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Volunteers

Introduction

This bulletin examines the use of volunteers in Texas police departments. The tasks and duties performed are identified. In addition, volunteer retention is addressed by analyzing methods through which police departments maintain their continued service. Giving recognition is one of the main attributes associated with volunteer retention as well as maintaining a healthy volunteer program (Getz 1989).

Background

During the colonial period (Burden 1988b) and the frontier days of the old west, volunteers in policing prevailed (Sundeen & Siegel 1986; Krueger 1982; Garry 1980, Greenberg 1979; and Boop & Schultz 1972). In modern times, utilization of volunteers has been revived (Thrash 1989; Bocklet 1988; Burden 1988b; and Biggs 1986). Volunteers may perform a variety of services ranging from translating foreign documents (Getz 1989), to serving in motorist assistance programs (Marquez 1992), to responding to calls for service (Walker & Walker 1990).

The degree of responsibility given to volunteers is sometimes surprising. In Victoria, Canada, the police department utilizes volunteers to respond to calls for service through the "Community Police Station Program (Co. P. S.)." The city has developed "store front stations" staffed with one department officer and approximately 30 volunteer officers. This approach has been successful in Victoria due to "the leadership role played by the citizen" (Walker & Walker 1990). Many departments have experienced success through imple-

menting the use of volunteers, and some administrators could not operate a department any other way. According to Chief Richard Ruonala of the Goose Creek, South Carolina, Police Department, "in a department our size and a city our size, we couldn't survive without this volunteer help" (Burden 1988b).

Due to a lack of financial resources, it is logical to supplement a work force with volunteers if possible. Volunteers can perform a number of duties that enable an administrator to extract more productivity from the department without depleting the budget (Arreola 1992). Many departments have minimized costs and increased the quality of service in this manner (Bocklet 1988; Casey 1992; Thrash 1989). The use of volunteers not only provides more work experience for individuals (Garry 1980), it also enables the administrator to "free up sworn officers to devote greater time to activities considered more essential to crime prevention or reduction" (Garry 1980). Using volunteers in policing facilitates the process of improving police-community relations. Finally, successful volunteers may prove to be an excellent source for potential full-time officers of the future (Garry 1980).

Problems. Although there are many positives associated with the use of volunteers in policing, negatives must also be taken into consideration. Problems include potential staff/volunteer conflict, citizen/volunteer conflict, and other quality control related issues. Harty and Valante (1983) suggest potential difficulties related to turnover rates, supervisory

needs, dependability, and staff/volunteer conflict. Further, Rosentraub and Sharp (1982) found officers to be unsupportive of citizen volunteers in the Fort Worth and Sherman, Texas, police departments.

Many members of unionized departments across the United States dislike the use of volunteers because of job security issues. Volunteers are thought to deplete potential jobs for paid officers as well as jobs that were once reserved for disabled members of departments (Burden 1988b).

Retired officers. Among the concerns related to the recruitment and utilization of citizen volunteers in policing are legal liability, overall citizen volunteer quality, and staff/volunteer conflict (Wallace 1994). It is possible that the increased utilization of retired police officers as volunteers could be a solution to some of these problems. Burden (1988a) suggests that there is a gross underrepresentation of retired police officers as police volunteers. Coleman (1987) asserts that these qualified individuals represent a willing, potential solution to many of the problems associated with the utilization of police volunteers. Increased recruitment of retired volunteer officers might reduce conflict between officers and volunteers, as retired officer volunteers could serve as a liaison between the two groups. These individuals have a wealth of law enforcement and public relations knowledge that would be an asset to any department. By virtue of their previously attained professional status, it appears reasonable to assume that some of the previously mentioned problems would be diminished. Thus, utilizing retired officer volunteers would produce less police/volunteer conflict, liability concerns, and problems related to quality control issues (i.e., turnover rates, supervisory needs, dependability).

How Volunteers Are Used

The responses from participating departments across the state indicate that the use of volunteers in policing is very popular. Approximately three-fourths of the departments use volunteers on a part-time basis. Amarillo and El Paso use full-time volunteers. While the Amarillo Police Department employs only one full-time volunteer, the El Paso Police Department has over 100 full-time volunteer officers.

