

***Building Program  
Infrastructure***

# Section 3: Building Program Infrastructure

## KEY POINTS

- To begin the process of creating a volunteer program it is necessary to assess the needs of the agency.
- Before identifying the activities and/or functions that can be fulfilled by a volunteer it is crucial to involve labor groups as well as all sworn and civilian employees.
- While volunteer programs cost money to maintain, the return on investment can be substantial.
- The main sources of funding for law enforcement volunteer programs are grants, donations, and fundraising.
- Law enforcement agencies should contact their local government attorney to determine liability coverage for volunteers.

## Agency and Community Characteristics

The characteristics of your agency and community will influence the need for, the acceptance of, and the availability of volunteers. You may consider including community members or organizations in the program development process. Factors to consider include agency size, community size, citizen demographics, and the presence of higher education institutions, philanthropic organizations, and tourist destinations.

*The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department offers a volunteer-based Visitor Information/Visitor Assistance Program in frequently visited parts of the city.*

## Building Staff Support

As discussed previously, your volunteer program will not reach its full potential without the support of paid employees, sworn and civilian. Support for the volunteer program begins with the top executive and filters down through the agency. This buy-in is absolutely essential to maintaining a successful program.

You may choose to have a program advisory or governing board that includes sworn and civilian employees. The agency employees should make volunteers feel welcome and appreciated. This process will not occur overnight. It will take time for the staff to fully respect, trust, and utilize the volunteers.

One of the challenges facing law enforcement agencies with volunteer programs is a misunderstanding of the purpose of a volunteer program. Often, employees are not aware of programs or of the ways volunteers can and do assist them. One way to address this challenge is to provide information about volunteer programs to cadets while they are still in the academy. The message can be reinforced through in-service training and roll call. In time, staff will learn to appreciate the contributions of agency volunteers.

## Addressing Employee Concerns

Agencies must involve labor groups, officers, and civilian employees in the identification of activities and/or functions that can be performed by volunteers. Involving these groups from the beginning will help convey the message that volunteers are there to assist paid staff. It will also enable volunteers to better perform the duties for which they are trained.

## Needs Assessment

The first step in establishing a volunteer program is to assess the needs of the agency. These needs may include supplemental duties that sworn employees do not have the time or manpower to perform. Sample needs assessments appear in the VIPS resource library available at [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org). The purpose of a law enforcement volunteer program is to supplement and support, not supplant current agency employees. If you replace a paid employee with a volunteer, as some agencies have in the past, you may end up with a staff that does not welcome volunteers and volunteers who do not feel valued. Another aspect of this assessment process is determining the mission, goals, and objectives of the volunteer program.

## Position Descriptions

Comprehensive position descriptions detailing the duties and expectations of specific volunteer positions are necessary for the operation of a successful program. Such descriptions can be helpful in screening potential volunteers, as those not suited for certain positions may self-select out of the process or seek more appropriate roles within the agency. Position descriptions are also valuable during volunteers' evaluation processes, since they can be used to determine whether volunteers are meeting department expectations. Like policies and planning documents, the position descriptions should be periodically reviewed to ensure that they are accurate. Sample position descriptions are available in the VIPS resource library available at [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org).

## Volunteer Activities

The VIPS Program defines a volunteer as someone who performs service for the department without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for services rendered. Volunteers may include unpaid chaplains, unpaid reserve officers, interns, persons providing administrative support, and youth involved in a Law Enforcement Explorer Post. If your agency has at least one person who fits this description, the VIPS Program considers you to have a volunteer program. Volunteers in law enforcement agencies perform a wide array of functions. A partial list follows.

