

EXAMPLES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Compiled by: Rose L. Greenspoon  
Information Officer  
VA Division of Volunteerism

In Virginia Beach, Virginia, senior citizens help analyze statistics for the Police Department. Police say that they had been putting about 70% of their time into the paper work of compiling statistics. Under the Integrated Criminal Apprehension Program (ICAP), in just three months, volunteers contributed 2,177 hours that officers then could devote to actual analyzing.

-----  
Nearly half of Richmond, Virginia's 59 public schools have been adopted by business and civic groups in an Adopt-A-School program.

Among Adopt-A-School's projects are a fine arts week, an attendance contest, scholarships, printing the school's literary magazine, seminars on computers and other topics, tour of a hospital, including a demonstration on the use of a respirator. In addition, practical information is offered by the adopters on everything from how to prepare for a job interview to rape prevention. Funds are made available for the purchase of new equipment.

-----  
The Saginaw County Department of Social Services began its Person-to-Person program by matching self-supporting male volunteers with unemployed fathers receiving public assistance. The volunteer acted as the client's friend, helping to learn of job opportunities, evaluating his skills, and helping him apply for jobs. Many clients did obtain jobs in this way.

The program gradually expanded to include helping the disabled, the emotionally disturbed, and parents who were high-risk prospects for neglectful behavior. Contact: Susan L. Topliff, Saginaw County Department of Social Services, 310 Johnson Street, P. O. Box 5070, Saginaw, MI 48605. 517/771-1615.

-----  
In Hartford, Connecticut, residents living on meager incomes and enduring hard times have been able to keep the tax wolf from their doors through the 5 year-old In-Kind Service Program.

The city's program, the first in the nation, is limited to the unemployed, retired, and those whose taxes exceed 10% of their income. Average income is \$5,400.

Citizens are paid, depending on their aptitudes and skills, from \$3.30 to \$4.80 hourly, and have done everything from taking the rust pits off the outside brass railings at City Hall to legal work.

-----  
Recreation-minded volunteers organized in Richmond, VA to go to the aid of the Division of Parks, when budget restraints made it seem unlikely that services could continue until the scheduled closing dates. Under the supervision of trained full-time personnel, the volunteers maintained hiking trails, picnic areas, public restrooms, and manned visitor centers.

The City of Richmond wanted to clean up Belle Isle, part of James River Park. The city's budget was unprepared for the effort, but not the city's volunteers. Willing hands turned out and got the job done.

-----

In the Arlington, Virginia, County Social Services program, volunteers assist with the distribution of food stamps and with many services to clients, such as friendly visitors, transportation, and family counseling. Volunteers also perform clerical services in the office.

The Social Services Bureau also serves as a clearinghouse to match volunteers with services in all local agencies and organizations. Some of the local government programs that depend on volunteers, in addition to school and recreational activities, which traditionally involve the largest numbers, are:

When the Public Works Department wanted to set up its own library within the department, it called on volunteers to help with the organization. Volunteers also work in the planning department.

In the libraries, volunteers are trained to use the Kurtzweil reading machine. They in turn train the blind to use the equipment.

In the County Personnel Department, volunteers answer the phones, screen applicants, and match applicants with job vacancies.

Volunteers work with the Animal Welfare League in pet therapy and animal welfare. Volunteers conduct a program whereby pets are lent to residents of nursing homes to provide the comfort and companionship so desperately needed.

In the Environmental Health Department, volunteers not only help with clerical work and research, but also accompany the sanitarians on their inspection rounds.

Volunteers work with the police in setting up neighborhood watches.

At the Visitor's Center, volunteers help to staff the desks.

Contact: Jean Berg, Arlington Co., Department of Human Resources, 1800 N. Edison Street, Arlington, VA 22207. 703/558-2654

-----

Friends of the Norfolk Court are volunteers who visit boys and girls who are alone in detention homes on visiting days. They tutor children who are having trouble learning, become pen pals, organize sports, and interact in general with youth who need care and understanding.

Project Response for Victims of Abuse is also operated by this agency. Volunteers are trained to assist victims of spouse abuse. Battered women have access to persons who support them through the court system at the time of the court hearing. Contact: Theresa L. Nock, Executive Director, Friends of the Norfolk Juvenile Court, Inc., P. O. Box 809, Norfolk, VA 23501 804/623-8311.

-----

In Frederick County, Virginia, at the initiative of the chairman of the Board of Supervisors, a county-wide volunteer program is being launched to encourage citizens to volunteer in county government. Among the incentives considered is allowing tax credit on real estate and property tax assessments in return for hours of community service.

-----

The Charlottesville, Virginia Department of Social Services involves volunteers as parent aides, child care aides, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and as members of its advisory board. Volunteers mobilize resources such as food and clothing and participate in the Wilderness Challenge program for troubled youth. Volunteers also help with program development and evaluation. Contact: Kim Grosner, Department of Social Services, 610 E. Main St., Charlottesville, VA 22901 804/296-5121.

-----

Two years ago, a board bank was started in the Virginia Peninsula. Local citizens registrar their interest in and qualifications for positions on over 80 boards that are filled by appointment of City Council. In addition, interest is registered in serving on boards of 200 non-profit organizations.

The board bank has drawn widespread support from both City Council and community organizations, and utilization is constantly increasing. The Pensinsula bank is believed to be unique in that it serves both city government and community organizations. Contact: A booklet describing the program is available from the Voluntary Action Center of Va. Pensinsula, 1520 Aberdeen Road, Hampton, VA 23666. 804/838-9770.

