

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Police Ride-Along Sample Policy

Municipal police departments periodically receive requests from schools, community groups and members of the public to ride along with law enforcement officers and provide insight into the roles and responsibilities of the police. The sample "Police Ride-Along" policy below outlines considerations to evaluate for adoption before a municipal police department offers a ride-along program in their community.

Purpose

A police department ride-along program is designed to educate citizens about police duties and allow them limited participation in the day-to-day activities of a police officer. Citizens, students and other interested community members may participate in this program to promote education, awareness and communication about police department operations. However, officers must adhere to guidelines while administering the program to help protect the participant(s) and police department personnel.

Procedures

- Potential participants must complete a Request for Police Ride-Along form and Ride-Along Waiver ⁽¹⁾ before being considered for the Ride-Along Program. Failure to complete this information in its entirety may disqualify the person from participation in the program.
- Require valid identification for all participants, a copy of which shall be attached to the waiver. Additionally, the police department will conduct a criminal history check prior to participation in the ride-along program.
- If the participant is under 18 years of age, request a signed parental permission that includes valid identification be attached to the waiver.
- Participants are allowed to ride four hours per shift in one week and three times per calendar year. Exceptions may be granted by the chief of police or his/her designee. Consider keeping an updated alphabetized file of ride-along participants. A person may ride only one time with an individual officer and be the only ride-along participant in the vehicle. Exceptions may be granted for members of other law enforcement agencies who wish to ride with the same officer.
- The senior on-duty supervisor needs to assign participants an officer and notify all on-duty supervisors of the presence of a ride-along participant. Whenever possible, assign participant(s) to ride with seasoned officers and officers of the same sex.
- The officers are expected to act professional in his/her conduct and demeanor while in the presence of the ride-along participant. Do not discuss personal issues, opinions or situations that tend to place the officer, supervisor(s) or the department in a negative light.
- Probationary police officers will not be authorized or approved for ride-along participants

This is a sample guideline furnished to you by Glatfelter Public Practice. Your organization should review it and make the necessary modifications to meet the needs of your organization. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing risk exposure to the public, personnel and property. For additional information on this topic, you may contact your GPP Risk Control Representative. www.glatfelterpublicpractice.com

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Security Considerations

- Officers engaged in any special/unusual assignment that could present a hazard beyond normal police patrol risks to the ride-along participant or officer are not eligible for ride-along assignments.
- Participant(s) may be discharged from police vehicles in the event of an emergency call for service or hazardous circumstances are anticipated. The officer will notify the communication's center upon discharge and return to pick up the participant as soon as practicable. Communications will arrange for a pick-up of the program participant if the officer will be engaged for an extended period of time. Officers are not to participate in a vehicle pursuit with a ride-along.
- Participant(s) who join in a passenger/observer capacity only will not enter a premise or leave the patrol vehicle while the officer assigned to the ride-along participant is involved in law enforcement duties. Further, participant(s) will not operate a police vehicle, handle or possess firearms, OC spray (mace) or other law enforcement weapons or equipment (except when jurisdiction provides such) or use communications equipment. In the event of an emergency where the officer is in danger, the passenger/observer can use communication equipment to tell the dispatcher that the officer is in trouble and needs assistance.
- Ride-along participants will not be in possession of any weapons, including: firearms, edged weapons, chemical weapons, impact weapons and electronic control devices (Taser). Exceptions may be granted to individuals that are trained and qualified members of a law enforcement agency having jurisdiction in the locale or the state.
- Each participant is under the direction and control of the officer assigned. Should conflict arise, the officer has the authority to discontinue a ride-along at his/her discretion. If this occurs, the officer discharges the participant at police headquarters and notifies a supervisor immediately. Give a written explanation for the need to discharge the participant and forward to the appropriate supervisor.

Conditions on Participation

- Ride-along applicants are expected to be of good reputation with no felony convictions or serious misdemeanor convictions. Multiple convictions of a lesser offense may prevent the ride-along applicant from participating in the program. To evaluate the applicants who desire to participate in the program, conduct a criminal background check that includes a driving history.
- It is important that ride-along participants have not consumed alcohol for eight hours prior to the scheduled ride-along.
- The use of any device with a camera or audio or visual recording capabilities is prohibited during ride-alongs. Exceptions may be granted to the news media.
- Full confidentiality must be maintained of all that is heard and seen during participation.
- Meal break opportunities may not occur so it is recommended that participants eat prior to participation. If a meal break is taken, the participant is responsible for their own food and beverage.
- Returning to headquarters at a precise hour is not guaranteed.

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- Ride-along participants can be subpoenaed into court proceedings.
- Final approval or denial of ride-along participation resides with the chief of police or designee.
- The ride-along program is an initiative of the chief of police and as such is subject to additional program requirements or modifications deemed appropriate and necessary.

Dress Code

Participants in the ride-along program are expected to be groomed and dressed professionally and appropriately. Dress in casual style slacks/pants or dress jeans, with a dress-style shirt or blouse. No sweat suits, t-shirts or tank tops, shorts or similar leisure apparel will be allowed. For safety purposes, no open toed shoes or sandals are permitted. Participants are expected to have a clean and neat appearance that projects a positive image of the department and the law enforcement community.

(1)Note: Develop waivers and ride-along forms in conjunction with the municipality's legal counsel.