

Community Relations

344.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for community relationship-building.

Additional guidance on community relations and outreach is provided in other policies, including the:

- Bias Crimes Policy.
- Limited English Proficiency Services Policy.
- Communications with Persons with Disabilities Policy.
- Chaplains Policy.
- Patrol Policy.
- Suspicious Activity Reporting Policy.

344.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Vigo County Sheriff's Office to promote positive relationships between Sheriff's office members and the community by treating community members with dignity and respect and engaging them in public safety strategy development and relationship-building activities, and by making relevant policy and operations information available to the community in a transparent manner.

344.3 MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

Deputies should, as time and circumstances reasonably permit:

- (a) Make casual and consensual contacts with community members to promote positive community relationships (see the Contacts and Temporary Detentions Policy).
- (b) Become reasonably familiar with the schools, businesses and community groups in their assigned jurisdictional areas.
- (c) Work with community members and the Sheriff's office community relations coordinator to identify issues and solve problems related to community relations and public safety.
- (d) Conduct periodic foot patrols of their assigned areas to facilitate interaction with community members. Deputies carrying out foot patrols should notify an appropriate supervisor and the Dispatch Center of their status (i.e., on foot patrol) and location before beginning and upon completion of the foot patrol. They should also periodically inform the Dispatch Center of their location and status during the foot patrol.

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344.4 COMMUNITY RELATIONS COORDINATOR

The Sheriff or the authorized designee should designate a member of the Sheriff's Office to serve as the community relations coordinator. He/she should report directly to the Sheriff or the authorized designee and is responsible for:

- (a) Obtaining Sheriff's office-approved training related to his/her responsibilities.
- (b) Responding to requests from Sheriff's office members and the community for assistance in identifying issues and solving problems related to community relations and public safety.
- (c) Organizing surveys to measure the condition of the Sheriff's office's relationship with the community.
- (d) Working with community groups, Sheriff's office members and other community resources to:
 - 1. Identify and solve public safety problems within the community.
 - 2. Organize programs and activities that help build positive relationships between Sheriff's office members and the community and provide community members with an improved understanding of Sheriff's office operations.
- (e) Working with the Patrol Commander to develop patrol deployment plans that allow deputies the time to participate in community engagement and problem-solving activities.
- (f) Recognizing Sheriff's office and community members for exceptional work or performance in community relations efforts.
- (g) Attending County council and other community meetings to obtain information on community relations needs.
- (h) Assisting with the Sheriff's office's response to events that may affect community relations, such as an incident where the conduct of a Sheriff's office member is called into public question.
- (i) Informing the Sheriff and others of developments and needs related to the furtherance of the Sheriff's office's community relations goals, as appropriate.

344.5 SURVEYS

The community relations coordinator should arrange for a survey of community members and Sheriff's office members to be conducted at least annually to assess the condition of the relationship between the Sheriff's Office and the community. Survey questions should be designed to evaluate perceptions of the following:

- (a) Overall performance of the Sheriff's Office
- (b) Overall competence of Sheriff's office members
- (c) Attitude and behavior of Sheriff's office members
- (d) Level of community trust in the Sheriff's Office
- (e) Safety, security or other concerns

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A written summary of the compiled results of the survey should be provided to the Sheriff.

344.6 COMMUNITY AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

The community relations coordinator should organize or assist with programs and activities that create opportunities for Sheriff's office members and community members, especially youth, to interact in a positive setting. Examples of such programs and events include:

- (a) Sheriff's Office-sponsored athletic programs (e.g., baseball, basketball, soccer, bowling).
- (b) Police-community get-togethers (e.g., cookouts, meals, charity events).
- (c) Youth leadership and life skills mentoring.
- (d) School resource deputy/Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.®) programs.
- (e) Neighborhood Watch and crime prevention programs.

344.7 INFORMATION SHARING

The community relations coordinator should work with the Sheriff to develop methods and procedures for the convenient sharing of information (e.g., major incident notifications, significant changes in Sheriff's office operations, comments, feedback, positive events) between the Sheriff's Office and community members. Examples of information-sharing methods include:

- (a) Community meetings.
- (b) Social media (see the Sheriff's Office Use of Social Media Policy).
- (c) Sheriff's Office website postings.

Information should be regularly refreshed, to inform and engage community members continuously.

344.8 LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS EDUCATION

The community relations coordinator should develop methods to educate community members on general law enforcement operations so they may understand the work that deputies do to keep the community safe. Examples of educational methods include:

- (a) Development and distribution of informational cards/flyers.
- (b) Sheriff's Office website postings.
- (c) Presentations to driver education classes.
- (d) Instruction in schools.
- (e) Sheriff's Office ride-alongs (see the Ride-Alongs Policy).
- (f) Scenario/Simulation exercises with community member participation.
- (g) Youth internships at the Sheriff's Office.
- (h) Citizen academies.

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Instructional information should include direction on how community members should interact with the police during enforcement or investigative contacts and how community members can make a complaint to the Sheriff's Office regarding alleged misconduct or inappropriate job performance by Sheriff's office members.

344.9 SAFETY AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Sheriff's Office members responsible for community relations activities should consider the safety of the community participants and, as much as reasonably practicable, should not allow them to be present in any location or situation that would jeopardize their safety.

Sheriff's Office members in charge of community relations events should ensure that participating community members have completed waiver forms before participation, if appropriate. A parent or guardian must complete the waiver form if the participating community member has not reached 18 years of age.

Community members are subject to a criminal history check before approval for participation in certain activities, such as citizen academies.

344.10 COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Sheriff should establish a committee of volunteers consisting of community members, community leaders and other community stakeholders (e.g., representatives from schools, churches, businesses, social service organizations). The makeup of the committee should reflect the demographics of the community as much as practicable.

The committee should convene regularly to:

- (a) Provide a public forum for gathering information about public safety concerns in the community.
- (b) Work with the Sheriff's Office to develop strategies to solve public safety problems.
- (c) Generate plans for improving the relationship between the Sheriff's Office and the community.
- (d) Participate in community outreach to solicit input from community members, including youth from the community.

The Training Sergeant should arrange for initial and ongoing training for committee members on topics relevant to their responsibilities.

The Sheriff may include the committee in the evaluation and development of Sheriff's office policies and procedures and may ask them to review certain personnel complaints for the purpose of providing recommendations regarding supervisory, training or other issues as appropriate.

344.10.1 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Sheriff and the community relations coordinator should work with the County Attorney as appropriate to ensure the committee complies with any legal requirements such as public notices, records maintenance and any other associated obligations or procedures.

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344.11 TRANSPARENCY

The Sheriff's Office should periodically publish statistical data and analysis regarding the Sheriff's office's operations. The reports should not contain the names of deputy, suspects or case numbers. The community relations coordinator should work with the community advisory committee to identify information that may increase transparency regarding Sheriff's office operations.

344.12 TRAINING

Subject to available resources, members should receive training related to this policy, including training on topics such as:

- (a) Effective social interaction and communication skills.
- (b) Cultural, racial and ethnic diversity and relations.
- (c) Building community partnerships.
- (d) Community policing and problem-solving principles.
- (e) Enforcement actions and their effects on community relations.

Where practicable and appropriate, community members, especially those with relevant expertise, should be involved in the training to provide input from a community perspective.