



Program Brief

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Citizen Corps

Every American has a critical role to play in safeguarding his or her community. Ensuring a more secure and safer homeland and safe and crime-free neighborhoods requires preparedness, training, and citizen involvement.

Overview of Citizen Corps

Citizen Corps (www.citizencorps.gov) was created to help coordinate volunteer activities that will make communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to hazardous situations. Its mission is to harness the power of every individual through education and outreach, training, and volunteer service. It provides opportunities for people to participate in a range of measures to make their families, homes, and communities safer from the threats of crime, terrorism, public health emergencies, and hazards of all types.

Citizen Corps is a vital part of USA Freedom Corps (www.usafreedomcorps.gov). Both share the goal of helping communities prevent, prepare for, and respond to crime, terrorist attacks, and other emergencies.

USA Freedom Corps brings together the resources of the federal government with the nonprofit, business, educational, faith-based, and other sectors to increase residents' involvement in their communities. The USA Freedom Corps Network helps individuals find volunteer opportunities that match their interests and talents locally, nationally, and internationally. USA Freedom Corps fosters a culture of service, citizenship, and responsibility and is working with educators and



About BJA

The Bureau of Justice Assistance was established in 1984 as a component of the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. BJA provides leadership and resources to state, local, and tribal governments and communities to reduce crime, violence, and drug abuse and to strengthen the nation's criminal justice system. BJA provides this assistance through formula and discretionary grants, training and technical assistance, publications, and the BJA web site.

For Further Information

For information about Citizen Corps, contact:

Citizen Corps

www.citizen corps.gov

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For publications and information on other BJA-funded programs, contact:

Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse

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Clearinghouse staff are available Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. eastern time. Ask to be placed on the BJA mailing list.

Office of Justice Programs

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others to increase civic awareness and community participation. Citizen Corps is one of five federal service programs—with the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, and Senior Corps—that make up USA Freedom Corps.

Administration

Citizen Corps is coordinated nationally by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA works closely with other federal entities (e.g., the Corporation for National and Community Service), state and local governments, first responders and emergency managers, volunteer organizations, and the White House Office of USA Freedom Corps to promote volunteer service activities that support community safety and homeland security. Citizen Corps programs build on successful efforts that are in place in many communities throughout the nation to prevent crime and respond to emergencies. Programs that started through local innovation are the foundation for Citizen Corps.

In fiscal year (FY) 2002, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), administered approximately \$2.7 million in funds for Citizen Corps. Fiscal Year 2003 funds increased to almost \$3 million. Funding for FY 2004 remains at almost \$3 million. BJA administers two of the Citizen Corps programs: Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) and Neighborhood Watch.

Volunteers in Police Service

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is managing and implementing the Volunteers in Police Service Program in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice. IACP is the world's oldest and largest nonprofit membership organization of police executives, with more than 19,000 members in about 90 countries. The

“Through Citizen Corps, we are building a grassroots culture of citizen preparedness. It is critical that the public be prepared personally and work with their neighborhoods and communities to do the same.”

—Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge

ultimate goal of VIPS is to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to use volunteers.

The foundation of this national initiative to assist state and local law enforcement agencies is the VIPS web site (www.policevolunteers.org). The web site serves as a gateway to information for law enforcement agencies and citizens interested in law enforcement volunteer programs. As of April 2004, more than 850 law enforcement volunteer programs, representing more than 59,000 volunteers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, have registered with the VIPS Program. Having expanded this year to include an international component, VIPS also has registered programs from England, New Zealand, and Canada.

The VIPS Program offers the following resources:

- ◆ An online directory of existing law enforcement volunteer programs that potential volunteers can search to connect with a program in their community.
- ◆ *Volunteer Programs: Enhancing Public Safety by Leveraging Resources*, a resource guide to assist in the implementation or enhancement of an agency volunteer program.
- ◆ An online clearinghouse of sample documents and forms, including policies and procedures, liability waiver forms, training materials, and volunteer applications.
- ◆ Technical assistance.
- ◆ *VIPS Info*, a monthly electronic newsletter.
- ◆ A moderated discussion group for registered VIPS programs to share information and ideas.

National Neighborhood Watch

The Neighborhood Watch Program is a unique infrastructure that brings together local officials, law enforcement officers, and citizens to protect communities. Neighborhood Watch has enhanced its approach from an “extra eyes and ears” strategy to crime prevention to a more comprehensive, community-oriented endeavor. During its more than 30 years in existence, Neighborhood Watch has grown into an effective means of crime control and neighborhood cohesion. Additionally, the advent of community policing in recent years has contributed to a resurgence in Neighborhood Watch groups. Businesses, shopping areas, local infrastructure, and play areas that have high crime rates also benefit from Neighborhood Watch groups.

