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Law Enforcement Volunteerism:Leveraging Resources to Enhance Public Safety

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Law enforcement agencies are facing an increased workload in a resource-constrained environment. Many agencies are turning to volunteers to provide support for and enhancement of their efforts. But police volunteerism is not a new phenomenon. Volunteers have been formally and informally supporting law enforcement efforts for more than a century through reserve, auxiliary, and posse programs. With the growth and proliferation of community policing, volunteer programs have grown to include activities as varied as interpretation services, citizen patrols, and victim assistance.

Law enforcement volunteers perform service for a department without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for services rendered. They include interns, chaplains, reserve officers, Explorers, and persons providing administrative support, among others. Volunteer programs are as varied and diverse as law enforcement agencies, and each program is tailored to the needs and resources of the agency and its community; there are many successful examples.

What Can Volunteers Do for My Agency?

Law enforcement volunteer programs are not designed to replace sworn or civilian employees. 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 and very important people, performing many diverse and supportive functions.

Volunteers can provide innumerable benefits to a department, including maximizing existing resources, enhancing public safety and services, and improving community relations. Investing in a volunteer program can help a department's employees fulfill their primary functions and provide services that may not otherwise be offered, allowing law enforcement agencies and officers to focus on policing and enforcement functions. For

example, staffing a substation with volunteers can expand its hours of operation and allow officers to increase their patrols.

Volunteers can help provide services that the public wants but that sworn or civilian staff may not have time to furnish. These services may include fingerprinting children, patrolling shopping centers, checking on homebound residents, or checking the security of vacationing residents' homes. Volunteers can act as extra sets of eyes and ears for patrol officers by participating in nonhazardous, nonenforcement activities such as citizen patrols or Neighborhood Watch programs.

Volunteers can also enhance law enforcement-community relations. A community member who volunteers with his or her local law enforcement agency will have a better understanding of that agency and law enforcement as a whole. Like graduates of citizen police academies, volunteers can serve as well-informed ambassadors in your community.

An agency looking to establish a law enforcement volunteer program or enhance an existing program need take into account several considerations. As law enforcement volunteer programs are tailored to the needs and resources of the law enforcement agency and its community, there are many successful examples for how a program is funded or managed.

Investing in a Volunteer Program

Establishing and maintaining a volunteer program is not a cost-free endeavor; but many agencies find that the return on their investment can be substantial. The San Diego Police Department, for instance, reports that in 2004 it spent approximately \$585,000 on the staffing, the equipment, and the management of its four volunteer programs. But the department estimates the value of the hours contributed by volunteers at more than \$2.65 million.

The costs associated with establishing and maintaining a volunteer program varies with the size of the agency and the scope of volunteer opportunities offered. Costs to consider include the following:

- Personnel (salary and benefits for the program's manager or coordinator)
- Screening
- Training
- Workspace requirements
- Supplies
- Equipment
- Uniforms
- Recognition

In the United States, law enforcement volunteer programs are funded through a variety of mechanisms, including federal and state grant programs such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Citizen Corps Program. Agencies may also choose to partner with an existing local nonprofit association that can raise funds and secure nonprofit status. Local businesses or organizations also support volunteer programs by providing in-kind services or donations ranging from a gift certificate to recognize a volunteer to a vehicle used in a citizen patrol program.

Considering the services and support provided by volunteers that would otherwise not be provided, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Annually, Independent Sector, a coalition of nonprofits, foundations, and corporations, calculates an average hourly value of volunteer time. The value is based on the average earnings for private, nonagricultural workers, as calculated by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, and is increased by 12 percent to account for fringe benefits. The 2004 national average hourly value of volunteer time is \$17.55.

Liability Concerns

Liability and risk management is a common concern when establishing a volunteer program. The applicable liability laws vary by state; local government attorneys can help departments determine what coverage can be provided. Some agencies have partnered with the local office of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), a program under the USA Freedom Corps umbrella. RSVP participants are eligible for accident and liability coverage through their RSVP-sponsoring agency at no cost.

Another source for information about insurance coverage is a nearby law enforcement agency that offers volunteer opportunities. A listing of existing law enforcement volunteer programs by state is available at (www.policevolunteers.org). As volunteer programs have an established history in many agencies, liability issues have and can be successfully addressed and need not be a barrier to the implementation of a volunteer

program.

Policies and Procedures

Once a person joins the agency as a volunteer, he or she must be made aware of the expectations, policies and procedures to be followed. Establishing operational guidelines and policies about the governance and function of a volunteer program are imperative at the outset. Having policies provides the structure to manage the program equitably and can prevent future problems. The National Law Enforcement Policy Center, a collaborative project between the IACP and Bureau of Justice Assistance, offers a model policy on volunteers at no cost. Specific policies for volunteers may include the following:

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

Volunteers also need to be made aware of general agency policies and procedures they must follow.