-----

Madison Avenue and East Harlem in New York City became partners in cleaning out vacant and littered spaces. Employees of Ogilvy and Mather, the world's third largest advertising agency, worked with 1,390 residents on 117th Street between Park and Lexington Avenues to make the area habitable.

There are now residents' committees, a senior center, athletic teams, and a park.

-----

Volunteers for libraries do much to expand services. Friends of the Richmond Public Library have provided scholarships for library school, a kitchen for use in connection with the auditorium, duplicated popular books, purchased equipment, and refurbished a room for special collections. They sponsor special programs and coordinate projects with other groups such as garden clubs. Details may be obtained from the Richmond Public Library, 101 E. Franklin Street, Richmond, VA 23219. 804/780-4672.

-----

Volunteer Emergency Foster Care of Virginia is an agency dedicated to providing emergency shelter to troubled children as an alternative to jail or detention facilities.

VEFC was started in 1978 by the combined efforts of the Virginia Council of Churches, the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Welfare. Volunteer foster parents open their homes to boys and girls in need of temporary shelter (a maximum of ten days) and provide encouragement and support. Often this cooling-off period is all that is needed to resolve a family situation or for the social worker to find a satisfactory solution to the problem. Contact: Bill Christian, Executive Director, VEFC, 2317 Westwood Avenue, Suite 103, Richmond, VA 23230 804/353-4698.

-----

Business leaders around the country are forming 2 percent, 5 percent, and 10 percent clubs with the idea of supplying some of the money for charity and community improvement that no longer comes from the federal government. One of the recent such clubs was started in lower Tidewater, Virginia, where 55 companies have formed a 5 percent club.

Richmond executives are meeting with the president of the Metropolitan Richmond, Va. Chamber of Commerce to learn how the clubs operate. The organization would be operated as a project of the chamber. Contact: Carlton P. Moffatt, Jr., President, Metropolitan Richmond Chamber of Commerce, 201 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219 804/648-1234.

-----

PACE (People Acting Through Community Effort) was launched in Providence, Rhode Island in 1969 to fight neighborhood decline and deterioration and to build "people power."

The most unusual aspect of PACE is that it is an organization of organizations-- a coalition of block clubs and civic groups working together to resolve community concerns. PACE works with the city's inspector, the sanitation department, and the recreation department in an effort to keep the city cleaner and safer.

-----

Neighborhood Tree Corps is a year-round program to do something about once treelined streets which "progress" renders bare. In Brooklyn, N. Y., a block association has been formed to raise money to purchase replacement trees and to take care of the remaining ones.

During the winter months, school children take courses at a community center on the care of trees, and in the summer they put the knowledge to practical use by tilling, watering, and generally looking after the trees in their neighborhood. The youngsters are supervised by volunteers. Contact: Hattie Carthan, Magnolia Tree Earth Canter, 678 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11216. 212/387-2116.

-----

With the help of police department, concerned citizens in Springfield, Virginia have formed a program known as A.B. and C on Burglary.

The purpose is to increase community awareness and educate the public about the limitations of any police force if citizens do not do their part by taking logical precautions to protect their homes and valuables.

The name was taken from three convicted burglars, identified as "A, B, and C," who made a presentation to a citizens group on burglary through the eyes of "pros." Contact: William Urick, Chairman, Franconia District Citizens Advisory Committee, 9453 Park Hunt Court, Springfield, VA 22153. 703/455-1567

-----

Virginia Beach, Virginia has made a study to determine how volunteers can contribute to the operation of all of its 17 city government departments. Some of the more innovative programs under consideration are:

Department of Data Processing: Volunteers to assist in developing the data collection.

Department of Economic Development: Business and industry leaders would contact prospective firms considering Virginia Beach as a site and act as the liaison between their companies and the staff of Economic Development.

Volunteers would serve as "city desk ambassadors," to sit in hotel lobbies and airports during major conferences in the city to answer questions about what is going on.

Volunteers would act as docents in the city's pavilion to set the tone of hospitality and welcome visitors.

Department of Permits & Inspections: Disabled individuals would assist the department in inspecting buildings and offer suggestions for improvement. (The best judges of barrier-free buildings would be the individuals who need to take advantage of them).

Consumer protection volunteers would man phones and do preliminary investigations of consumer complaints.

Personnel Department: In a Loaned Executive Program, executives would work in this department to evaluate, observe, and make suggestions.

Department of Planning: An individual from the business/corporate community would act as ombudsman to improve understanding of the department and communication with business and corporations in Virginia Beach. This volunteer would meet with key individuals in the community to explain the planning process as well as to solicit support for necessary changes.

Department of Public Health: Volunteers would assist in family planning clinics with teaching birth control.

Volunteers would assist in clinics by taking care of children waiting with parents, helping the receptionists, and transporting patients to different areas of the clinic.

Department of Public Utilities: Volunteers would look into the feasibility of using the water bills to convey public relations messages. Twelve-month schedules of rotating messages would be developed.

Volunteers could be trained to accompany department employees in making water and sewage inspections. Inspection services could be maximized by using these employee/volunteer teams to be known as PUP (Public Utilities Partners).

Department of Public Works: Citizens would be trained as "street spotters," to reduce the cost of road repairs through early identification of need.

Spotters could also be used for drainage maintenance needs. Contact: Edwin S. Clay, Assistant City Manager, Municipal Building, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456. 804/427-4242

-----  
Not to be overlooked is the sometimes too obvious contribution of volunteer fire-fighters. All over Virginia, a large percentage of fire protection is still provided by volunteers.

The same is true of rescue service, which is provided in large part by the many volunteer rescue squads in the state.