### ***Administrative Duties***

- Enter data
- Type reports, file, answer phones, and perform other office tasks
- Help front counter personnel by answering citizen inquiries, directing visitors, and performing routine administrative tasks
- Help telephone reporting units take reports of minor and "no suspect" crimes

### ***Citizen Patrols***

- Read parking meters
- Provide bike patrols in community parks
- Patrol shopping centers during the holiday season to assist stranded motorists or lost children
- Write citations for violations of handicapped parking restrictions
- Participate in marine patrols
- Provide home vacation checks
- Provide visual deterrent
- Conduct traffic surveys

### ***Community Liaison Activities***

- Sit on citizens' advisory boards
- Participate in speakers bureau on topics such as disaster preparedness or identity theft
- Attend citizens' police academies
- Join RSVP groups
- Staff community policing substations
- Staff a department booth and distribute information on police services at community events

### ***Neighborhood Watch***

- Join or start a Neighborhood Watch program

### ***Research***

- Conduct research using department and regional computer programs
- Compile crime data for specific area problems
- Utilize crime mapping and analysis
- Assist university researchers, statisticians, and criminologists who can help law enforcement agencies conduct research

### ***Youth - Related Activities***

- Assist in programs such as Police Athletic /Activities Leagues
- Serve as a mentor
- Help with youth citizen academies
- Assist in school-based programs such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) and Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.)
- Assist with after-school programs
- Join explorer posts
- Participate in internships and service-learning programs
- Provide short-term care of juveniles in protective custody
- Serve on youth aid panel
- Participate in Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) or Student Emergency Response Teams (SERT)

### ***Assist with***

- Crime prevention programs
- Graffiti abatement programs
- Cold case squads

### ***Other activities***

- Search and rescue
- Role-playing and training scenarios for officers
- Investigations
- Victim assistance
- Disaster response
- Courts
- Special events
- Fingerprinting

### ***Volunteers with special skills can serve in numerous ways:***

- Counselors can provide support to victims of crime and assist with crisis intervention
- Mechanics can help maintain police vehicles
- Faith leaders can become involved in chaplain programs
- Public health officials can develop public safety plans and train for biohazard management
- Architects, landscapers, and building engineers can suggest ways community centers can improve or modify buildings and landscape designs to prevent or reduce crime
- Security specialists can conduct free security reviews for local schools, after-school programs, or places of worship
- Public relations professionals can design public safety campaigns and supporting materials
- Bilingual volunteers can assist with translation services
- Computer programmers can help develop or improve Web sites and record management systems
- Persons with state approved training can become reserve or auxiliary officers

## **Developing Program Policies and Procedures**

Before establishing a volunteer program, you must develop operational guidelines and policies about the governance and function of the program. Having a set of policies provides the structure to manage the program equitably and can prevent future problems.

Specific policies to consider include the following:

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

Agencies also need to make volunteers aware of agency policies and procedures they must follow. For example, volunteers should be instructed on how to deal with representatives of the media while on duty.

The National Law Enforcement Policy Center, a collaborative project between the IACP and BJA, offers a model policy on volunteers. The model policy and other sample policies are available in the VIPS resource library at [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org).

## ***Liability***

Liability concerns are common when implementing a volunteer program in a law enforcement agency. The applicable liability laws vary by state. Many state legislatures have passed “Good Samaritan laws” or other legislation that defines in what instances organizations and volunteers are legally protected from liability issues. A collection of state liability laws developed by the Nonprofit Risk Management Center can be downloaded from the VIPS resource library, and the organization’s contact information is available in section 9.

Consult with your local government attorney or state point of contact to determine what coverage may be provided. Other departments within the government (e.g., parks and recreation) may use volunteers, and a policy may already exist. Some agencies classify their volunteers as unpaid employees or pay their volunteers \$1 a year in order to provide coverage.

Agencies unable to provide liability insurance typically require their volunteers to sign a waiver. Again, consult your local government attorney when drafting such a waiver. Volunteers must be made aware of their personal liability and worker’s compensation coverage and eligibility.

Liability coverage is available for Law Enforcement Explorers under the Learning for Life Program. More information can be found at [www.learningforlife.org/exploring/index.html](http://www.learningforlife.org/exploring/index.html).

Some agencies have partnered with their local RSVP Program, since participants are eligible for accident and liability coverage through their RSVP-sponsoring agency at no cost. Additional information about the RSVP Program appears in sections 4 and 9.