Recruitment

Qualified persons are essential to a successful law enforcement volunteer program. To find good volunteers, some departments reach out to community members who are already involved in police-related activities such as a citizens' advisory board, a Triad program, or Neighborhood Watch.

Agencies with established law enforcement volunteer programs frequently cite their current volunteers as the best recruiters. Their word-of-mouth recruitment is invaluable, as volunteers often become protective of the agency's reputation and share the agency's desire to maintain its respect and integrity. Other potential recruitment sources include a Citizen Corps council, the local media, educational institutions, volunteer centers, and civic groups.

IACP's Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program
www.policevolunteers.org

The Bureau of Justice Assistance funded the International Association of Chiefs of Police to manage and implement the Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) program on behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice. Established in 2002, the program's goal is to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers. The program serves as a resource for all law enforcement volunteer programs and efforts. The program's Web site, www.policevolunteers.org, serves as a gateway to information and

resources for law enforcement agencies and citizens. The VIPS Program offers the following resources for law enforcement agencies that have or would like to establish a volunteer program:

- A searchable online directory of existing law enforcement volunteer programs
- An online library of sample documents and forms
- A model policy
- "Volunteer Programs: Enhancing Public Safety by Leveraging

Resources," a resource guide to assist in the implementation or enhancement of an agency volunteer program

- Training and networking opportunities
- Technical assistance
- "VIPS Info," a monthly newsletter
- Educational videos
- A discussion group for law enforcement volunteer program coordinators
- Regular publications about law enforcement volunteer programs

Screening

As with paid employees, agencies must carefully screen potential volunteers before bringing them into the organization. The level of screening will depend on the role the volunteer will be serving. For example, volunteers who will have access to confidential information or agency equipment may require more comprehensive screening. Screening tools may include the following:

- An application form
- An interview
- A criminal background check
- A reference check
- Fingerprinting
- A polygraph

- Drug testing

Regardless of the function the volunteer is serving, his or her actions on and off duty will reflect the department. The volunteer's friends and neighbors and the community at large may not distinguish between an employee and a volunteer. Volunteers serve at the pleasure of the chief executive of the agency and can be removed from consideration at any time in the screening process or removed from the program after selection.

Program Management

A volunteer program can help to free up sworn and civilian staff, but it is not self-sufficient. Effective management of such a program is needed for continued success. 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 become acclimated to the environment.

Selecting a person or persons to coordinate program activities can be one of the most important keys to a successful volunteer program. Depending on the size of the agency and program, there may be several people responsible for the management of the volunteers. A volunteer coordinator may be a sworn or civilian employee, or the program's staff may include a mixture of sworn and civilian employees. There are benefits and drawbacks to both sworn and civilian models, but the decision will ultimately depend on the agency's resources and staffing patterns.

The person responsible must be committed to the mission and purpose of the volunteer program. The volunteer coordinator must also possess the skills and will to supervise volunteers. Volunteers require supervision, support, feedback, and evaluation just like paid employees.

Training

The length, structure, and format of volunteer training will vary according to the size of the agency and the activities and scope of the volunteer program.

At a minimum, volunteers should receive an orientation to the agency before taking on any responsibilities. An orientation may include the following types of information:

- A welcome from the chief, the sheriff, or another command staff representative
- An agency history
- The agency structure and organizational chart
- The goals and purpose of the volunteer program
- The policies and procedures governing the volunteer program
- A glossary of terms and abbreviations used by the agency
- A tour of the agency
- Emergency procedures
- Timesheets and other required forms
- Future training opportunities
- Evaluation procedures

Agencies should make sure every volunteer does the following:

- Meet his or her supervisor
- Be shown the location where he or she should report
- Meet the paid and volunteer staff he or she will be working with
- Be shown where to store personal belongings
- Be shown where to park

Upon completion of this basic introduction to the agency's requirements and expectations, consider asking the volunteer to sign an agreement acknowledging applicable policies and procedures and a commitment to a certain schedule or number of volunteer shifts. This initial training should be supplemented by ongoing in-service training. This will keep volunteers apprised on policy and programmatic changes and further develop their skills, enabling them to better carry out tasks they are assigned. Some agencies offer CPR, emergency first aid, and

community emergency response team (CERT) training to enhance their volunteer skills.