El Paso's volunteer coordinator stated that the utilization of full-time volunteers is a reaction to budget and personnel constraints as well as an urgent need for additional human resources. The department had planned on implementing a reserve officer program in an attempt to address these problems. However, Texas state law prohibits the utilization of reserve officers until 400+ hours of training has been completed. Thus, the reserve program was put on hold and the successful volunteer program was developed.

While 73 percent of the departments reported using volunteers, only 27 percent (Deer Park, Amarillo, Richardson, El Paso, and Arlington) enjoy the services of retired officers as volunteers (RPVs). The agencies reported using a total of 1,465 volunteers, but only 33 were retired officers. Because very few departments utilize RPVs there will be no further distinction made between retired officers and those who are not. There was no substantial difference in the manner in which the retired officers were utilized, and of all the reporting agencies that use RPVs, there was no indication of any problems.

The Abilene Police Department ranked their six original volunteers as extensively used and indispensable in their clerical and data management duties. "Our volunteers are indispensable. I don't know how we would get along without them. Our volunteers also provide us with inspiration, in that they are very dedicated and do a great job."

Volunteers in policing are used for a variety of duties ranging from clerical assistance to automobile maintenance (see Table 1). The most common use was for clerical assistance as reported by 57 percent of the departments. The next most frequently performed volunteer function was data processing and management (33%), followed by neighborhood watch (30%). The responses clearly indicate that volunteers are useful resources for departmental management, as well as other tasks more traditionally thought of as police officer duties (e.g., citizen patrol, assisting with victims, etc.).

Table 1

Use of Volunteers by Function

Function	Number of Departments	Percent of Departments
Clerical Assistance	17	57
Data Processing	10	33
Neighborhood Watch	9	30
Citizen Patrol	8	27
Assisting Victims	7	23
Public Education	7	23
Translating	7	23
Front Desk	6	20
Communication	4	13
Motorist Assistance	4	13
Citations	3	10
Explorer Post	3	10
Maintenance	2	7
Other	9	30

It is important to note that some functions performed by volunteers, while not practiced by the majority of departments, represent practical and successful innovations. The Fort Worth and Garland police departments provide very comprehensive lists of volunteer job opportunities as shown in Tables 2 and 3. Motorist assistance, while not a highly reported volunteer function, is used extensively by one-fourth of the departments and is reported to be of considerable value. The Amarillo Police Department refers to its motorist assistance program as extensively used and indispensable.

Under the broad heading of clerical assistance, the Abilene Police Department presents a unique use with the "Criminal Investigation Division Senior Citizen Volunteer Program." This program was developed to improve public relations in a service-oriented way and is a practical response to a problem in the Criminal Investigation Division. Since many cases sent to the division have no follow-up leads, they are inactivated and filed. In 300-400 cases a month, the complainant is not informed because the detective does not have enough time to make follow-up calls. As a result, there is the potential for creating a dissatisfied citizen. In response, the department assigns its senior citizen volunteers to make necessary follow-up calls. The volunteer calls the complainant, informs him/her of the status of the case, and asks for any additional information. By following up on the filed cases, the department demonstrates its concern for citizens and projects a better public image.

The least reported volunteer function was providing for departmental maintenance (i.e., washing of patrol vehicles). Only two departments, Amarillo and Garland, use volunteers for this purpose and indicated the service was indispensable. One would expect that since the maintenance function is not a task associated with confrontation or legal problems, it would present an excellent program. However, at present it is underrepresented as a volunteer function.

Economic Support

Depending on the extent of use and number of volunteers recruited, a department can provide human resources for certain police services free of charge thus saving city or county funds. The estimated monthly value of services performed by policing volunteers ranged from \$400 to \$160,000 with an average of \$15,961.

