WHAT IS A CITIZEN VOLUNTEER IN POLICE SERVICE?

A citizen volunteer in police service is a member of the community who provides support services to a law enforcement agency without monetary benefit. Services typically include community outreach, telephone work, research, and other administrative tasks.

WHY VOLUNTEER IN LAW ENFORCEMENT?

Law enforcement agencies often strive to meet public safety challenges with limited resources. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, most agencies have needed even more resources for homeland security efforts. Citizens can step in and help fill critical gaps in order to free officers to focus on these and other priorities.

WHO CAN VOLUNTEER?

Citizens of almost any age and background can volunteer to help out. Even youth can volunteer—many agencies offer a Law Enforcement Explorer Program.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING?

Citizens who volunteer to help law enforcement gain in many ways. They will

- Help make their communities, their cities, and their country safer from crime and terrorism
- Gain insights into the law enforcement system and how it works
- Have an opportunity to improve the quality of their local law enforcement service

WHAT DO VOLUNTEERS DO?

There are many ways a volunteer can assist a law enforcement agency, including

- Providing home safety checks for vacationing residents
- Typing reports, entering data, and other office tasks
- Staffing community policing substations
- Providing bike patrols in community parks
- Conducting research and compiling crime data for specific area problems
- Participating in Neighborhood Watch
- Assisting front counter personnel by answering citizen inquiries and directing citizens to the proper police unit
- Providing traffic/crowd control
- Assisting with special events
- Patrolling shopping centers to assist stranded motorists or lost children
- Writing citations for handicap parking violations
- Providing short-term care of juveniles in protective custody
- Participating in search-and-rescue activities
- Participating in role-plays and training scenarios
- Staffing a department booth and distributing information on police services at community events
- Assisting the telephone reporting unit in taking reports of minor and "no suspect" crimes (e.g., theft from auto)
- Participating in a citizens advisory board
- Becoming reserve or auxiliary officers
- Joining an explorer post if you are a youth interested in a law enforcement career

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ALSO STRIVE TO MATCH A VOLUNTEER'S SPECIALIZED SKILLS WITH THEIR OWN NEEDS. FOR EXAMPLE:

- 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 a Chaplain Program.
- University researchers, statisticians, and criminologists can help law enforcement agencies conduct research.
- Public health officials can help officers develop public safety plans and train for biohazards.
- Security specialists can conduct free security reviews for local schools, afterschool programs, or places of workshop.
- Marketers and artists can help local law enforcement design community public safety campaigns.
- Bilingual individuals can assist with translation.
- Computer programmers can help develop or improve websites and records management systems.

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING IS REQUIRED?

Most law enforcement volunteer programs have short orientation and training sessions to introduce volunteers to law enforcement practices. Some agencies have Citizen Academies, which familiarize citizen volunteers with such aspects of policing as how to recognize suspicious behavior, how to use portable radios, how to protect a crime scene, and the basics of criminal and traffic law.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

The specific volunteer opportunities offered will vary from agency to agency. The Volunteers in Police Service Program (VIPS) website, www.policevolunteers.org, serves as a gateway to information for citizens interested in volunteering with a state or local law enforcement agency in their community. The website includes a searchable database of law enforcement volunteer programs and volunteer opportunities throughout the country. You can find out what opportunities are offered in your community by visiting www.policevolunteers.org. or by contacting your local law enforcement agency.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) (www.theiacp.org) manages and implements the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the White House Office of the USA Freedom Corps and the U.S. Department of Justice.

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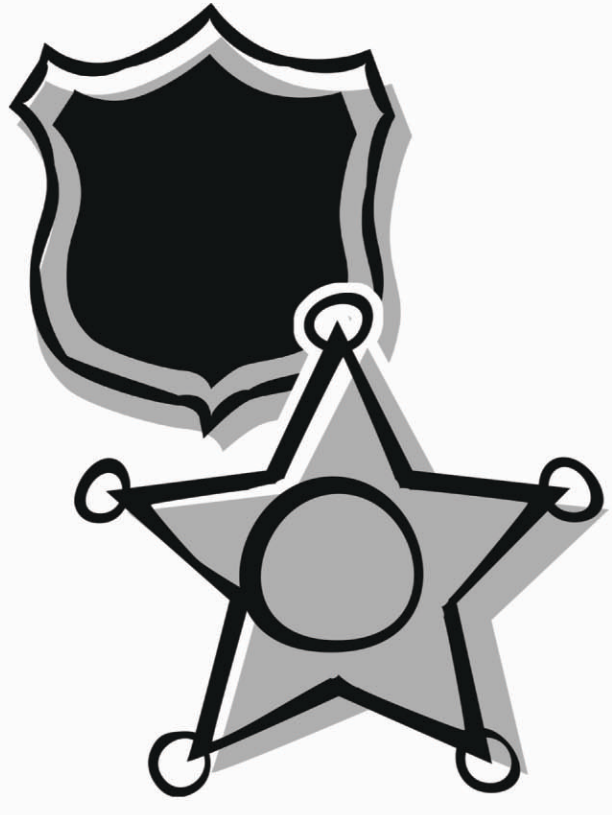
Law Enforcement Needs Your Help