Integrating

Volunteers into a Law Enforcement Setting

Once volunteers know what is expected of them, they need to be introduced to the department. Integrating volunteers into the culture of the agency can be a significant challenge. Volunteers who do not feel they are a valued part of the agency are unlikely to stay. Volunteers can be integrated into the agency culture in the following ways:

- Allowing volunteers to use agency facilities such as a workout room
- Allowing volunteers to join the credit union
- Including volunteers in celebration and recognition events
- Providing a uniform or clothing
- Distributing the agency newsletter to volunteers

Volunteers must feel welcomed by the sworn and civilian employees they are working with. A volunteer program cannot reach its full potential without the support of employees, and the support must start at the top. It will take time for the staff to fully respect and trust the volunteers, but this buy-in is absolutely essential to maintaining a successful program.

Volunteer Recognition

Acknowledging and recognizing volunteers helps convey the important role they play in the agency and is a key to their retention. Although some volunteers may not be motivated by recognition, the time, effort, and talents provided by your volunteers should not be taken for granted. Recognition need not be time-consuming or expensive to be meaningful. A volunteer program and the agency as a whole should acknowledge volunteers regularly through sincere expressions of gratitude. Here are a few simple ways to recognize volunteers:

- Verbal expressions of thanks
- Letters of commendation
- Pictures with local elected officials
- Certificates of appreciation signed by local elected officials
- Volunteer of the month (or year) awards
- Personal notes
- Posted photos of volunteers on the job
- Gift certificates donated by local businesses
- Working with your local media to publicly highlight volunteer contributions
- Regular award and recognition banquets and other events
- Pins to acknowledge a certain number of total hours volunteered
- Shirts, bags, and other items with the agency's seal

President's Volunteer Service Award

The President's Council on Service and Civic Participation recognizes and encourages outstanding volunteer service and civic participation by individuals and organizations. The President's Volunteer Service Award, modeled after the President's Physical Fitness Awards, are methods that many volunteer programs, including law enforcement, are implementing. Persons who have completed 100 hours of volunteer service in a 12-month period are entitled to receive the award. Individuals will receive a personalized certificate of achievement, an official pin, a note of congratulations from the president of the United States, and a letter from the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation. For more information, including criteria, visit (www.presidentialserviceawards.gov).

Program Assessment

Assessing the costs and benefits of a volunteer program can assist in making budget and resource distribution decisions. It is important to document the resources required to manage, implement, and maintain the volunteer program. Gathering information and data supporting the value of the program can be vital to its maintenance and growth. Commonly collected information may include the following:

- The number of volunteers
- How many hours each volunteer contributes
- The types of activities volunteers are engaged in
- The number of times an activity (such as home safety checks) has been completed

The \$17.55 average hourly value of volunteer time discussed earlier can help convey the value that volunteers provide to the agency and the community at large. Additionally, some grants may allow volunteer time or the value of volunteer time to be used as matching funds.

Volunteer efforts, tailored to the needs and resources in the community, can enhance the agency's homeland security efforts and create a safer community. In this era of growing responsibilities and shrinking resources, the ability to enhance services, maximize resources, and improve ties with the community cannot be matched. Whether there is one volunteer or 1,000, the benefits are innumerable.

For more information, call the Volunteers in Police Service Program at 1-800-THE-IACP, write to (info@policevolunteers.org), or visit (www.policevolunteers.org). ■

Profiles of Award-Winning Volunteer Programs

The Concord, California, Police Department and the Pima County, Arizona, Sheriff's Department were winners of the first annual IACP/SAIC Outstanding Achievement in Law Enforcement Volunteer Programs Award. The awards were made at the 111th annual IACP Conference in Los Angeles, California.

Concord, California, Police Department

The Concord, California, Police Department's Volunteers in Police Service Program is an extension of the department's community policing philosophy. The volunteers have become an integral resource throughout the agency, with volunteers involved in all aspects of department operations. Volunteer assignments include clerical functions, Neighborhood Watch, emergency preparation, assisting with Street Smart, a public safety television show, and preschool safety programming. They can also participate in a Neighborhood Patrol program, conducting vacation house checks, handicapped parking enforcement and traffic control. Volunteers also participate on department Oral Boards for officers and civilian staff.

Over the years, the program has expanded, evolved, and become an integral part of the entire department. Assignments have changed with an increasing emphasis on community involvement and interaction, reflecting the department's philosophy of community policing. Volunteers are given meaningful assignments, which not only use their skills and challenge their minds but also give them the opportunity to contribute in a variety of ways. The program has gained widespread acceptance throughout the community, the city government, and the department. In the department's budget, there are specific line items devoted to support of the program. Recently, the city council approved acquisition of two new vehicles for their use through asset forfeiture funds.

