

**POSITION TITLE:**

Volunteer Probation Officer (V.P.O.).

**SUPERVISOR:**

Assistant Court Volunteer Programmer.

**TIME COMMITMENT:**

A minimum of nine months' service availability. The volunteer probation officers must meet with their assigned probationers at least once a week for a minimum of two hours during the first two months. V.P.O.'s are encouraged to maintain the same contact rate after the first two-month service period. They usually serve from six to nine months.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

Volunteers must be at least 20 years old, mature, concerned, and a good adult model. They must have no prior arrest and conviction records other than minor traffic violations. Each volunteer is strongly urged to have access to or own an automobile.

**TRAINING:**

All volunteer probation officers must take six hours of specialized training prior to assignment. Training sessions are held on the first Monday and Tuesday of each month, between 7 and 10 p.m. Active V.P.O.'s are encouraged to participate in the in-service training session on the third Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m.

**DUTIES:**

Each volunteer probation officer will be assigned to supervise one child on probation with the County Juvenile Court. The V.P.O. will be expected to meet with his or her child on a weekly basis during the first two months. The volunteer will exercise the court's probation conditions.

**JOB DESCRIPTIONS** are definitions of a person's duties and responsibilities within an organization. They are essential to the success of agency volunteer programs. A good job description clearly outlines the function to be performed, and its development forces a social agency to think through its use of volunteers.

An adequate job description cannot be developed unless there is an actual need for the function it describes. Hence, job descriptions meet the first criterion of a good personnel policy—they define needs to be met by the recruitment and training of new staff.

In developing job descriptions for volunteers or paid staff, an administrator is forced to review the nature of his organization and the interrelationships of his staff. This allows him to analyze his resources, plan for their best utilization, and ultimately to organize his unit to meet his goals.

Recently, the staff of the Office of Volunteer Programs at Michigan State University set out to develop several new volunteer opportunities for students enrolled in pre-medical or other health oriented curriculums.

In our zeal to open up new locations for the pre-med type student, we failed to define the role of the volunteer in the agency clearly. Our staff thought the students we recruited would be able to use their training in a residential health care facility. But the agency staff actually planned to use the student volunteers as visitors for their patients.

# Job descriptions

## MATCHING VOLUNTEER SKILLS WITH AGENCY NEEDS

**JOHN H. CAULEY, JR.**

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**POSITION TITLE:**

Tutor.

**SUPERVISOR:**

James Elementary School teachers.

**TIME COMMITMENT:**

A minimum of three hours a week for each tutor during the school year. Five hours a week is preferred.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

Tutors must be high school students or adults from the James Elementary School community.

**TRAINING:**

Tutors will be trained by the teachers to whom they are assigned. Training will take place at the convenience of the prospective tutors and will normally consist of personal interview/information sessions with individually assigned teachers.

**DUTIES:**

Work with a designated child or small group of children to improve specific skill areas such as reading and arithmetic. Maintain records of activities and progress. Maintain weekly contact with teacher to report progress and plan future activities.

We started with a well-planned and well-received training session, and the volunteers began with great enthusiasm. The initial enthusiasm was short-lived, however, because the volunteers quickly perceived that they would not be involved in the treatment of residents and that on Saturday mornings—the time assigned to volunteers—only a few of the agency's medical personnel were even on duty.

Our failure to develop written job descriptions led to the almost immediate failure of the volunteer program and the creation of a great deal of misunderstanding between the student volunteers, the community agency, and our staff.

In retrospect, our staff realized that if job descriptions had been written in advance, many of the program's problems could have been avoided.

A description should not only detail the functions of the volunteer, but it should also outline the responsibilities of the agency. For example, good volunteer job descriptions will incorporate all of the following elements:

- A job or position title.
- The function and responsibilities of the volunteer.
- Names of supervisors.
- The required time commitment.
- Essential qualifications.
- The necessary training that will be provided by the agency.

The position title should define and identify the role of the volunteer. Volunteer Probation Officer and Child Activity Room Supervisor are two examples of brief but explicit volunteer position titles. A short explanatory paragraph describing the duties and functions to be performed should follow the position title. Alternatively, the duties and functions can be listed individually rather than in paragraph form. The essential point is that duties and functions must be clear, concise, and easily understood.

Well-developed job descriptions honestly state the actual time commitment required. One of the most

serious mistakes an agency can make is to fail to indicate truthfully how much time the volunteer will need to do the job. Too frequently, agency administrators say, "But I can't really expect volunteers to devote enough time to complete the job." If that is true volunteers should not be involved in that job. Volunteers should be recruited and trained only for positions they can handle. Recruiting volunteers without clearly defining the time commitment will ultimately result in failure of the project.

