

***Recruitment***

# Section 4: Recruitment

## KEY POINTS

- Current volunteers can be the best recruiting tool.
- Citizens' police academies are a good source of volunteers.
- The Internet has become a widely used venue for potential volunteers. Use your government and/or agency's Web site and the VIPS Program Web site to share information.
- Many communities have volunteer centers. Let your center know you are establishing a volunteer program.

In order to develop a successful law enforcement volunteer program, you must seek out individuals who are qualified for the work they will be performing. Research on volunteerism has consistently shown that people who are asked to volunteer are far more likely to volunteer than those who are not asked.

There are many ways to recruit volunteers. Before choosing a method, consider the time each method will require to plan, develop, and execute, as well as the time required to deliver and maintain the number of volunteer positions you seek to fill. It is imperative to include employees in the program's planning development process.

## Develop Your Recruitment Message

Your recruitment message should be inviting and encourage people to become involved with the program. You may have multiple recruitment messages tailored to the different volunteers your agency requires, such as students, professionals, or neighborhood residents. Each message should identify the specific needs of your agency, the ways a volunteer can address those needs, and the benefits to the volunteer.

When developing your recruitment message, it might be helpful to keep the following questions in mind:

- Is the message tailored to a target audience?
- Are the needs of the police department clearly identified?
- Who in the department can best deliver this message?

## Identify Meaningful Assignments for Volunteers

Identifying meaningful assignments for volunteers will provide an outline detailing the work that needs to be accomplished. This is essentially creating a volunteer position description, which may be useful in forming the basis of your recruitment efforts. The identification of activities performed by a volunteer is limited only by your creativity and the ability to provide programs structure, management, and guidance. It identifies the assignment, skills, abilities, and interests necessary to perform the task successfully.

## Internal Recruitment

There may be preexisting avenues within your agency that can be used to recruit volunteers. While you may not have what you consider to be a true volunteer program, there are likely individuals in your community who currently assist your department by participating in programs such as Neighborhood Watch. These individuals may be the first community members to reach out to when developing a program.

Agencies with established law enforcement volunteer programs have consistently identified their current volunteers as the best source of recruitment. Word-of-mouth has proved to be the most effective and widely-used method of recruitment. Volunteers frequently become protective of the program's reputation and share the agency's desire to maintain its respect and integrity.

### ***Citizens Police Academy***

Many established volunteer programs grew out of their CPAs. You may be able to cultivate the participants' demonstrated interest in the agency into a long-term volunteer relationship. The academy also offers a foundation for new volunteer training as some programs make academy attendance mandatory. In some cases, CPA participants may take the lead role in establishing a continued relationship by creating a CPA alumni association.

Some alumni associations have formed tax-exempt nonprofit associations that raise funds to support volunteer programs or other agency activities. The Internal Revenue Service has produced a publication explaining how to seek this status. Information on this publication is available in section 9 and in the VIPS resource library at [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org).

***The San Diego Police Department partners with the Senior Corps' Retired and Senior Volunteer Program to offer the Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol. The Aging and Independent Services Office of San Diego County sponsors local Senior Corps activities.***

## **External Recruitment**

Printed materials can be helpful to the recruitment process. Brochures and flyers can be used in mailings or as takeaways at presentations and special events. The VIPS Program can provide bulk copies of *Volunteering with Law Enforcement: Citizen Guide* and *Enhancing Public Safety Through Citizen Involvement* brochures and its educational DVDs and CD at no cost to agencies that wish to distribute them at public events such as Celebrate Safe Communities. For more information, refer to [www.celebratesafecommunities.org](http://www.celebratesafecommunities.org).

### ***Mass Media***

Your local media (television, radio, and newspaper) can assist in advertising information about your volunteer program. These media organizations may also produce stories profiling your volunteers and their accomplishments.

### ***Internet***

Citizens are increasingly using the Internet to conduct research on organizations and volunteer opportunities. If your local government and/or agency maintains a Web site, you should publish information about your volunteer program, such as opportunities available, a point of contact for additional information, and an online or downloadable application form.

In addition to advertising on your agency's Web site, you can register your program with the VIPS Program Web site at [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org). Include a description of your volunteer program, post a link to your agency's site, provide a downloadable application form, and post photos of your volunteers in action.

## Existing Volunteer Organizations

### ***Volunteer Center***

Your community may have a centralized volunteer center that has information about volunteer opportunities throughout the area. Once you have established a program, let the volunteer center know so it can refer potential volunteers to your agency. If you do not know of a volunteer center in your community, you can contact the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network for information at [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org).

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

Many law enforcement agencies have successfully partnered with their local RSVP to attract volunteers. RSVP is a part of the Senior Corps, Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS). More information can be found at [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org). One of the added benefits of recruiting volunteers through RSVP is the provision of accident, personal liability, and excess automobile insurance coverage for the volunteer by the RSVP-sponsoring agency.

### ***Civic Groups***

Existing civic groups in your community, such as the United States Junior Chamber (Jaycees), can be helpful in getting the word out about your program. These groups may also be a good source of volunteers, particularly if a group of volunteers is needed for a special event.

### ***Educational Institutions***

Colleges and universities in your community can be another source of volunteers. Increasingly, students are required to volunteer or complete internships before graduation. While student interns require additional supervision, they may have more time and demonstrate a greater commitment to the agency's mission than some adult volunteers.

Do not limit your internship program to criminal justice students. Students from other disciplines have skills from which your agency could benefit. For example, a communications student could develop educational materials; a computer science student could design a database for your agency.

### ***Citizen Corps Councils***

The purpose of a Citizen Corps council is to coordinate Citizen Corps activities, including the VIPS program, at the local level. If you are developing a law enforcement volunteer program, you may want to consider getting involved in your community's council. The council can help match volunteers to create new opportunities, educate and train the public, provide funding resources, and promote your program. Information about the Citizen Corps initiative appears in section 9. A complete listing of Citizen Corps councils is available at [www.citizencorps.gov/citizenCorps/councilmap.do](http://www.citizencorps.gov/citizenCorps/councilmap.do).

***The Harris County, Texas, Citizen Corps Council's Web site, [www.harriscountycitizencorps.com](http://www.harriscountycitizencorps.com), serves as a centralized referral resource for volunteer opportunities in the public health and public safety fields within the county.***