On a regular basis, volunteers are included in department training courses and in some cases are required to attend. The department supports the 40-hour training program for Neighborhood Patrol members, requires regular recertification for such things as driver training, CPR and first aid, and NCIC/CLETS. They encourage all

volunteers to participate in department in-service training classes on such topics as verbal judo, elder abuse, and identity theft. The department pays for volunteers to attend local conferences where they receive additional training.

The program has 66 active members, ranging in age from 33 to 91. These volunteers contributed more than 11,600 hours in 2003, at a calculated value of \$199,404 (using Independent Sector's estimate of the national hourly value of volunteer time). For more information, call Karen Siemsen, volunteer coordinator, at 925-671-3184, or write to her (karens@cpd.ci.concord.ca.us).



Pima County, Arizona, Sheriff's Department

The Pima County Sheriff's Department's Sheriff's Auxiliary Volunteer (SAV) Program provides support to the sheriff's department in virtually all areas of operation and are responsible for virtually all crime prevention instructions and programs throughout the county. Volunteers provide office and clerical support throughout the organization, provide emergency response support (traffic control and scene security), manage 224 Neighborhood Watch programs, conduct periodic patrols of businesses and homes, conduct directed patrol for motorist assists, provide fingerprinting services to 7,500 residents annually, conduct home and business security inspections, and provide public relations and education and outreach support.

Due to the county's size (9,241 square miles), the program is composed of three chapters in the populated areas in Pima County. The sheriff has tasked coordinators to closely monitor and manage each chapter. The chapters conduct their own fundraising and have

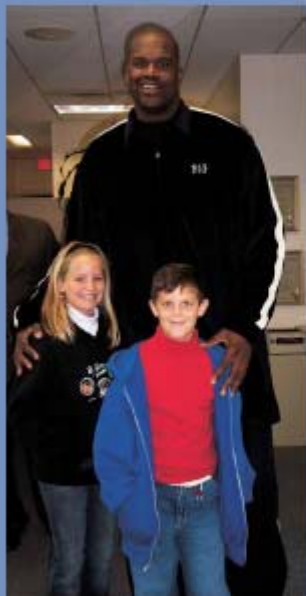
incorporated as nonprofit entities in order to manage those funds in the best interest of the SAV organization and the community. The SAV chapters have used their funds to purchase vehicles to use in the course of their duties, including fifteen fully marked and outfitted patrol vehicles.

The SAV Program is responsible for conducting its own ongoing training. The 16-hour fundamental training covers civil liability, rules and regulations, standards of conduct, use of force, CPR and automated external defibrillation (AED), defensive driving, and map reading. There are additional classes for crime prevention (16 hours) and field operations (35 hours).

The Pima County Sheriff's Department has had a dedicated volunteer program and volunteer support since 1977. The Sheriff's Auxiliary Volunteers have helped bridge the gap between the community at large and the law enforcement community and are considered by the department to be "indispensable ambassadors of goodwill."

In 2003 the 250 SAV volunteered 91,397 hours of their time worth \$1,772,188. For more information, contact call Deputy Maria Dollar at 520-547-6107, or write to her (atmdollar@pimasheriff.net).

Miami Beach's Newest Reserve Recruit



Shaquille O'Neal, star center for the Miami Heat of the National Basketball Association, is the latest reserve recruit to become a part of the Miami Beach Police Department, reports Chief Don De Lucca. O'Neal made it clear in a July 20, 2004, interview with the Miami Sun-Sentinel that law enforcement would be part of his life after basketball. O'Neal plans to obtain a master's degree in criminal justice and eventually become a chief of police. He wants to go through the police academy and work the streets as an officer before becoming a chief.

Before being recruited by the Miami Beach Police Department, O'Neal was a reserve officer with the Los Angeles Police Department. He was certified as a reserve officer in Los Angeles after completing 816 hours of training. O'Neal will have to pass a Florida state examination to be a reserve officer in Miami Beach.

Chief De Lucca reports that O'Neal will serve in a number of capacities, including playing a support role in undercover and crime suppression operations

that take advantage of his experience in undercover and surveillance work. O'Neal will be a part of the department's problem-solving team and will help raise the profile of law enforcement in Miami Beach and beyond.

At 7 feet 1, O'Neal is an impressive sight in uniform. He was born on March 6, 1972, in Newark, New Jersey. He attended Louisiana State University, where he led the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) in rebounds and was the sixth-leading scorer, fourth in blocked shots, and 14th in shooting percentage. In 1991 he was named college basketball player of the year. O'Neal prides himself on the 3.0 grade point average he maintained in 1990-91 while preparing for a career as a professional basketball player in the NBA.

He started his professional basketball career in 1992 with the Orlando Magic and then played with the Los Angeles Lakers from 1996 to 2004. He is in his first season with the Miami Heat.

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