

## ***Selection and Management***

# Section 5: Selection and Management

## **KEY POINTS:**

- An agency must develop a set of criteria for screening potential volunteers before establishing a volunteer program.
- The screening process should involve an application and an interview.
- After selecting a volunteer, you should consider the agency's needs and the volunteer's skills before placing him or her into a position.

## **Screening**

Law enforcement agencies must screen individuals before bringing them on as volunteers. The level of screening will depend on the role the volunteer will be serving. Individuals with access to confidential information or agency equipment may require more intensive screening.

All applicants should be asked to complete an application form. They should provide contact information, an emergency contact, and references. Applicants should also detail their skills, experience, and availability. Sample application forms can be found in the VIPS resource library. You may also choose to provide a cover letter or informational brochure about the volunteer program to explain the agency's expectations and the volunteer opportunities offered.

In addition to an application you may consider additional screening including:

- A criminal background check
- A reference check
- Fingerprinting
- Drug testing
- Polygraph

Some agencies may choose to complete some or all of these steps before conducting an interview. In this event, the information required to complete the check(s) should be requested in the volunteer application.

Screening is critical. Regardless of the function the volunteer is serving, his or her actions on and off duty will reflect on the department. The volunteer's friends and neighbors and the community at large may not distinguish between an employee and a volunteer. Agencies must select a person or persons to coordinate program activities.

## **Interviews**

If you are considering accepting the applicant into the program, the volunteer coordinator or other agency representative should make arrangements to interview the candidate. The interview should assist in determining if the prospective volunteer is a good fit for your program and to learn more about his or her interests, abilities, experiences, and what he or she is looking for in a volunteer capacity. Interviews can prevent future problems by ensuring that there is a clear understanding of the requirements of the volunteer position, and to inform the volunteer about policies, procedures, and other organizational information.

## Selection

Once a volunteer has been accepted into the program, you may choose to send a letter welcoming him or her to the agency. A letter signed by the chief of police, sheriff, or head executive can convey the agency’s appreciation and serve as the first step in cultivating a long-term relationship with an individual that is donating his or her time and talents to your agency.

## Placement

Two issues should be considered in determining the placement of a volunteer. First, you need to understand the specific needs of the agency (refer to Section 3). Second, the skills and interests of a potential volunteer should be considered. Don’t assume that a volunteer is interested in using the same skills or serving the same function as he or she may serve professionally. While a former accountant may be an asset to your agency’s financial management division, that volunteer may want a new experience. An unhappy or unfulfilled volunteer is more likely to leave your agency, thus wasting your investment in recruiting and training. This placement should be negotiated between the volunteer and the volunteer coordinator.

The agency should regularly assess the volunteer’s placement as your needs and his or her interests may change over time. This may be part of the standard volunteer evaluation process (refer to Section 8).

## Persons Not Appropriate For Your Program

Each agency must develop criteria for screening and selection before establishing a volunteer program. The specific criteria will vary from one department to another. While you may have certain universal criteria, such as no felony convictions, other criteria may depend on the activities the volunteer will be engaged in, such as driving a city vehicle. Making potential volunteers aware of these selection criteria at the outset may prevent unqualified individuals from applying. It is also useful to have established criteria to refer to if an individual complains about not being selected.

If you have a multi-dimensional program, a volunteer who is inappropriate for one role may be a good fit for another role within the agency. If a volunteer is not suitable for placement within your agency, there may be better opportunities outside your agency. You can refer him or her to the local volunteer center or make the volunteer aware of other opportunities to help.

It is also advantageous for local departments and volunteer programs to develop networking relationships among one another in order to avoid or forewarn against problem volunteers and/or those who may be agency shopping. If a volunteer has been deemed unsuitable for volunteering at one department, it could be likely that the volunteer is ineligible for work at another.

***Due to the sensitive nature of the work, all potential volunteers in the Waco Texas Police Department’s Victim Services Unit are interviewed, fingerprinted, and given a full background check consisting of a Texas Crime Information Center and National Crime Information Computer (TCIC/NCIC) check.***

## Supervising and Managing Volunteers

While establishing a volunteer program can help to free up sworn and civilian staff, it is not self-sufficient. Effective management of such a program is needed for continued success. A volunteer program within a law enforcement agency is unique. 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 and navigate the environment.

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

No resource is more important than the person/personnel charged with the day-to-day management and operations of the program. Clear roles must be defined for the coordinator so that there is a lucid connection with the agency's mission and the role of the volunteer department.

The person(s) responsible must be committed to the mission and purpose of the volunteer program. The volunteer coordinator(s) must also possess the skills and will to supervise volunteers. Volunteers require supervision, support, feedback, and evaluation just like paid employees. There may be a local or state network of volunteer coordinators who can provide guidance to a new coordinator on management training opportunities. VIPS also offers a mentor program pairing law enforcement volunteer coordinators in need of support with experienced volunteer coordinators in order to provide tools and guidance to develop and maintain successful volunteer programs.

*The Fairfax County Police Department's Volunteers in Police Service Program utilizes a volunteer to assist in the day-to-day management of their program.*

### ***Supervision***

Regular supervision (monitoring) is vital to ensure that volunteers are adequately utilized. Especially during the first few months, volunteers need substantial assistance and guidance. Access to either the coordinators or experienced volunteers can help newly placed volunteers get through the rough spots that might otherwise lead to frustration.

Additionally, there are differences in supervising volunteers compared to paid staff. Staff directly supervising volunteers should be trained on how to properly manage and motivate their volunteers. Volunteers receive no form of monetary compensation, thus the notion of a pay increase is not a motivating factor to enhance their performance, as it would be for paid staff. The supervisory staff must recognize the differences between paid staff and volunteers and adjust their management style accordingly. A reading list of helpful volunteer management books is provided in Section 9.

### ***Communication***

Another critical element to the management of volunteers is good communication. An important aspect of communication is scheduling. Volunteers need to have advanced notice of when and where they are needed. Also, if they are not needed on a particular day volunteers should be notified with as much notice as possible. Similarly, if a volunteer cannot show up, the coordinator needs to know about it in advance so they can readjust their plans.

## **Sustainment**

It is important to remember that your volunteer program should align with the culture of the law enforcement agency in order for it to have sustainability. It is important that the program supports the mission and values of the agency.

Collaboration between coordinators and department staff about the role and significance of the program can be helpful in ascertaining how volunteers can best be utilized. This may assist staff in viewing the volunteer program as an important extension of the agency, and not as a different entity.

Once a person joins your agency as a volunteer, he or she must be made aware of the expectations, policies, and procedures to be followed. The length, structure, and format of volunteer training will vary according to the size of the agency and the scope of the volunteer program.