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human
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Office of the Assistant Secretary

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TO: ADMINISTERING AGENCIES AND GRANTEES FOR HDS PROGRAMS

Title: SUBJECT: HDS Position Statement on Volunteerism

PURPOSE: To recognize and support current volunteer programs in social services; to stimulate and encourage the development of volunteer programs where none exist and to encourage the expansion of existing volunteer efforts.

PRIORITY: Improving the quality and increasing the quantity of social services through the use of volunteers is a top priority of the Reagan administration. This Office (and this Department) is committed to that priority through its Private Sector Initiative which is Goal #1 of seven goals of the Office of Human Development Services.

COMMITMENT OF MANAGEMENT: In order to be successful, HDS volunteer programs must have strong commitment of management at all levels from the highest executive to the lowest supervisor and staff. While volunteers are not without cost, they can and should be extremely cost effective. The cost effectiveness is apparent when comparing the yield in value of services provided in return for dollars invested in hiring volunteers and budgeting funds for necessary expenses. Commitment of top management to volunteerism implies a willingness, when necessary, to budget funds for the operation of the program. The cost effectiveness can be documented by separate line item budgets for volunteer programs and reports maintaining statistics on volunteer activities. This is important to continued support of volunteer programs by legislatures, county commissions and boards of directors. Agency staff at various levels should be involved in designing the program to assure that volunteers are used, etc.

LIABILITY:

Volunteers should be insured against liability to the same extent as regular employees who carry out similar functions. Such insurance is now available in most States at reasonable rates.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Client confidentiality need not and should not be a barrier to the use of volunteers in social services programs. Volunteers who are recruited by agencies administering publicly funded social services should be trained and supervised by agency staff. They should be expected to maintain the same standards of confidentiality, and be subject to the same prohibitions and sanctions concerning disclosure of information, as salaried employees. Under these conditions, they should be afforded access to any agency files essential to carrying their assigned functions. Volunteer access to confidential files should be on a "need to know" basis as is true for salaried staff.

**REIMBURSEMENT
TO VOLUNTEERS:**

Although volunteers are not paid a wage for services provided, at agency option, they may be reimbursed for legitimate expenses incurred in the performance of their duties such as mileage, meals or per diem (if overnight travel is involved). Such reimbursement should be based on established written policies of the agency and are an allowable use of Federal funds in block grant, formula grant and discretionary programs. Also if volunteers are not reimbursed for mileage, they may claim a specified amount per mile as a contribution on their income tax returns.

**STATUS OF
VOLUNTEERS:**

People who volunteer their time and skills in an organized program should be afforded equal treatment with agency staff so far as program guidelines and policies are concerned. They should receive comparable orientation, on-the-job training, supervision, etc. The goals and objectives for volunteer programs should be synonymous with those of the agency or the program to which they are assigned.

It is beneficial to have written agreements with each volunteer specifying their duties, number of hours per week or month and a specific termination date. New agreements may then be initiated with the same volunteers if mutually desirable. Ongoing evaluation is an important ingredient of a good volunteer program. Volunteers should be evaluated regularly to measure accomplishments and effectiveness of the program.

**RECRUITMENT AND
USE OF VOLUNTEERS:**

Volunteers can be recruited from all socio-economic groups within the community, including representatives of client groups, civic, fraternal or religious organizations and other community groups.

Volunteers may be used in any area of program administration or service delivery in which they have appropriate training and skills. This is true for all programs receiving Federal funds from or through the Office of Human Development Services.

RECOGNITION:

Awards or certificates of recognition should be an ingredient of good management in any setting. Because volunteers are not salaried or paid a wage, it is even more important that they be recognized for their contribution to public service.

CONCLUSION:

Well managed volunteer programs are inseparably linked with the goals and objectives of the agency. Not only are volunteer programs cost effective and contribute immeasurably to improved quality and quantity of services, but also a cadre of well-trained and appropriately used volunteers become excellent advocates in promoting the program to the public.


Assistant Secretary of Human
Development Services