

Training

Section 6: Training

KEY POINTS

- All volunteers should receive an orientation to the agency.
- All volunteers should receive job-specific training to maximize their ability to perform assigned tasks.
- Periodic training is a valuable tool to keep volunteers apprised of any program/policy changes and help them develop useful skills.
- Sample documents referenced in this section appear in the VIPS resource library at www.policevolunteers.org.

Orientation

All volunteers should receive an orientation to the agency before taking on any responsibilities. It can be helpful to supplement this orientation by providing the volunteer with a handbook of policies and procedures for future reference. Sample handbooks can be found in the VIPS resource library. Some agencies use their CPA as a prerequisite to volunteering. In this instance, the CPA functions as the orientation.

You may consider including the following items in the orientation:

- A welcome from the chief, sheriff, or other command staff representative
- An agency history
- The agency structure and an organizational chart
- The goals and purpose of the volunteer program
- The policies and procedures governing the volunteer program
- A glossary of language and abbreviations used by the agency
- A tour of the agency
- Emergency procedures
- Timesheets and other required forms
- A termination policy
- Evaluation procedures

In addition to the above, the volunteer should

- Meet his or her supervisor
- Be shown where he or she should report
- Meet the paid and volunteer staff he or she will be working with
- Be shown where to store personal belongings
- Be shown where to park
- Be issued proper credentials (i.e., ID card, parking pass)

Your local or state government may require additional training, such as sexual harassment, diversity, or ethics. Upon completion of this basic introduction to the agency's requirements and expectations, you may consider asking the volunteer to sign an agreement acknowledging applicable policies and procedures and a commitment to a certain schedule or number of volunteer shifts. Sample volunteer agreements appear in the VIPS resource library.

Position-Specific Training

Volunteers should receive specific training in order to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their volunteer assignments. By sufficiently training your volunteers, you can increase their job satisfaction and overall morale, making them likely to continue volunteering with the agency.

Training will also reduce your risk for liability. You may consider having your volunteers sign a form to indicate that they have completed training in a certain task and are comfortable moving forward on their own.

Training should be appropriate to the complexity and demands of the position and the capabilities of the volunteer. Volunteers can be trained through on-the-job demonstration, lectures, written material, role-playing, simulations, and case studies. Some programs may require different techniques, but adults learn best when the training is practical and experientially based. For more information on training, refer to the VIPS resources library at www.policevolunteers.org.

The following are examples of training procedures provided to volunteers:

Volunteer Patrol Programs

Some volunteer patrol programs provide volunteers with a field-training program, which includes a step-by-step guide for trainees. The field-training program is an in-depth study and review of departmental policy and procedures as well as the duties of the volunteer. The training and guide include information on uniforms and appearance, radio operation, problem solving, filling out forms, communication techniques, and specific safety concerns for patrol members (keeping subjects in sight, confronting subjects, searching volunteer vehicles prior to duty, and maintaining a zone of safety).

Chaplain Programs

Volunteer chaplains have received outside training by virtue of their position. However, most chaplains do not have experience working with law enforcement. Many programs introduce chaplains to law enforcement by having the chaplain observe various operations, such as a communications center, agency substation, or academy. Policies and procedures should state whether a chaplain will work alongside officers at all times or only for specific occasions. Each chaplain should receive specific instruction as to the use of pagers and radios, as well as any forms used. It is also necessary that the chaplain learn about participation in special events (i.e., award ceremonies, memorials, or funerals).

Administrative Support

Administrative volunteers may serve in many different areas throughout the department. Because of assignment diversity, administrative support volunteers require specific training for a variety of matters including, but not limited to, confidentiality, human relations, communications, filing, computer skills, and recognizing different functions and departments within the agency. In addition, many departments provide information about office-appropriate behavior and attire.

The Coral Springs, Florida, Police Department invites volunteers to attend city-wide "New Employee Orientation," which includes police officers, firefighters, and all other city agencies' employees.

