

***Establishing or Enhancing
a Volunteer Program***

Introduction

Section 1: Introduction

Benefits of Using Volunteers

While law enforcement agencies are designed and staffed to maximize services to the community, there is always more to do. Consequently, and as a result of recent economic strife, agencies are experiencing an increased workload in a resource-constrained environment. More than ever volunteerism has become a need and not a luxury.

Maximizing Resources

By providing supplemental and/or support services, volunteers allow law enforcement agencies and officers to focus on policing and enforcement functions. Investing in a volunteer program can help law enforcement agencies fulfill their primary functions and provide services that may not otherwise be offered. The financial return on investment of a volunteer program can be substantial, amounting to millions of dollars.

Enhancing Public Safety and Services

Volunteers provide services that the public wants but that sworn or civilian staff may not have the time to furnish. These services may include fingerprinting children, patrolling shopping centers, checking on homebound residents, or checking the security of vacationing residents' homes. Additionally, volunteers participating in non-hazardous, non-enforcement activities such as citizen patrols or Neighborhood Watch programs can function as extra sets of eyes and ears.

Improving Community Buy-in

Volunteers can also enhance law enforcement-community relations. A community member who volunteers with a local law enforcement agency will have a better understanding of that agency and law enforcement as a whole. Volunteers can serve as well informed ambassadors in your community and will have credibility within the community as they are supporting law enforcement without monetary compensation.

Origin of the Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program

The VIPS Program has its roots in the USA Freedom Corps (USAFC) initiative which followed the September 11 attacks. Citizen Corps was created in 2002 to help coordinate volunteer activities to make communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to any emergency situation. It provides opportunities for people to participate in a range of measures to make their families, their homes, and their communities safer from the threat of crime, terrorism, and disasters of all kinds.

Citizen Corps partner programs build on the successful efforts that are in place in many communities around the country to prevent crime and respond to emergencies. Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) is one of five Citizen Corps partner programs. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages the VIPS Program in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

Refer to Section 9 for contact information and descriptions of these organizations.

VIPS Goals and Objectives

The VIPS Program provides support and resources for agencies interested in developing or enhancing a volunteer program and for citizens who wish to volunteer their time and skills with a law enforcement agency in their community. The program's ultimate goal is to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers.

Through trainings, educational presentations, and exhibits around the country, the VIPS staff seek to:

- Learn about promising practices used in existing VIPS programs and share this information with law enforcement agencies that want to expand their programs;
- Increase the use of volunteers in existing programs;
- Help citizens learn about and become involved in VIPS programs in their communities; and
- Help agencies without volunteer programs get one started.

VIPS Resources

The VIPS Program offers a number of resources for law enforcement agencies and citizens interested in law enforcement volunteer programs.

The VIPS Program makes available the following resources:

- A Web site containing a directory summarizing volunteer opportunities available in law enforcement agencies across the country. The directory is a searchable resource for agencies that are looking to net work with programs offering similar or desired volunteer roles. It also serves as a resource for citizens searching for volunteer opportunities;
- A library of sample documents and forms, including policies and procedures, position descriptions, training materials, and screening forms.
- *VIPS in Focus*, a publications series that builds on this resource guide. The series addresses specific elements and issues related to law enforcement volunteer programs;
- A model policy and concepts and issues paper developed in collaboration with the IACP's National Law Enforcement Policy Center;
- A technical assistance program to help local agencies determine their volunteer needs and design programs that will effectively meet those needs;
- A mentor program that pairs experienced law enforcement volunteer coordinators with coordinators in need of support;

- Five educational videos covering such topics as program implementation and incorporating youth in law enforcement volunteerism;
- CD-ROM on *Supporting Law Enforcement Volunteer Efforts: Resources to Enhance Public Safety*;
- *VIPS Info*, a monthly electronic newsletter that provides news and lists events about law enforcement volunteer activities around the country;
- *VIPS Stories*, a section of the VIPS Web site recognizing VIPS law enforcement volunteer programs that have recently been in the news and cross-linking them to their respective program pages; and
- VIPS to VIPS, a moderated online discussion group for law enforcement volunteer program leaders to share information and ideas.

How to Get Involved With VIPS?

To register as a VIPS program, volunteers must work directly with a state, local, or tribal law enforcement agency through an in-house volunteer program or one operating in concert with a law enforcement agency, such as a Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association (CPAA) or a Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Register online at www.policevolunteers.org. As a registered VIPS program, your agency will be a part of more than 1,950 volunteer programs representing all 50 states with more than 224,000 volunteers.