

## RSVP: TAPPING INTO VALUABLE ASSETS OF YOUR COMMUNITY

There are an estimated 75 million people in the U.S. age 55 and over<sup>1</sup>. While many of these individuals are still working professionals, many find themselves with time on their hands, time to give back. The Corporation for National and Community Service which administers the Senior Corps programs Senior Companions, Foster Grandparents, and RSVP, estimates that nearly 500,000 seniors are engaged in service to their communities.

RSVP began in the early 1970's as the Retired Senior Volunteer Program. It engages older Americans as resources within their communities assisting with the delivery of resources and furthering the improvement of neighborhoods and communities. RSVP volunteers are involved in more than 700 projects in 61,500 community organizations around the country. The most common activities for RSVP volunteers include recruiting and coordinating volunteers, tutoring children, teaching English to non-speaking residents, assisting victims of natural disasters, and providing services to their peers to help them remain independent. During fiscal year 2007, RSVP members volunteered 79 million hours. In 2008, the RSVP Program received \$58.6 million dollars in federal funding and \$59.7 million dollars in non-federal funding<sup>2</sup>.



RSVP programs at the local level are managed by community volunteer centers, offices of aging, and other community organizing non-profit groups. Although the particulars may differ from program to program, generally the RSVP umbrella organization at the city or county level recruits volunteers, offers a simple screening process and an orientation to volunteering. RSVP can also provide supplemental liability insurance for volunteers while they are volunteering and can reimburse them for their transportation to and from volunteering.



The RSVP office can be the certifying organization for the President's Volunteer Service Award which gives Presidential recognition to individuals, families, and groups who have made a sustained commitment to volunteer service. Co-administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Points of Light Foundation, the Award recognizes volunteers for 100, 250, and 500 volunteer hours served within a year with a pin, a certificate, and a letter from the President.

This issue of *VIPS in Focus* looks at the RSVP programs within the law enforcement agencies of the Anaheim, California, Police Department; the Baltimore County, Maryland, Police

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, "Monthly Postcensal Resident Population, by single year of age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin" (May 2009) <http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/2008-nat-res.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, "Senior Corps Fact Sheet" (May 2008).

Department; and the Brookings County, South Dakota, Sheriff's Office. This issue examines how these agencies have made RSVP volunteers an integral part of their law enforcement efforts.

### *Anaheim, California, Police Department*

Anaheim, located in Southern California, is one of the world's largest tourist destinations. The city is home to the Disneyland Resort, Angel Stadium, the Honda Center, and the Anaheim Convention Center, the largest convention center west of the Mississippi River. The city's population is growing rapidly with a current estimate of 350,000 people. The city stretches from east to west covering approximately 50 square miles. The Anaheim Police Department (APD) serves its residents and 20 million annual visitors with a staff of 400 sworn, 210 civilian and 78 RSVP volunteers.

#### *Recruitment Tools*

The volunteer coordinator for APD uses a variety of tools to attract volunteers. Volunteer information is advertised on the city's local cable channel and the city's Web site. APD maintains a computer monitor in the lobby which advertises opportunities. Volunteers attend community events and neighborhood meetings to let residents know about the volunteer opportunities available within the police department. Word of mouth advertising from existing volunteers also brings new volunteers into the department.



Interested applicants complete an application. Qualified applicants are then granted a first interview. As the process continues, applicants complete a background investigation questionnaire. The applicants are then granted a second interview where the entire questionnaire is reviewed. The applicants are fingerprinted and a polygraph examination is given. Once the investigation is successfully completed, applicants are then approved to volunteer.

#### *Getting Down to Business*

All new volunteers are required to attend APD's 14 week academy, known as Public Awareness through Citizen Education or P.A.C.E. Once they begin their activities, RSVP volunteers will spend an average of 23 percent of their time receiving on-going training. RSVP volunteers attend monthly meetings, where they receive training, briefings on crime

problems, commendations and other recognition from the department; and details about upcoming events, and other volunteer opportunities. These monthly meetings are attended by almost all the RSVP volunteers and are held at the Anaheim Police Department.

#### *Safe City*

APD has three primary goals: keeping Anaheim a safe place and being a leader in homeland security and problem-oriented policing. RSVP volunteers assist by engaging in three programs: Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol, Volunteers in Service to Anaheim (V.I.S.T.A), and Anaheim Ambassadors. Volunteers can work in multiple areas or switch between areas when they are looking for a change of pace.

*Keeping Volunteers Engaged*

Prior to beginning patrol activities, volunteers receive three days of training, followed by three days of field training with a field training volunteer, and one observation day where volunteers can be signed off to begin patrol. Patrol volunteers are equipped with vehicles, cell phones, and radios so they can observe neighborhood activity, conduct vacation house checks, enforce parking rules, and visit homebound residents as part of the You Are Not Alone program. Patrol volunteers also participate in community flashlight walks where they engage with the residents to identify problem solving opportunities.

