

Assessment

Section 8: Assessment

KEY POINTS

- Assessing your volunteer program can help you make budget and resource distribution decisions.
- Measuring the value of volunteer time can be done by using the same rate of pay as the person who would be doing the same job, or by using the national average hourly value of volunteer time.
- Because of the sensitive nature of the job that volunteers perform in a law enforcement agency, evaluating a volunteer on a biannual or annual basis is important.

Volunteer Program Assessment

Assessing the costs and benefits of your volunteer program can assist you and other decision makers in making budget and resource distribution decisions. It is important to document the resources required to manage, implement, and maintain your volunteer program. As discussed earlier, a volunteer program is not a free endeavor. The return on investment, however, can be substantial. Information and data supporting the value of the program can be vital to its maintenance and growth.

Collecting data before the implementation of the program (“baseline” data) can assist in measuring the growth and impact of your program. You will likely collect both quantitative (e.g., numbers) and qualitative (e.g., anecdotal) data. Examining the same type of data on an annual basis can be helpful in determining if the goals of the volunteer program are being met.

Commonly collected information may include:

- The number of individuals volunteering
- How many hours each volunteer contributes on a monthly basis
- The types of activities volunteers are engaged in
- When applicable, the number of activities completed (e.g., how many home safety checks were conducted, how many children were fingerprinted)

Assessing your program on a regular basis can help identify functions that no longer require the same amount of volunteer support and newly identified agency needs that can be met with the support of volunteers.

Calculating the Dollar Value of Volunteer Contributions

There are several ways to measure the value of volunteers’ contributions. If your agency has volunteers serving in numerous roles, you may choose to use the national average hourly value of volunteer time. This value is set by the Independent Sector, a coalition of approximately 600 charities. The hourly value of volunteer time is based on the average hourly wage for all non-management, nonagricultural workers as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, with a 12 percent increase to estimate for fringe benefits. The current 2008 value is \$20.25 per hour. Using this calculation, if volunteers contributed 6,300 hours to your agency in a 12-month period, the value of their contributions is \$127,575. A complete list of the different rates by state is available at www.policevolunteers.org, listed under the references section of the resource page.

You may choose to calculate the hourly rate of pay for the individual who would serve the function if not performed by a volunteer. For example, if a volunteer is conducting home security checks for vacationing residents, rather than an officer making \$20.00 per hour, the value of that volunteer's time should be calculated as \$20.00 per hour.

Although this dollar amount may be helpful when making budgetary and programmatic decisions, the value of an increased presence in the community and the positive public relations generated by volunteers are not included. While difficult to measure, anecdotal information and feedback from the community are also important considerations. If you use volunteers to staff a community policing station that would otherwise be closed, it may be helpful to track the number of visitors to the station during its operating hours.

In addition to making and justifying internal funding decisions, the information collected should be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program, determine program growth areas, and seek additional program support from the public and outside entities such as community foundations.

Assessment of Individual Volunteers

Due to the sensitive nature of volunteering for a law enforcement agency, volunteers should be routinely assessed. Depending on the size and scope of the program, this assessment may be completed by the volunteer coordinator and/or the volunteer's supervisor. Many agencies choose to formally evaluate volunteers on an annual or biannual basis.

This evaluation can be a valuable tool to:

- Select a volunteer for formal recognition
- Identify and prevent a potential problem
- Determine what training would be helpful to the volunteer in performing his or her role
- Determine whether the volunteer can and would like to take on a new or additional role
- Obtain feedback and suggestions about the structure and management of the volunteer program

Talking to volunteers can also be valuable in obtaining feedback about what is working and not working within the program. Examples of evaluation forms can be found in the VIPS resource library at www.policivolunteers.org.

The current hourly value (2008) of a volunteer was increased to \$20.25 from to \$18.04 in 2005.