The average annual cost for volunteer maintenance, (e.g., providing uniforms and other equipment), ranged from \$10 to \$500 a volunteer. As part of Plano's motorist assistance program, the department provides volunteers with a truck at an expense of \$2,400 a year. While there is concern about the cost of maintaining volunteers, the figures indicate that it is not substantial compared to the value of services provided.

The overall estimated yearly costs of volunteer maintenance statewide is \$59,870, while the overall estimated value of services per year is \$191,532.

Volunteer Characteristics

While the data indicate that more departments report using volunteers between 31 and 35 years of age, high school graduates, and males (see Table 4), for the most part, age, education, and gender are evenly distributed. Sixty percent of the departments reported using 31 to 35-year-olds, 53 percent reported using volunteers age 63 and older, 47 percent had volunteers age 51 to 62, and 30 percent had volunteers 22 to 30. The only age group underrepresented was less-than-21, with only 13 percent of the departments reporting using volunteers in this age group. The Duncanville Police Department requires all volunteers to be at least 21 years old.

Thirty-seven percent of the departments reported having volunteers with a high school education, while 30 percent reported using volunteers with one to two years of college, and 27 percent have college graduates working as volunteers. No departments reported using volunteers without a high school education.

Regarding gender, the departments indicated that 44 percent of their volunteers are female while 56 percent are male, a fairly even distribution. Although the Abilene Police Department has only female volunteers, overall, volunteers represent a wide variety of characteristics. For example, 93 percent of the departments reported no variance in volunteer functions by age.

Selection

Only 14 percent of the departments have volunteer selection requirements equal to those for their regular personnel. Those departments reporting fewer requirements cite reasons such as the volunteers' tasks do not propose a severe risk to security or safety; thus, it is not necessary to evaluate them physically or psychologically. Volunteers are tested more specifically on the particular skills they will perform.

To insure volunteer quality, 73 percent of the departments perform a background check. Most focus on criminal history, traffic history, employment references, and credit review. Only two departments, Arlington and Fort Worth, conduct polygraphs, and Fort Worth reported that volunteers are difficult to obtain as a result of this requirement. Apparently the polygraph serves as a useful tool for "weeding out" potential problematic volunteers. Only the Mesquite Police Department utilizes drug testing as a form of selective screening.



Table 2

Fort Worth Police Department Volunteer Activities

- File Clerk/Typist—Filing of confidential information documents into police employee folders, filing index cards numerically, use of copy machine.
- Front Desk Receptionist—Answering telephones to screen calls, typing letters and documents, use of copy machine.
- Weapons Range—Sorting and cleaning shell casings, manufacture ammunition, repair used targets, answering telephones, cleaning of weapons and bullet trap areas, etc.
- Equipment Clerk—Sizing, labeling and sorting of police uniforms, removing sleeve patches from discarded uniforms.
- Auto Theft—Answer phones, pick up paperwork in Records, filing, working front desk and weekly overdue supplement list.
- Major Case—Answer phones, take and deliver messages, take paperwork to Pre-trial and Tarrant County Bond Desk as needed, pick up teletypes in PIC for fugitives and handle requests for information from officers in the field.
- Pawn Shop Detail—Answer front desk and weekly overdue supplement list.
- Victim Assistance—Answer phones, pick up paperwork, assist with clerical duties, limited counseling, informing victims about victim compensation.
- Youth—Assist the bicycle officer with the job of getting the bicycles ready for auction, phone referral transfers, entering and updating the computer juvenile ID records, assist the missing persons clerk in “call back” verifications of new runaway and missing persons reports.
- Narcotics—Enter narcotic complaints and Crime Stoppers tips into computer system, help maintain files, and typing of search warrants.