VISTA volunteers work around the department after receiving on the job training for their assignment. They volunteer at the Anaheim Family Justice Center, a one stop shop for victims of family violence, assist at community events with fingerprinting, help out at special events, and help at specialized details by conducting computer research. Volunteers' individual skills and talents are relied on for specific tasks.

The Resort Ambassadors patrol on foot within the Resort Area of the city. Ambassador volunteers receive four days of foot patrol training from a field training volunteer. Then assist visitors by answering questions, providing directions, connecting them to resort area resources and acting as a liaison to APD officers assigned to the resort area. As extra eyes and ears, Ambassadors can also work to identify problem solving opportunities.

*Value Added*

In 2005, representatives from the Anaheim Police Department traveled 100 miles south to learn about the San Diego Police Department's RSVP Program. Since its inception, the RSVP volunteers of Anaheim have been dedicated to

making Anaheim a safer place and helping with the department's community oriented policing goals. In 2008, the activities of the V.I.S.T.A., Ambassadors, and Volunteers in Patrol combined totaled 16,349 RSVP volunteer hours.

*Baltimore County, Maryland, Police Department*

Baltimore County surrounds the city of Baltimore in northern Maryland and stretches north to the Pennsylvania state line. The county is bisected by several major interstates, which creates an urban environment in the southern part of the county and a rural one in the north. The police department, while having a memorandum of agreement with state police, and memorandums of understanding with campus law enforcement agencies and public transportation police, is the sole law enforcement provider for the county of more than 800,000 residents.

The Baltimore County Police Department (BCoPD) accomplishes its goal of being a model of innovative, community-oriented policing by operating out of 10 precincts. This law enforcement agency is comprised of 1,950 sworn officers, 350 civilians, 47 auxiliary public safety officers, 35 interns, 13 fire/police chaplains, 37 law enforcement explorers and 65 RSVP volunteers.

*Outside Assistance*

The county Office of Aging maintains the RSVP Program and is a clearinghouse for all county volunteer opportunities. When citizens contact the office, they are asked to complete an interest form and if they are interested in volunteering with the police department the RSVP director facilitates the exchange of

information. The county office also places RSVP volunteers with Maryland State Police. The county RSVP office provides all volunteers with a general orientation to volunteering and the expectations from the RSVP office.

### *Recruiting from Within*

BCoPD recruits all volunteers, including RSVP in many ways, including through the volunteer recruitment Web sites of United Way and the Points of Light Foundation, as well as the county human resources office. The department's media relations unit maintains a regular television show and promotes the volunteer programs. The Citizen Police Academy also serves as an excellent recruiting tool for volunteers. No matter how a volunteer arrives at the desk of the volunteer coordinator, an application devised by BCoPD's human resources unit is completed.

### *Screening Process*

The volunteer coordinator has a volunteer who assists with the screening process by conducting a basic background check, assisting with the interview, and communicating with the applicants. After the first interview, an assignment specific interview will be held for positions within the department's human resources, photography lab, and crime analysis units. A full background check will be completed which has helped build support from officers. The volunteer coordinator holds orientation as volunteers come on board, and reviews the handbook which includes copies of all forms. The handbook will have the volunteer's supervisor's phone number on the front. At orientation, volunteers will also receive their color coded identification cards and are given their assignments in one of the precincts or at headquarters. Finally, all county employees, including volunteers, must complete a course on computer usage prior to be given access to a computer.

### *To Each Their Own Activity*

RSVP volunteer tasks vary. At one point, the records department had a backlog of personnel records to be filed away. To assist, a RSVP volunteer now organizes those records so they can be filed faster. Another RSVP volunteer used to do filing a few hours a week at her local precinct until recently when the captain's secretary went on medical leave. That volunteer now spends her days assisting the captain in the interim. RSVP volunteers also assist officers at headquarters and precincts by assisting various departments within the facility. RSVP volunteers assist in the domestic



violence and juvenile offender coordinator's offices, file, complete data entry, prepare informational packets, stuff envelopes, maintain various logs and help with community awareness events relating to their specific coordinator's assignment. These volunteers are paired with a coordinator to develop a relationship that helps foster longer retention of the volunteer and leaves the officer more time to conduct home visits with victims.

### *Recognition*

RSVP volunteers complete time sheets each month and copies are sent to the county RSVP office which tallies all hours and sends it to the Corporation for National and Community Service. Most RSVP volunteers are not interested in the stipend offered as they work in the neighborhood precinct and cite ease of location as one of their primary motivations for

volunteering with BCoPD. The volunteers enjoy giving back to their immediate community.