Too often, the decision to recruit volunteers is made without adequate planning, preparation, and commitment on the agency's part. This leads to difficulties in the successful implementation of the idea, and these lead directly to frustration and, ultimately, the failure of the well-meaning volunteer.

Businesses do not hire people unless they actually need them. But many agencies create volunteer programs and recruit volunteers before they need them or determine that their use will increase the amount and quality of service provided. When social service agencies have small staffs and resource shortages, the volunteer route seems an easy solution. Hence, the most basic personnel policy—that of establishing an actual need for additional personnel—is often violated in the development of social service agency volunteer programs.

In a paid work setting, after administrators and planners determine that a need exists or that there is a function for another employee, they develop a job description to outline the new position's duties and responsibilities. This allows a prospective employee to get a clear picture of the type of job being offered. It also indicates the requirements for the position to the prospective employee. Even before he applies, the individual knows essentially what the job entails and has an idea about whether or not he is qualified.

Another obvious difference between the treatment of paid staff

**POSITION TITLE:**

Social Work Aide.

**SUPERVISOR:**

Individual members of agency casework staff.

**TIME COMMITMENT:**

A volunteer assigned as a social work aide will be expected to serve for a minimum of 12 months. Each social work aide must serve at least eight hours a week and attend the agency's monthly casework staff meetings.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

Each volunteer must be at least 18 years old and should successfully complete the Social Work Aide Training Program.

**TRAINING:**

The Social Work Aide Training Program consists of 40 hours of classroom training spread over a two-week period. Each volunteer will be expected to demonstrate skills in interviewing, peer counseling, and referral at the conclusion of the training session. The training sessions are conducted semi-annually.

**DUTIES:**

Each social work aide will be responsible for maintaining a caseload of 10 individuals. The aide will be responsible for providing interviewing and referral service in local community centers. Each aide must maintain a good working knowledge of his or her community and its resources. In addition, each aide must keep regularly scheduled office hours and submit monthly reports to the area community center.

and volunteers involves the introduction of the individual to the organization. Management usually provides the paid employee with a general view of the organization and its function. Most important, however, the paid employee is usually introduced to his co-workers and superiors. Where volunteers are involved, this basic essential of most

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successful job performance is frequently overlooked. In too many situations volunteers are simply left to introduce themselves and develop their own friendships.

Organizations hiring new employees provide a substantial amount of time for orientation and training. Depending on the nature of the job and the amount of responsibility, the training period for a new employee may last from a few hours to a few days or even weeks or months. Orientation and training gets the new employee off to the proper start and familiarizes him with the organization's goals and objectives. In addition, the orientation-training period gives the new employee time to adjust to his new environment.

### **Inadequate Orientation**

In the development of agency volunteer programs, orientation-training is the one basic personnel function that is carried out on a fairly regular basis. Most social service agencies recognize that volunteers need to have at least a general idea of their functions, and this information is frequently conveyed through some sort of orientation-training session. But even though agencies usually provide orientation-training, it is usually inadequate. Many agencies provide new volunteers with nothing more than an informal interview.

Too often agency personnel have only a vague idea of how volunteers will be used. For example, last year our campus newspaper ran an article based on an interview with the director of a local day care center. The article contained a clear plea from the director for volunteers to assist at the center, but the secretary on duty at the center knew nothing of the newspaper story. Her method of dealing with telephone inquiries about it was to take names and phone numbers with the promise that she would return the call. Later she learned from the center's director that volunteers were always welcome, but obviously no one had prepared the staff for them. Nor

was there a job description available. It is doubtful that many volunteers found their experience at the center satisfactory. This is indicative of the manner in which many agency volunteer programs begin.

A good job description indicates the kind of training required for each volunteer position and tells who will supervise the volunteer on the job. Knowing who is responsible for supervising the volunteer is essential. Too many times agencies fail to tell both volunteers and staff.

In fact, most agencies fail to provide adequate supervision for the volunteer, and some provide none at all. Usually, an already overburdened staff member simply assumes responsibility for the volunteers and therefore has little time to oversee their activities. This, coupled with other discrepancies, almost certainly results in the failure and the frustration of the volunteer. In contrast, it is unthinkable that a paid employee would not be closely supervised until such time as he was able to assume responsibilities in a non-supervised setting.

