

## **Response to Questions on the FY 2019 Budget**

**Request By:** Supervisor Herrity

**Question:** Please describe the Explorer Program, the number of schools covered and the current membership. If possible – how many hires have been former Explorers? What would the cost be to expand the Explorer program to additional schools?

**Response:**

The Explorer Program allows young people in the community (ages 14 – 20) to learn about careers in the law enforcement field by working directly with Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) officers. The program also aims to teach character, ethics, public speaking and other career skills to help Explorers become productive adults. The program is an effective recruitment tool, as it brings together young people from the Fairfax County community who are already interested in a law enforcement career.

Explorers receive extensive training in various techniques used by law enforcement professionals. This training includes traffic stops, building searches, bomb threat response, hostage negotiation, accident reconstruction, and arrest and search techniques. Explorers become familiar with police radio procedures, patrol areas, vehicles, equipment, and methods of patrol. In addition, Explorers are eligible to participate in the department's ride along program where they get to ride with a patrol officer and experience life through the eyes of an officer. Explorers also assist the Police Department by providing logistical support for activities such as community events, crime prevention programs, and departmental awards ceremonies. Explorers are given an overview of the Fairfax County Police Department as a whole and its daily operations.

There are currently three Explorer Posts spread throughout the County. Post 1742 meets at the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy in Chantilly, Post 505 meets at Annandale High School and Post 2252 meets at West Potomac High School in the Alexandria area. Although two of the Explorer Posts hold their meetings at Fairfax County high schools, their membership is not exclusive to students of those schools. The meetings are held after school hours and each Post is intended to serve a region of the County including students from several different schools. The recent expansion of the program from one Post to three was implemented to make the program accessible to a larger and more diverse section of the County's population.

There are currently 167 active Fairfax County Police Explorers spread between the three Explorer Posts. The Explorer Program has been active in Fairfax County for 42 years and there have been dozens of Explorers over the years that have gone on to become Fairfax County Police Officers. There has been an increased emphasis on Explorer recruitment recently and within the last five years, seven former Explorers have been hired as Police Officers and two are currently Police Cadets who plan to become Police Officers when they are 21 years old.

The Explorer Program is a non-profit organization that maintains its own financial account to pay for the annual Post chartering fees, operating expenses, and equipment used for training. These funds are replenished through Explorer Post fundraising activities and annual Explorer membership dues.

The financial costs to Fairfax County consist mainly of:

- Overtime costs for Police Officers participating in the program during their scheduled time off.
- Uniform costs for Explorers participating in the program

**Overtime** - Police Officers are permitted to consider the regular Post meetings as a work assignment and attend on duty (if possible) or take overtime. Similarly, when Police Officers supervise Explorers in uniform at public events to support the Department or the County, this is also considered a work assignment and officers can attend on duty or take overtime. Events that are held solely for the Explorer Program, such as a Post fundraising event, are not compensated and the officers volunteer their time for those events. In 2017, the Department expended 1,705 hours of paid overtime to support Explorer Program activities for its three Explorer Posts. It can be estimated that adding more Explorer Posts, each with their own meetings and events, would likely increase this overtime expenditure by 400 – 600 hours, or roughly \$22,788 – \$34,182 of expended paid overtime annually.

**Uniforms** - The Police Department provides uniforms to Explorers while they participate in the program. When the Explorer leaves the program, they return the uniform and they are reissued to new Explorers. The Department's uniform budget used to be able to absorb the costs of the Explorer uniforms, but the recent growth of the Explorer Program has reduced the stock of existing uniforms and created an increase in uniform spending. In FY 2018, FCPD started using Seized Asset funds to purchase uniforms for the Explorers. It costs approximately \$300 to fully outfit a new Explorer, but many of them receive used items when the correct sizes are available. FCPD spends approximately \$10,000 - 15,000 per year on uniform items and this number would increase if the program expanded based on the overall number of Explorers countywide.