

RETIRED SENIOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS (RSVP) AT SAN DIEGO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

SUMMARY

The Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP) program is the accepted name for a group of senior volunteers who work with a San Diego County law enforcement agency to aid the agency as well as the citizens of San Diego County. Various San Diego area law enforcement agencies may have different names for their programs, but this report will use RSVP to refer to all such groups. Previously, the 2003-2004 and 2013-2014 Grand Juries reported on RSVP programs in the San Diego Sheriff's Department and the San Diego Police Department.

The current investigation determined that, although most San Diego County law enforcement agencies operate RSVP programs, these programs have varying duties and responsibilities. However, all RSVP groups have proven to be valuable assets to their sponsoring law enforcement organizations.

Recommendations offered in this report are that the named San Diego law enforcement agencies:

- Collaborate to create a centralized two-week academy for new RSVP recruits across all municipal law enforcement agencies.
- Collaborate to develop and share recruiting best practices.
- Pursue outside funding sources for RSVP operations and acquisition of dedicated equipment.

BACKGROUND

The 2023-2024 San Diego County Grand Jury undertook an investigation about the purpose, use, and procedures concerning RSVP programs in San Diego County. These programs have proven to provide valuable support to San Diego law enforcement agencies, and the Grand Jury has undertaken to research the history, status, and potential methods for improving the effectiveness of RSVP programs.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury interviewed members of all eleven law enforcement agencies in San Diego County:

- San Diego Sheriff's Department
- San Diego Police Department
- Coronado Police Department
- Oceanside Police Department
- Carlsbad Police Department
- La Mesa Police Department
- Chula Vista Police Department
- Escondido Police Department
- El Cajon Police Department

- Harbor Police Department
- National City Police Department

The Grand Jury reviewed the report *Volunteers in Police Service Add Value While Budgets Decrease*, published by Volunteers in Police Service, International Association of Chiefs of Police, & Bureau of Justice Assistance, US Department of Justice. 2011.¹

DISCUSSION

In 1992 San Diego Police Officer Fred Wilson first began asking citizens over the age of 50 to become more involved with their police department by forming the first Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP) program, graduating 21 volunteers in that first class. In addition to being 50 or older, RSVP members must be semi- or fully retired, have a valid California driver's license, and be available a minimum of three days per month. Applicants also undergo a comprehensive police background check, possibly including a lie detector test, and cannot have any felony convictions.

Since 1992, the RSVP concept has been adopted by law enforcement agencies throughout the country. In the County of San Diego most police departments and the Sheriff's Department currently have RSVP programs in place. Those with programs have brief descriptions of them on their websites.

The two prior Grand Jury investigations into the RSVP program included only two law enforcement agencies. This investigation included all 11 local law enforcement agencies, nine of which have RSVP programs. The remaining two, the Harbor Police Department and the National City Police Department, are considering reinstatement of their programs, which were suspended during COVID-19.

Currently, training is handled by each individual law enforcement agency. It can involve everything from the two-week Volunteer Patrol Academy, conducted by the Sheriff's Department, to a one-on-one individual training at an agency. The Sheriff's Department conducts the two-week, all-inclusive RSVP academy four times per year. Recently some of the other law enforcement agencies have sent their new RSVP members to this academy. If all law enforcement agencies joined in providing this two-week academy to their new RSVP members, it would facilitate a foundational knowledge applicable to all agencies upon which individual agency training could build. This method of training new RSVP volunteers would enhance an already effective system and introduce RSVP members to other agency personnel, promoting inter-agency cooperation, much the same as the San Diego Regional Law Enforcement Training Academy currently does for new officers and deputies.

Agencies report that the life experiences of individual RSVP members contribute to the success of the RSVP program, and they cite these significant contributions and benefits of their RSVP programs:

- Provides the agency with additional "eyes and ears" in interactions with the public at large.

- Aids in traffic control, special events, community engagements, and parking enforcement.
- Makes popular services available to citizens such as vacation home checks and You Are Not Alone (YANA) visits to homebound seniors.
- Uses RSVP members' experience, energy, and time to make the city a safer and better place to live.
- Enhances public relations for the law enforcement agencies.
- Allows RSVP members to stay active and to have the satisfaction of providing useful contributions to society.
- Frees up officers and deputies to handle other enforcement issues.

Most law enforcement agencies report that the operation of their RSVP programs is negatively impacted by a lack of quality equipment. Equipment provided to RSVP members includes vehicles, uniforms, communications gear, and other support equipment. The most expensive and most difficult equipment to procure are vehicles. Most agencies use older patrol cars and other phased out vehicles for RSVP personnel. The City of Coronado includes support for RSVP equipment in its budget, but other agencies have less formal and dependable support policies. A survey from Volunteers in Police Service showed that nationally, volunteer police programs obtain their funding from a variety of sources besides police departments such as federal, community, and corporate grants.

The Grand Jury investigation also determined that recruitment of new RSVP members is an issue in many of the law enforcement agencies. Agencies use various methods such as informational flyers, website announcements, local community events and fairs, and news media articles (both television and print) to recruit. Individual law enforcement agencies can also collaborate on their recruiting efforts; however, all agencies agreed that more needs to be done to meet their needs.

FINDINGS

- F1.** RSVP programs are an asset to local law enforcement agencies.
- F2.** RSVP personnel perform routine administrative tasks allowing sworn personnel to perform other more vital public safety actions.
- F3.** RSVP programs benefit significantly from having reliable equipment to provide quality services.
- F4.** Current RSVP recruitment does not always meet membership goals.
- F5.** Training requirements are currently determined and, in many cases, conducted by individual jurisdictions, leading to potentially inconsistent policies and procedures throughout the County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2023-2024 Grand Jury recommends that all interviewed San Diego law enforcement agencies with RSVP programs:

- R1.** Collaborate to create a centralized two-week academy for new RSVP recruits across all law enforcement agencies.
- R2.** Collaborate to develop and share recruiting best practices.
- R3.** Pursue outside funding sources for RSVP operations and acquisition of dedicated equipment.

¹ <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/volunteers-in-police-service-add-value-while-budgets-decrease>

REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
 - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding
 - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
 - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
 - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
 - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed,

including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

- (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.
- (c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

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<i>Responding Agency</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
<i>San Diego Sheriff's Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>San Diego Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>Coronado Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>Oceanside Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>Carlsbad Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>La Mesa Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>Chula Vista Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>Escondido Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>El Cajon Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>Harbor Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>
<i>National City Police Department</i>	<i>R1 through R3</i>