Table 3

Garland Police Department Volunteer Job Opportunities

- Alarms Clerk—Assists with notification of home owner of city alarm ordinance and the penalty for non-compliance.
- Children’s Safe House Attendant—Assists investigators with child interviews by baby-sitting and answering the phones.
- Crime Prevention Clerk—General office duties, compiling information packets for Neighborhood Crime Watch and Business Crime Watch programs.
- Crime Scene/Search Assistant—Assists investigators with field work, office, and laboratory.
- “Crime Watch Live” Assistant—Live TV production assistant, camera and sound work.
- “Crime Watch Live” Operators—Telephone screeners for live call-in TV show.
- Criminal Investigations Clerk—Filing, phones, copying, and light computer work for the following areas: burglary, criminal mischief, auto theft, forgery, homicide, gang unit, personal violence, intelligence, administration.
- Communications Clerk—Clerical support for communications director. Computer and organizational skills.
- Crisis Counselor Assistant—Clerical support and phones for crisis counseling and victim’s assistance programs.
- Fingerprint Technicians—Fingerprinting of the public at the station and of children at the schools.
- Jail Clerks—Clerical support for detention staff, phones, light data entry.
- “Operation Calm” Volunteer—Makes five-day-a-week phone contact with the elderly, makes referrals for services.
- Pawn Ticket Entry Clerk—Data entry into pawn ticket computer assisting investigators with reported stolen merchandise.
- Property Room Assistant—Data entry and general support for quartermaster.
- Records Clerk—Data entry, filing, public contact at service window.
- “Santa Cop” Volunteer—Organization and distribution of donated toys during the month of December.
- “Speedwatch” Volunteer—Operates radar and speedboard on residential streets at the request of citizens and the traffic division.
- Squad Car Inspector—Inspection and supply for all fleet vehicles. Delivery of vehicles for service or repair.
- Traffic Clerk—Clerical support for Traffic Division. Phones and light computer work.
- “Turkey Drive” Volunteer—Collection and distribution of food to the needy during the month of November.
- “Vacation Watch” Patrol—Checks homes of citizens at their request during their absence.
- VIP Secretary—Clerical support for volunteer coordinator.
- Warrants Clerk—Clerical support for warrant office.
- Word Processing Assistant—Word processing of police documents and proofreading.

Table 4

Characteristics of Volunteers

Characteristics	Number of Departments	Percent of Departments
Age		
63+	16	53
51-62	14	47
31-35	18	60
22-30	9	30
< 21	4	13
Education		
High School Graduate	11	37
1-2 Years College	9	30
College Graduate	8	27
Other	2	6
Gender		
Male	17	56
Female	13	44

Training

Forty-two percent of the departments indicate 1 to 10 training hours as the standard required for their volunteers. Twenty-five percent require 21 to 40 hours and 21 percent require none. At the extreme, 8 percent provide 41 to 80 hours and 4 percent require 11 to 20 hours (see Table 5). San Antonio and Houston have different training programs based on the activities of the particular volunteer. San Antonio has both a short (1 to 10 hour) and long (21 to 40 hour) program. Houston also has a short (1 to 10 hour) program as well as an extensive 41 to 80 hour program for those volunteers involved with crime victims.

Table 5

Typical Hours of Volunteer Training

Hours	Number of Departments	Percent of Departments
0	5	21
1-10	10	42
11-20	1	4
21-40	6	25
41-80	2	8
80+	0	0

Maintenance of Volunteers

Fifty-seven percent of the departments reported a variety of dress codes for volunteers. For example, Fort Worth prohibits shorts and shirts exhibiting offensive pictures or messages. The dress rules ranged from formal to casual as illustrated by Arlington and El Paso. In Arlington, the volunteers are subjected to the same dress code as full-time employees while in El Paso, volunteers are to be neat and fully clothed.

Thirty-seven percent of the departments provide uniforms and/or equipment for volunteers ranging from shirts and radio equipment to jackets and vehicles. San Antonio and Midland provide their volunteers with cellular phones, and Plano, as mentioned earlier, provides its motorist assistance volunteer with a truck. All of these provisions are important, first, because they can increase productivity of the volunteers, and, second, providing the volunteers with attire and equipment solidifies their feelings of acceptance and worth.