## ***Reducing Liability Concerns***

Clearly outlining your department’s policy on volunteers is a fundamental step toward reducing your risk. Furthermore, volunteers need to be aware of any risks involved and what coverage, if any, they should expect. Having written volunteer job descriptions will also assist with communicating expectations and give volunteers an idea of what level of risk their jobs may entail.

The screening process is critical to identifying qualified volunteers. The level of screening will depend on the type of activity performed. The VIPS Web site includes a resource library of sample forms, policies, and procedures, including several sample liability and medical waiver forms. Refer to section 5 for more information on screening.

Incorporating a regular review of policy and procedures helps to pinpoint areas that may or may not be working well, and allows for policies to be updated in a timely manner.

### ***Volunteer Protection Act of 1997***

The Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 offers limited protection for volunteers and volunteer organizations. Under this federal law, a volunteer is not liable for harm caused by his or her act or omission on behalf of the organization or entity if

- at the time of the act or omission, the volunteer was acting within the scope of his or her responsibilities in the organization or entity;
- if appropriate or required, the volunteer was properly licensed, certified, or authorized by the appropriate authorities to undertake the activities or practice in the state;
- the harm was not caused by willful or criminal misconduct, gross negligence, reckless misconduct, or a conscious, flagrant indifference to the rights or safety of the individual harmed; and
- the harm was not caused by the volunteer's operation of a vehicle for which the state requires the operator or owner to possess an operator's license or maintain insurance.

Federal law preempts state law only in certain circumstances.

### **CALEA Accreditation and Volunteer Programs**

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) does not have a specific standard for law enforcement volunteer programs. The appropriate standard(s) will depend on the type of volunteer opportunities you offer.

CALEA has standards regarding auxiliaries that often encompass the functions of volunteers:

16.4.1 A written directive establishes and describes the agency's auxiliary program to include:

- A statement that auxiliaries are not sworn officers, and
- A description of the duties of auxiliaries, including their role and scope in authority.

*Commentary:* Auxiliaries are not commissioned as law enforcement officers and do not have the authority to make full custody arrests. Auxiliaries may be assigned to law enforcement-related community service functions. They can also be used as a resource in emergencies and large-scale special events. Generally, they receive significantly less training than sworn officers or full-time employees. However, if the agency chooses to involve them in various activities to assist in the day-to-day delivery of law enforcement services, it should ensure that their duties do not require the status of a sworn officer, that their level of training is adjusted according to the scope of their authority, and that they do not carry unauthorized weapons or equipment in the performance of their duties.

16.4.2 Auxiliaries receive training in those authorized and assigned duties.

*Commentary:* Auxiliaries may provide services to support any law enforcement duties not requiring sworn officer status. However, if the agency chooses to use them, auxiliaries should receive training appropriate to the duties anticipated.

### ***Recognition Standard***

16.4.3 If auxiliaries wear uniforms, the uniforms clearly distinguish them from sworn officers.

*Commentary:* To have an auxiliary appear to be a regular sworn officer can be hazardous to the auxiliary, confusing to the public, and a potential detriment to the image of the agency. Unless the auxiliary is clearly distinguishable from the sworn officer, members of the community may expect assistance in situations for which the auxiliary is not trained or empowered to act. There should be a clear designation on a shoulder patch, pocket identification, or other distinctive area of the uniform identifying the category of auxiliary. Purchase of the uniform may be the responsibility of the auxiliary.

For more information on how your agency's volunteer program should be addressed for CALEA accreditation purposes, talk to your agency's accreditation manager or contact CALEA at [www.calea.org](http://www.calea.org) or 1-800-368-3757.

## **Budgeting**

Establishing and maintaining a volunteer program is not a cost-free endeavor; however, the return on your investment can be substantial. The costs associated with establishing and maintaining a volunteer program will depend on the scope of opportunities you offer.

