers prepare informational packets and assist with data entry. Volunteers who are experienced with Neighborhood Watch give presentations to new groups, offering tips on how to start and maintain a successful Neighborhood Watch group.

**Office of Professional Standards.** Volunteers organize commendations in chronological order, scan them, and send them electronically. Other duties include routing completed commendations, making copies, and data entry.

**Operations Analysis Unit.** Volunteers enter data for nonserialized pawned and stolen property and file police reports.

**Police Substations.** The department has four neighborhood substations. Volunteers help staff the stations by greeting the public, providing phone reception, connecting citizens with area resources, distributing information on police department services, and providing clerical support.

**Property Control Unit.** Volunteers in the Property Control Unit help police property specialists dispose of property that is no longer of evidentiary value, assist with auction transport, move property and evidence, and assist with processing requests for dispositions to police officers.

**Public Information Office.** Volunteers assist with the publication of the department's monthly newsletter, "The Rap Sheet." Other opportunities include dubbing taped news stories and taking photographs.

**Records Section.** Volunteers help with filing, photocopying, data entry, and purging files.

**School Resource Team.** Volunteers assist the department's Crime Prevention Specialists by mentoring at-risk students, helping students develop problem-solv-

ing skills, participating in class presentations, and participating in after school homework clubs.

**SWAT Team and Crowd Control Team.** Volunteers assist the SWAT and crowd control teams during training scenarios where actors are needed. Volunteers play roles such as protestors, victims, and innocent bystanders.

**Volunteer Program Administration.** Volunteers assist the coordinator of the volunteer program by scanning photos, processing mail-outs, and doing data entry.

### ***A Win/Win Situation***

When citizens who receive police services are helping to deliver those services by volunteering, a closer connection is made between the police department and the public. In the three-plus years since the Eugene Police Department's volunteer program was launched, it has become a key component of the department's community policing program. Implementation of the program has resulted in strong partnerships between the Eugene citizenry and the law enforcement community.

For more information on the national Volunteers in Police Service Program, please contact the VIPS staff at 1-800-THE-IACP or [info@policevolunteers.org](mailto:info@policevolunteers.org) or visit [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org). ❖

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