The problems created by the lack of basic personnel policies in the design and implementation of volunteer programs are further aggravated by what may be called the agency-volunteer authority conflict. The question of authority is central to the success of the volunteer effort. Failure on the part of the agency to develop essential and adequate personnel policies for volunteers is a part of the confusion surrounding the authority issues. If social agencies recognized true authority over their volunteers, they would develop and refine personnel policies to outline the nature of this relationship.

The authority problem arises primarily from failure by the agency to recognize the volunteer as a staff member even if unpaid. Thus, the agency relegates the volunteer to a questionable status that creates uncertainty and ambiguity.

The final discrepancy between the non-paid volunteer situation and the paid work setting is the volunteer's

lack of opportunity for advancement. In most social service agencies, paid positions are clearly defined and ranked. Each employee knows the requirements and qualifications for advancement. Unfortunately the volunteer has little opportunity for advancement. Too frequently his function has not been clearly defined, and until the agency provides him with at least a job description, it will be impossible to "promote" even the most successful volunteer.

Job descriptions should state exactly what qualifications will be required, and once established, the agency should stick to its written statements. Often agency administrators are quick to waive their own printed statement of qualifications because they do not know how to say no to the well-meaning, over-enthusiastic volunteer sitting before them. This failure to adhere to the necessary qualifications will only hasten failure.

Again, in comparing the volunteer setting to a paid work setting, it is obvious that supervisors normally would not hire an applicant unless he meets the minimum qualifications for the position. The same rule must also be applied to all applicants for volunteer positions. An individual either qualifies or he does not. Agencies definitely must learn how to say no.

### **Agency Needs**

Basically, the agency will have certain needs and expectations. For example, our local probate court expects MSU volunteer probation officers to serve for at least nine months. All agencies expect a volunteer to be dependable. If an agency has developed a well-planned volunteer program, its staff will expect those who accept placement to meet their commitment.

At the same time, when developing job descriptions, agency administrators must keep in mind the volunteer's needs and expectations. For example, a volunteer will want to know specifically what his function

will be, how much time will be required, who will provide the training and supervision, and what qualifications are required for whatever volunteer position is offered. The volunteer will expect to contribute a valuable service, and will be seeking a meaningful and worthwhile opportunity. If volunteers are only offered tedious tasks that are not wanted by the paid staff, few volunteers will even accept a job in the first place. Agencies must recognize that today's volunteer seeks an opportunity to be involved in a direct-service capacity.

On the other hand, volunteers must realize that agencies are limited in their ability to design and implement volunteer programs. Initially, any social agency will be governed by staff and budget limitations. Even though it may be most desirable to hire a full-time volunteer coordinator to recruit, train, and supervise volunteers, most agencies will not have such resources. Many agencies will not even be able to provide other services such as free uniforms or complimentary meals for their volunteers.

Agencies should also be made aware of volunteers' limitations. Many volunteers cannot give more than two hours a week because they have other commitments. Many volunteers are limited by their own lack of resources. If a volunteer must provide his own meals when he is on duty, he may hesitate to extend his service commitment because he cannot afford the extra meals. Similarly if a program requires volunteers to purchase and maintain their own uniforms many will select other, less expensive programs.

Student volunteers often face limitations not encountered by regular community volunteers. The student volunteer must schedule his volunteer participation around his academic commitments. Every student is faced with term papers, exams, term breaks, and new schedules at the beginning of each term. There are realistic factors to be aware of when recruiting college students for

a volunteer program. Both agency and volunteer must honestly assess the requirements and time commitments of all programs.

If a job description is a vital link in the volunteer program development process, how can it be used to the greatest advantage of both agency and volunteer?

The most important fact to keep in mind when writing volunteer job descriptions is to be totally honest. Caution the agency against selling its volunteer program by using impressive volunteer job titles. The most frequent mistake that agencies make is their failure to describe the duties, responsibilities, and time commitment of their volunteer positions honestly. An important-sounding title will not fool volunteers for long if they can see that the agency does not value their contribution.

The volunteer job description, then, should be used in the same manner as a job description for a paid employee.

**FIRST**, the description should accurately outline the duties and responsibilities of the job.

**SECOND**, the volunteer job description should be used early in the recruitment-interview-placement process. If the description is well written, it will state explicitly the required time commitment and qualifications. An agency administrator should use the description to make sure that the prospective volunteer meets the minimum requirements. It is a waste of both the volunteer's and the agency administrator's time if they spend an hour and a half discussing the agency's swimming program for the handicapped without stating early in the interview that volunteer participation in the program requires water safety instructor certification.