Incentives to maintain and reward volunteers for the services they provide have been developed by many departments. The most popular, used by 60 percent of the departments, is a formal ceremony where volunteers are recognized for their contributions (see Table 6). Forty percent provide volunteers with awards, 33 percent provide gifts such as caps or jackets, 23 percent organize group outings, and 12 percent treat their volunteers to social events such as ball games and plays. Ten percent of the departments reported having developed other creative forms of recognition. For example, the Addison Police Department provides their volunteers with marked parking spaces, and the Amarillo Police Department honors their volunteers with pins indicating hours volunteered for the year. Abilene and Plano take their volunteers to informal lunches. El Paso has many formal recognition ceremonies along with an informal monthly "Koffee Klatch."

Table 6

Incentives for Maintenance of Volunteers

Incentives	Number of Departments	Percent of Departments
Ceremonies	18	60
Awards	12	40
Gifts	10	33
Group Outings	7	23
Social Events	6	12
Other	3	10
None	1	3



In El Paso one can observe a perfect example of citizens getting behind their police department. In order to provide funds for the many ceremonies, lunches, as well as other forms of volunteer recognition, the volunteer coordinator hustles for donations. Above and beyond the scope of his duties, he works hard to collect funds in order to pay tribute to his indispensable volunteer staff. Even so, he acknowledges that this would not be possible without the very generous donations of his good friends who have collectively sponsored eight award ceremonies as well as two Christmas parties. In addition, they recently provided funds to provide each volunteer with an El Paso PD logo adorned cap.

Problems

Only 23.3 percent of the departments reported having experienced problems as a result of volunteer use. The problem most frequently reported was turnover (16.6%), followed by dependability (10%), staff/volunteer conflict (3.3%), confidentiality (3.3%), extensive supervisory needs (3.3%), and citizen/volunteer conflict (3.3%). Odessa, Plano, Arlington, El Paso, and Houston all experienced a turnover problem and unnecessary training costs. More specifically, Odessa indicated a problem with volunteers "losing interest" in the program as a potential reason for the high rate of turnover.

Arlington, San Antonio and Houston reported having problems with volunteer dependability. San Antonio, however offered the following suggestion: "The most successful volunteer activities are those that are project-based or do not demand that volunteers continually perform according to a set schedule."

Plano reported staff/volunteer conflicts which are undoubtedly related to their turnover problem. The Plano Department also indicated that their staff is resistant to the use of volunteers, and as a result, volunteers are under-utilized and feel that they are not needed. Garland experienced citizen/volunteer conflicts when some citizens did not appreciate being clocked by radar volunteers, even though citations are not issued. Finally, Arlington indicated problems involving extensive supervisory needs as well as confidentiality matters.

In addressing the possible relationship between amount of volunteer training and problems with volunteers, one would assume that departments experiencing problems would be those with little or no training. However, while five departments require no training, only one reported experiencing

problems. Three of the departments experiencing problems require only 1 to 10 hours of training, and the remaining departments with volunteer problems require more training or have dual training programs.

Why Departments Do Not Use Volunteers

Approximately 27 percent of the responding departments do not use volunteers. One agency does not use volunteers because of anticipated legal problems and extensive supervisory needs, and another cited anticipated dependability problems. Three departments currently not using volunteers, White Settlement, Randall County, and Cleburne, suggested the possibility of implementing programs in the near future.

Conclusion

Approximately three-fourths of the surveyed departments use volunteers. Most are part-time workers, and very few are retired officer volunteers (.02%). Volunteers range from clerical assistants and data managers to departmental maintenance and motorist assistants. At a minimal cost to the department, volunteers provide an additional resource that can aid the officers in completing a number of necessary tasks.

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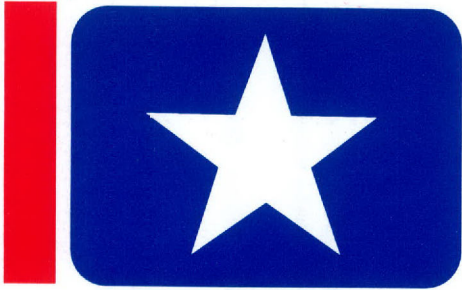
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This bulletin was written by Mr. Deon Brock, a
doctoral student at Sam Houston State Univer-
sity. Mr. Brock served two years as a lecturer at
the University of Texas-Pan American.



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