The Neighborhood Watch Program is administered by the National Sheriffs’ Association (NSA). NSA is a 62-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to raising the level of professionalism among those in the criminal justice field, particularly sheriffs, their deputies, and other law enforcement personnel.

NSA’s goals for Neighborhood Watch include expanding the number of watch groups in the nation and enhancing the program’s mission by incorporating terrorism awareness and education and disaster preparedness into its existing crime prevention mission. By the end of 2003, the number of registered Neighborhood Watch programs had doubled. Programs such as VIPS and Community Emergency Response Teams (discussed on page 5) complement a Neighborhood Watch program.

In addition to NSA and the Citizen Corps programs, other partners in the Neighborhood Watch Program are the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, IACP, National Association of Town Watch, and National Crime Prevention Council.

Neighborhood Watch outreach programs include the following:

- ◆ The 14-member Advisory Committee, which advises NSA on the Neighborhood Watch Expansion Project, provides mentors in the field and “ambassadors” to the public, gives feedback on ideas generated by staff and others, and offers direction for the future.
- ◆ The USAonwatch Mentoring Program, which guides local law enforcement agencies and community-based organizations on starting or revitalizing Neighborhood Watch programs in their communities.
- ◆ The Neighborhood Watch Awards of Excellence Program, which honors stellar Neighborhood Watch programs, law enforcement agencies, community organizations, and others.
- ◆ The Interstate Collaboration Program, which serves as a model to assist states in starting new or revitalizing inactive Neighborhood Watch groups.
- ◆ Cooperative Initiatives for Community Safety, which encourages business leaders to make a commitment to ensure the safety of their communities by creating Corporate Watch programs in their corporate neighborhoods, encouraging employees to start Neighborhood Watch groups in their home neighborhoods, and building alliances with local law enforcement agencies.

The program’s web site (www.USAonwatch.org) was launched to promote Neighborhood Watch at the national level and teach people how to organize a watch group. Additionally, NSA created the “Meet the Challenge” campaign to inspire law enforcement agencies, citizen organizations, and the general public to start new Neighborhood Watch groups or revitalize

existing ones and add them to the searchable national database. Other site features include a weekly e-mail newsletter, the *Neighborhood Watch Implementation Manual*, success stories and articles, and live audio interviews with government and law enforcement officials and other Neighborhood Watch affiliates.

Other Citizen Corps Programs

In addition to the programs administered by BJA, the following Citizen Corps programs encourage collaboration and volunteerism to enhance preparedness at the national, state, local, and tribal levels.

National Citizen Corps Council

The National Citizen Corps Council is made up of leaders from first responder groups, emergency management entities, volunteer organizations, government agencies, and the private sector. The National Council’s purpose is to foster collaboration; it is not an advisory or governing body and does not set national policy. The full National Council meets at least once a year, and smaller working groups meet more frequently. Member organizations include the Fraternal Order of Police, International Association of Fire Fighters, American Medical Association, National Emergency Management Association, Salvation Army, U.S. Conference of Mayors, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Leaders of the organizations and their colleagues at the state and local levels collaborate to create local Citizen Corps Councils and promote Citizen Corps’ mission.

State, Local, and Tribal Citizen Corps Councils

Citizen Corps Councils coordinate Citizen Corps programs, develop community action plans, assess possible threats, and identify local resources. Through the councils, all stakeholders can work together to prevent crime, ensure a coordinated response to all

emergencies, and promote the value and relevance of volunteerism. As of April 2004, there were 53 state and territory councils and 1,139 county and local councils serving more than 137 million people, or 47 percent of the total U.S. population.

Community Emergency Response Teams

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) train people in neighborhoods, the workplace, and schools in basic disaster response skills such as fire suppression, urban search and rescue, and medical operations and help them take a more active role in emergency preparedness. CERTs can give critical support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims, organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site, and help with nonemergency projects to improve community safety. In January 2002, 100 communities in 27 states had CERTs. The number has grown to more than 900 communities in 51 states and territories.

Medical Reserve Corps

Local Medical Reserve Corps (MRCs) coordinate volunteer health professionals and other citizens

interested in health issues. MRCs provide ongoing support for community public health needs (e.g., immunizations, screenings, health and nutrition education) and help during large-scale emergencies such as assisting emergency response teams and caring for victims with less serious injuries.

Affiliate Program

The Citizen Corps Affiliate Program expands resources and materials available to states and local communities by partnering with programs and organizations that offer resources for public education, outreach, and training; represent volunteers interested in making their community safer; and offer volunteer service opportunities to support first responders, disaster relief activities, and community safety efforts. Organizations that are part of the Affiliate Program include the American Red Cross, National Crime Prevention Council, National Volunteer Fire Council, and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

By enabling citizens to prepare for and respond to emergency situations, Citizen Corps programs are making communities safer and stronger throughout the nation.

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