Interpreter Programs

Because of the specific nature of law enforcement services, some law enforcement agencies require preservice training (e.g., ride-a-longs) for interpretation programs. Agencies train interpreters as to how to respond when paged through dispatch for immediate on-scene assistance, including training in the use of pagers and radios. The department and volunteers must continually research situation-specific vocabulary and terminology to assist with the assignment.

Victim Assistance

Because of the sensitive nature of victim services, most departments offer extensive training for these volunteers. Some departments have created intensive crisis-response training programs that include information on victim dynamics in issues of stalking/harassment, domestic violence, sexual battery, media relations, and crisis intervention. Additionally, volunteers receive training on the fundamentals of crisis and advocacy. Some departments use role-playing and scenario training to help volunteers learn proper techniques and helpful skills when working with victims of crime.

Search and Rescue

While it is the goal of every search to find the missing person, it is often small details that allow for a successful search. Most departments provide extensive training in the areas of search methods (line searches, hasty searches), land navigation (use of GPS units and compasses), tracking, and technical rescue techniques. These skills need constant refreshing, so volunteers must regularly practice the methods they have learned. Many departments hold mock search and rescue exercises in woods, open fields, back mountain trails, and commonly used exercise trails. These practice exercises allow for real-life execution of the skills the volunteers have learned. Some departments record the mock exercises and watch the tapes for training purposes.

Explorer Posts

Law Enforcement Explorer Posts are made up of volunteers ages 14–21. These highly motivated students are trained in all areas of law enforcement, with the purpose of introducing youth to a career in law enforcement. Many departments require weekly training sessions covering the history of law enforcement, patrol procedures, accident investigations, traffic control, criminal investigations, search and rescue, communications, and community policing. Additionally, some departments train explorers in proper child safety seat installation and child fingerprinting.

The Fresno, California, Police Department's Citizens on Patrol program provides volunteers with a field-training program, which includes a step-by-step guide for trainees. Victim Assistance

Ongoing Training

Any initial training should be supplemented by ongoing in-service training. This will keep volunteers apprised of policy and programmatic changes and further develop their skills, enabling them to carry out assigned out tasks.

Additional training opportunities can also be viewed as rewards. For example, volunteers may be interested in attending training offered to other department employees. You can also investigate training opportunities, such as advanced computer skills, offered to your local government employees. As space permits, you may be allowed to send volunteers at no cost. Some agencies offer CPR, emergency first aid, and CERT training to their volunteers to enhance their skills.

Integrating Volunteers into the Agency

Once volunteers know what they will be doing, they need to be introduced to the department. Items to discuss in the introduction include agency size, community size, citizen demographics, and the presence of higher education institutions, philanthropic organizations, and tourist destinations. Integrating volunteers into the culture of your agency can be a significant challenge. Volunteers who do not feel welcome are unlikely to stay.

There are a number of formal and informal ways to help volunteers feel as though they are part of the agency:

- Allow volunteers to use agency facilities, such as a workout room
- Allow volunteers to join the credit union
- Invite volunteers to formal and informal celebrations such as birthdays and recognition events
- Provide volunteers with uniforms or clothing that identifies them as volunteers with your agency
- Distribute the agency newsletter to volunteers and include volunteers in agency-wide events

Volunteers must also feel welcome by the sworn and civilian staff with whom they are working. This is another reason to involve the staff when developing a volunteer program: they must understand that the volunteers are there to support, not supplant, their activities. Staff should be educated about the volunteer program in the training academy and through periodic roll call or in-service presentations.

Communication between administrators, volunteer coordinators, and staff is important to the success of the program. Acknowledge resistance from staff to utilize volunteers and answer questions that may arise.

Many departments have recognized the need to train staff in supervising volunteers. It is not unusual for a volunteer to be the first person the staff member has supervised. Train staff members in making sure necessary items are provided for specific duties, being prepared for the volunteer on his or her assigned day (have work ready for the volunteer to do), and providing time to answer the volunteer's questions.

The Denver, Colorado, Police Department's volunteers have been trained to staff a room in the Crimes Against Persons Bureau where victims and their families wait to speak to detectives. The volunteers make the victims feel comfortable and offer a safe place for victims to interact with the police.