**THIRD**, the volunteer job description should be used as one of the very first training devices in the agency's volunteer training program. Clearly stated, well-written job descriptions will save a lengthy explanation of the volunteer's role in the agency, and the description

should serve as the launching pad for additional training.

**FINALLY**, the volunteer job description should serve as a clear statement of the volunteer's duties, and this statement should be used in volunteer evaluation sessions. If the volunteer was recruited and trained to perform a specifically-stated function, then his supervisor can use the description in evaluating and guiding him.

#### **A Non-Student Community Volunteer Job Description**

##### **POSITION TITLE:**

School-Community Liaison Aide.

##### **SUPERVISOR:**

Community school coordinator.

##### **TIME COMMITMENT:**

Each aide will be expected to serve for a minimum of eight hours a month during the school year.

##### **QUALIFICATIONS:**

Each aide must be a parent of a child attending James Elementary School.

##### **TRAINING:**

Each school-community liaison aide will be trained by the community school coordinator assigned to James Elementary School. Training will take place at the convenience of the volunteer and the community school coordinator. Training will consist of an outline of the duties and responsibilities of the school-community liaison aide as interpreted by the community school coordinator.

##### **DUTIES:**

The aide will serve as a liaison person between the school and the surrounding community, inform parents of school and community services, encourage parent participation in programs conducted at or sponsored by the school, advise faculty about community problems and special needs, and assist the community school coordinator in the development and implementation of special projects and programs.

MOST RESPONSIBLE VOLUNTEER JOBS

Define broad areas of responsibility and authority.  
Assign responsibility, not specific, detailed tasks.  
Allow person to negotiate time and manpower needs.  
Skills and abilities required should be defined.  
Leave room for initiative and creativity in  
how responsibility is carried out.

LESS RESPONSIBLE JOBS

Task generally spelled out fairly well. Time and skills required are defined. Lines of responsibility and authority indicated.

LEAST RESPONSIBLE JOBS

Duties, time and skills clearly defined. Much more specific re. tasks-exactly what needs to be done and when

## SAMPLES

### Example of MOST RESPONSIBLE VOLUNTEER POSITION

TITLE: Volunteer Recruitment Task Force Leader (or Chairman)

RESPONSIBLE TO: Director of Volunteers

AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY: To be responsible for the recruitment of volunteers for this agency. This includes the organization of other volunteers to assist in this outreach effort as needed; the design of recruitment materials; and the implementation of recruitment objectives, as defined together with the Director of Volunteers and approved by the Advisory Committee.

LENGTH OF COMMITMENT: One (1) year

QUALIFICATIONS: Organizational skills, knowledge of public relations and ability to work well with staff and other volunteers. Knowledge of the community helpful.

COMMENTS: This position carries a good deal of responsibility and thus it is recommended that it be your only (or at least, major) volunteer commitment for this year.

### Example of LESS RESPONSIBLE VOLUNTEER POSITION

TITLE: Speaker's Bureau Volunteer

RESPONSIBLE TO: Volunteer Recruitment Task Force Leader

DEFINITION OF DUTIES: Give presentations and/or speeches on behalf of this agency for the purpose of recruiting more volunteers and encouraging community support of our organization and its goals. Speeches to be given at service clubs, churches and other interested groups as assigned by Recruitment Task Force Leader.

TIME REQUIRED: 2-4 hours per month. Generally audiences would meet over lunch or dinner hours, but not always.

QUALIFICATIONS: Public speaking; ability to operate visual aide equipment helpful. Commitment to this agency's goals and objectives and a belief in the value of the volunteer. Enthusiasm a must.

TRAINING PROVIDED: Orientation sessions will be arranged with staff and volunteers to thoroughly acquaint volunteer with this agency, the volunteer program and the needs of both.

### Example of LEAST RESPONSIBLE VOLUNTEER POSITION

TITLE: Telephone Aide

RESPONSIBLE TO: Volunteer Recruitment Task Force Leader & Secretary

DEFINITION OF DUTIES: To telephone prospective volunteers from lists obtained at speeches and presentations to set up interviews with the staff. Phoning should be done at the Office of Volunteers.

TIME REQUIRED: 2 hours a week. Monday a.m. preferred.

QUALIFICATIONS: Pleasant phone personality and ability to work congenially with staff and volunteers.

COMMENTS: This volunteer must have transportation available, as our agency is not accessible by public transportation.

VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION

Place of Work:

Position:

Purpose:

Major Responsibilities:

Responsible To:

Term of Job:

Hours Required:

Volunteer Qualifications:

Orientation & Training:

Other: