



Retention

Key Messages

- Research suggests that two thirds of volunteers see themselves staying in the force as volunteers and are in it for the long run. However, many subsequently leave, in large measure related to aspects of the volunteering experience.
- The main reasons for leaving were to focus on paid employment, often within policing, or lack of opportunities and feeling poorly treated as a volunteer.
- Many Special Constables leave very early in their service, reflecting in part a young recruitment profile and many recruits with an aspiration to join the paid service as a 'regular' officer.
- Morale is a significant factor associated with length of service, improving this can result in higher rates of retention. Other factors that can improve retention are ensuring there are a variety of options and opportunities for different roles and development, strong skill utilisation, good communication, effective training, and that volunteers feel valued and included.

IPSCJ and Citizens in Policing

The Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice (IPSCJ) at the University of Northampton has developed evidence-based strategy and practice in respect of police volunteering programmes, underpinned by the largest-scale research programme ever undertaken in this field. Working closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council, Home Office, College of Policing, and individual police forces across the country, the programme of applied research has helped shape national strategy across the many thousands of volunteers in policing.



Introduction

The context in which police organisations are operating in is changing fast, resulting in a constant shift in the demands of citizens on police forces. As a result, the retention of police volunteers is essential to manage this demand. Our research found that two thirds (66%) of volunteers could see themselves in it for the long term and expect to still be a volunteer in three years-time. Organisational commitment varies within each volunteer however, those who felt there was a lack of opportunities, a need to focus on paid employment and poor treatment from the force were more likely to consider leaving. Morale is key to retaining police volunteers and fully utilising the skills, experience, capacity, and capability of volunteers is essential to meet demands and keep retention high.

WHAT WORKS?

- ✓ **Morale**- Morale has been identified as the most significant factor associated with length of service. Satisfaction with the level of supervision received in providing personal and professional support, feedback on performance, together with a more general sense that their force is good at managing volunteers are significant factors in volunteers having positive morale.
- ✓ **More opportunities & better skill utilisation** –Providing more diverse volunteering opportunities, particularly ones which utilise existing skills or provide new challenges.
- ✓ **Better communication** –Experiences of volunteering can be improved through better communication, particularly providing updates and feedback, and fundamentally staying in touch with volunteers. Better engagement throughout the force as to what police volunteers do can also help to improve staff and officer understanding of and support for volunteers.
- ✓ **Better training** – More training can increase volunteers’ abilities and make them feel and be better in their roles and is a key way in which volunteering experiences can be improved.
- ✓ **Feeling valued & included** – Ensuring that volunteers feel valued and appreciated for the work they do and the time they contribute. A key factor to feeling more valued can be increasing paid staff’s understanding of police volunteers and what they give to the force. This can result in volunteers feeling included in the force and feeling part of a team.
- ✓ **Attracting more broadly** – Current recruitment is often skewed towards young adulthood and those motivated towards volunteering as a stepping stone to paid employment. This tends to ‘bake in’ poor retention from the start.

Recommendations

1

Ensure volunteers have meaningful deployments, opportunities to be developed and trained, as well as utilising their skills.

2

Develop approaches that value volunteer contributions creating mechanisms for volunteers to be included and engaged.

3

Diversify recruitment strategies to attract a range of volunteers, whilst creating accessible and flexible volunteering opportunities in a supportive environment.

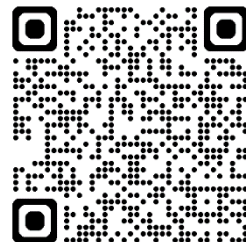
Evidence Base

<https://pure.northampton.ac.uk/en/projects/supporting-the-citizens-in-policing-network>

http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/15703/1/Exploring_views_of_Police_Support_Volunteers_in_England_and_Wales.pdf

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10439463.2018.1432613>

[Callender et al IPSCJ 2018 National Survey of Special Constables.pdf \(northampton.ac.uk\)](#)



Online version



Project page

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at:

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