

	HARRISONBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT General Orders		Policy Number: 430
	Chapter: Field Operations		Total Pages: 4
	Section: Ride Alongs		Issue Date: 04/29/2025
	Issued By: Rod Pollard, Interim Chief of Police		Effective Date: 07/02/2021
	Replaces: All General Orders Previously Issued Relative to Subject		
VALEAC Standards:			

A. POLICY AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for a ride-along with officers of the Harrisonburg Police Department. This policy provides the requirements, approval process, hours of operation and employee responsibilities for ride-alongs. This policy does not affect the Ride-Along policies established for Auxiliary Police Officers, Recruits, or the Police Explorer Program.

Ride-along opportunities will be provided to the public, City employees and employees of this department to observe and experience, first-hand, various functions of the Harrisonburg Police Department. The term “ride-along” includes riding as a passenger with an officer on patrol or observing the workday of employees engaged in other functions within the Department.

B. ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this policy. Responsibility rests with the supervisor to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated, and appropriate training, counseling and/or disciplinary action is initiated. This directive is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

C. ELIGIBILITY

A ride-along is available to Harrisonburg residents and business owners, students currently attending class in Harrisonburg and those employed within the City of Harrisonburg. Efforts will be made to accommodate all interested persons. However, any applicant may be disqualified without cause from participating.

Applicants for the Ride-Along program must meet one of the following criteria to participate in the program:

- a. Be a resident of the City of Harrisonburg.
- b. Be a member of a civic organization or employee of a business located within the City of Harrisonburg.
- c. Be employed by the City of Harrisonburg in a position that would be facilitated by knowledge of Departmental procedures and functions.
- d. Be a police employee applicant with the Harrisonburg Police Department or have current employment in the law enforcement field with another agency.
- e. Be a family member of an employee of the Harrisonburg Police Department.
- f. Demonstrate a special interest for participation that would benefit the Police Department, City government, or its citizens, such as the citizen's police academy or police citizen advisory group.
- g. Be a person sponsored by a Harrisonburg Police Officer and approved by the officer's commander.

Participants are not permitted to ride along with a police officer with whom they have or have had any personal relationship (e.g., boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, former spouse, etc.) Factors that may be considered in disqualifying an applicant include, but are not limited to:

- Being under 16 years of age.
- Prior criminal history.
- Pending criminal action.
- Pending lawsuit against this department or the City.
- Denial by any supervisor.

D. AVAILABILITY

A ride-along or job observation is available most days of the week. Exceptions to this schedule may be made as approved by the Chief of Police or Professional Standards Supervisor.

E. REQUESTS TO PARTICIPATE

Generally, ride-along and job observation requests will be maintained and scheduled by the Professional Standards Supervisor. The applicant will complete and sign a ride-along or job observation waiver form. If the applicant is under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must be present to complete the waiver form. Information requested will include a valid state-issued identification card or driver's license number, birth date, address, and telephone number.

The Professional Standards Supervisor will schedule a date, based on availability, generally one week after the date of application. If approved, a copy of the waiver form will be forwarded to the appropriate bureau as soon as possible for scheduling considerations.

Final approval or denial of the application will be based on the Professional Standards Supervisor's discretion.

If the request is denied, the Professional Standards Supervisor will advise the applicant of the denial.

See attachment: [103- Ride Along Application](#)

F. PROCEDURES

Once approved, ride-along applicants will be allowed to participate no more than once every six months. An exception may apply to the following law enforcement-involved participants:

- Explorers
- Volunteers
- Chaplains
- Auxiliaries
- Harrisonburg Police Department applicants
- Any others with approval of the Patrol Commander
- Students enrolled in any department-approved dispatcher training course

An effort will be made to ensure that no more than one member of the public will participate in a ride-along or job observation during any given time period. Normally, no more than one ride-along participant will be allowed in department vehicles at a given time.

Ride-along requirements for department Explorers are covered in the Explorers Policy.

a. CRIMINAL HISTORY CHECK

All ride-along applicants are subject to a criminal history check. The criminal history check may include a local records check, fingerprints, VCIN waiver and a Virginia Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) check prior to approval of the ride-along.

b. SUITABLE ATTIRE

Any person approved to participate in a ride-along is required to be suitably dressed in a collared shirt, blouse or jacket, slacks and shoes. Sandals, t-shirts, tank tops, shorts and ripped or torn pants are not permitted. Hats and ball caps will not be worn without the express consent of the Patrol Supervisor. The Patrol Commander or a supervisor may refuse a ride-along to anyone who is not dressed appropriately.

All Ride-Along participants shall wear, in a visible location, identification which is approved and provided by the Department. They are to identify themselves, when asked to do so, as an authorized citizen observer or a Ride-Along. Department personnel need not wear the identification if they are in proper uniform or wearing their Police Department employee identification card.

G. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

The assigned department employee shall consider the safety of the ride-along or job observation participant at all times. The employee shall maintain control over the participant and shall instruct the individual about the conditions that necessarily limit his/her participation. Instructions should include:

- a. The participant will follow the directions of the department officer.
- b. The participant will not become involved in any investigation, handling of evidence, discussions with victims or suspects, reading an individual's criminal history or other protected information, or handling any police department equipment. Ride-Along participants are not permitted to be involved in any police action (i.e., search, arrest, interview suspects, etc.) unless specifically requested for assistance in accordance with Code of Virginia.
- c. Participation may be terminated at any time by the officer if the participant interferes with the performance of the officer's duties.
 - 1. If the ride-along is in progress, the officer may return the participant to the point the ride originated.
- d. Participants may be allowed to continue a ride-along during the transportation and booking process, provided it does not jeopardize their safety.
- e. Officers will not allow participants to be present in any location or situation that would jeopardize the participant's safety or cause undue stress or embarrassment to a victim or any other member of the public.
- f. Participants shall not be permitted to accompany the department officer into a private residence without the express consent of the resident or other authorized person.

The officer assigned to provide a ride-along shall advise the communicator that a ride-along participant is present in the vehicle before going into service. An officer with a ride-along participant should use sound discretion when encountering a potentially dangerous situation. If a ride-along is in the vehicle, the officer will not engage in a pursuit, unless that passenger is discharged at a safe location. The communicator will be advised of the situation and as soon as practicable have another department employee respond to pick up the participant at that location. The ride-along may be continued or terminated at this time.

Conduct by a person participating in a ride-along that results in termination of the ride, or is otherwise inappropriate, should be immediately reported to the Patrol Commander and the Professional Standards Supervisor. The officer should enter comments regarding the reasons for terminating on a memo form.