Costs to consider include the following:

- Personnel (salary and benefits for volunteer coordinator(s))
- Volunteer screening
- Training
- Work space requirements
- Supplies
- Equipment
- Uniforms
- Recognition

## **Funding**

Law enforcement volunteer programs are funded through a variety of mechanisms. The main sources of funding are grants, donations, and fundraising.

### ***Grants.gov***

Grants.gov was created as a resource to improve government services to the public. Grants.gov is a central storehouse for information on more than 1,000 grant programs and access to approximately \$450 billion in annual awards. By registering on this site, your program can apply for grants from 26 different federal grant-making agencies, including those listed above. More information can be found at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

### ***Department of Justice (DOJ)***

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) offers federal financial assistance to state and local governments and agencies. OJP offers discretionary grant funds, which are announced through its Web site, [www.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov).

### ***Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program***

The JAG Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, offers formula grants that allow states and local governments to support a broad range of activities to prevent and control crime and to improve the criminal justice system. The total funds made available for FY 2009 amounted to \$484 million. The funds can be used to pay for personnel, overtime, and equipment. More information can be found on the JAG Web site at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/jag.html](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/jag.html).

### ***Department of Transportation (DOT)***

Nearly every federal agency offers grant programs. It is not necessary to only look at the Department of Justice for funds. For example, if your program is implementing a child-seat safety volunteer program, you may be able to obtain funds from DOT. More information can be found at [www.dot.gov](http://www.dot.gov).

### ***Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)***

HHS may be another source of funding. Volunteers who work in disaster assistance and preparedness issues, such as pandemics, may be eligible to receive grants from HHS. More information can be found at [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov).

### ***Department of Homeland Security (DHS)***

DHS has adopted a risk- and effectiveness-based approach to allocating funding for certain programs within Homeland Security grant programs. This approach aligns federal resources with national priorities. During FY 2009, DHS granted more than \$861.1 billion in funds, of which \$14.6 million was allocated to Citizen Corps programs. These funds may be used to maintain various volunteer initiatives, including citizen volunteer programs that support emergency responders, disaster relief, and community safety. Each state has a Citizen Corps point of contact that can offer grant-related information to local law enforcement agencies and your local Citizen Corps Council. A list of state contacts can be found on the Citizen Corps Web site at [www.citizen corps.gov](http://www.citizen corps.gov).

### ***Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)***

RSVP is a national service initiative that began in 1969. RSVP is a key element of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). Through RSVP, CNCS provides grants to qualified agencies and organizations to engage persons 55 and older in volunteer service. An office for the aging or a similar office within a community's local government may coordinate RSVP opportunities in your community. More information can be found at [www.seniorcorps.gov/about/programs/rsvp.asp](http://www.seniorcorps.gov/about/programs/rsvp.asp).

### ***Donations***

Local businesses or organizations may also provide in-kind services or donations, ranging from gift certificates for volunteer recognition to a vehicle for citizen patrols. Agencies raffle off in-kind donations, such as televisions, electronics, and gift cards, at community events; offer child fingerprinting services for a small donation; host community events, such as antiques or auto shows, dinners, and festivals, with proceeds going to the volunteer program.

### ***Fundraising***

Many law enforcement volunteer programs engage in fundraising to support their volunteer activities. The policy and procedures for direct fundraising by law enforcement agencies vary. Be sure to check with your agency's legal department for fundraising guidelines and regulations. Local branches of civic groups and service organizations such as Rotary International, Lions Club International, and the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks may be willing to provide support by raising funds on behalf of agencies that are prohibited from soliciting funds.

### ***Tax-Exempt Status***

Many registered VIPS programs have partnered with existing local nonprofit associations or have been involved in creating associations that can raise funds and secure nonprofit status. Many agencies form nonprofits through their Citizens' Police Academy Alumni Associations. The Internal Revenue Service has issued a publication (Publication 557, Rev. June 2008) titled *Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization* that discusses what is commonly referred to as Section 501(c)(3) status. More information can be found at [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p557.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p557.pdf), and a copy of this publication can be downloaded from the VIPS resource library.