Each spring during National Volunteer Week, BCoPD holds a volunteer recognition dinner drawing more than 100 volunteers, their spouses and members of the department including command staff, to a local catering hall. The department receives support from local business for this event and the chief presents awards to the volunteers.

### *Tremendous Assets*

In 2008, Baltimore County Police Department volunteers contributed 14,732 hours. At a median salary for the department, those volunteer hours equate to \$96,000 of value added to the department. The average retention time for a BCoPD volunteer is 6.8 years.

### ***Brookings County, South Dakota, Sheriff's Office***

The Brookings County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) serves a predominantly rural farming community of 20,000 in a jurisdiction of 800 square miles with eight patrol deputies. The sheriff's office also maintains the county jail. BCSO has jurisdiction over all of the unincorporated land in the county. The sheriff's office provides contracted law enforcement services to four cities in the county and their three schools.

### *Getting Started*

The RSVP Program began in the sheriff's office in January of 2005, and 14 of the original volunteers are still with the program. There are currently 17 RSVP volunteers total. Interested citizens complete an application with the RSVP program which the Sheriff reviews. In this sparsely populated county, the Sheriff knows most

everyone and only conducts background investigations on those unfamiliar to the agency. The Sheriff interviews each potential volunteer and provides a copy of his notes to the RSVP coordinator for their files.

### *Road Ready*

New RSVP volunteers receive 40 hours of in-service training and then patrol with a deputy for 12 hours before the volunteer can begin patrolling with another volunteer. The training includes an orientation to the department, expectations, safety on the job, report writing, first aid, radio operations, and orientation to county roads. RSVP volunteers encounter many things while on patrol and are trained to handle the following situations: escaped livestock, minor vandalism, motor vehicle accidents, traffic control, abandoned vehicles, and patrolling school zones.

Once volunteers complete training, volunteer pairs patrol in a marked SUV. The vehicle is equipped with green sheriff's office vests that volunteers are to wear if they exit the vehicle. A first aid kit and a shovel are also in the SUV. The volunteers carry portable radios and sign up for three-hour shifts. There are three shifts a day and



the Sheriff asks that all shifts be covered as best as possible. The majority of time spent on a volunteer shift is made up of patrolling the county conducting homeland security checks on grain elevators and electrical substations, and delivering commodities to county residents. In the morning and afternoon, RSVP volunteers are

on hand at one of the three schools in the contracted cities to help with traffic direction.

The RSVP volunteers' patrol vehicle has a radar gun installed and although they do not have enforcement powers, a simple nod to a speeding motorist from a marked vehicle sometimes does the trick. Given their familiarity of the county and its residents, when the sheriff's office receives calls that livestock have escaped, the volunteers have become proficient at determining the proper owner and contacting them to retrieve their animals.

At the conclusion of each shift, RSVP volunteers complete an activity log which the sheriff's office manager transcribes into monthly reports. The office manager also maintains the schedule and turns their hours into the RSVP coordinator. While the RSVP Program provides supplemental insurance coverage to volunteers, the sheriff's office also provides coverage from the county which includes the patrol vehicle and workers compensation.

#### *Future Activities*

The sheriff would like RSVP volunteers to become CERT trained. The county is located on the eastern side of South Dakota which is mostly prairie and during winter storms wind gusts can reach 100 miles per hour and snow drifts can make the interstate impassable. If volunteers could assist during some of these events, BCSO would be even better equipped to help the county.

#### *Added Benefits*

The Sheriff recognizes the need for the extra eyes and ears that the RSVP volunteers provide. With only one of the eight sheriff's deputies on duty at any given time, the support that RSVP volunteers brings has

become invaluable to the department. The RSVP volunteers have even provided their services to the television show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. The show came to a neighboring county in 2006 and BCSO RSVP volunteers provided more than 100 hours to assist in securing the property.

### *For Additional Information*

#### *Corporation for National and Community Service*

[www.NationalService.gov](http://www.NationalService.gov).

The three Senior Corps programs were created by the federal government in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Since 1993, they have been administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year the Corporation engages more than four million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to meet local needs through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs.

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Law enforcement agencies can register their RSVP programs and search for RSVP programs with the online VIPS program directory. Citizens can locate volunteer opportunities with law enforcement agencies in their communities. The directory allows users to search by zip code, state, key word, and type of program.

**VIPS Resource Library**

Browse and download sample documents from law enforcement volunteer programs, such as program descriptions, position descriptions, and policy and procedures for RSVP and other senior volunteer programs.

**VIPS to VIPS**

VIPS to VIPS is a moderated discussion group that allows members to post questions and share information about their law enforcement volunteer program activities. 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](http://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. VIPS is a Program Partner of Citizen Corps, an initiative helping to make communities across America safer, stronger, and better prepared for emergencies of all kinds. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages and implements the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice.



This project was supported by Grant No. 2007-DD-BK-K034 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this documents are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.