

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF VOLUNTEER SERVICES
SPECIAL PROJECT SUMMARY
EMPLOYMENT CREDIT FOR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not volunteer experience is being recognized and given consideration when volunteers apply for paid positions with A) government agencies, or B) private industry in Minnesota. Previous to this study, there was limited information available on this subject.

Volunteer work offers a wide range of experiences and opportunities to learn many skills which are transferable to other places and situations. In recent years, it has become evident that the 'know-how' gained by volunteers through their work assignments do not differ greatly from that gained by individuals in paid positions. Along with attaining personal growth, satisfaction of accomplishment and service to people, many volunteers feel they should be able to use their volunteer experience as a stepping stone toward gainful employment.

The opportunity to receive credit toward employment for volunteer experience adds another dimension to the responsibilities of volunteers and of individuals in agencies and in industries who believe in accountable volunteerism.

RECOGNITION OF VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE BY GOVERNMENTAL EMPLOYERS

At the Congressional level, a resolution was passed in 1976 urging all public and private businesses to recognize volunteer experience and implement the resolution into their hiring practices. The National Governors' Conference and the U. S. Conference of Mayors have passed similar resolutions.

Nationally, the United States Civil Service Commission recognizes volunteer experience on its application form and in its hiring practices.

Several states, including Minnesota, have already incorporated the recognition of volunteer experience on their job application form. Both the Minnesota Civil Service and Merit Systems request information related to volunteer experience on their employment application forms and have developed policies equating volunteer experience to paid experience.

In a sampling of Minnesota cities and counties, it was found that the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County consider volunteer work in their hiring policies and practices. However, most other city and county governments in the state do not have similar policies.

A random sampling of personnel directors and administrators of governmental units were contacted during this study. The majority of them indicated that they had not previously considered recognizing volunteer experience in hiring practices. However, many expressed an interest in considering appropriate revisions in their application forms and hiring policies.

As a result of the study findings, the following suggestions are made for possible follow-up action:

1. Units of government should receive encouragement and assistance in rewriting their job applications to include consideration of volunteer experience.
2. Technical assistance should be made available to governmental agencies in the form of information and consultation regarding volunteer experience and how it relates to paid employment.
3. Information and educational opportunities should be made available to volunteers, volunteer administrators and agency staff to assist them in:
 - a. keeping records that document volunteer experience and skill development;
 - b. translating the skills developed in volunteer work to competencies needed to compete in the job market; and
 - c. preparing functional resumes based on volunteer work.

RECOGNITION OF VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE BY EMPLOYERS IN PRIVATE INDUSTRY

In compiling information for this study, 180 businesses in Minnesota were sent letters requesting information on their recognition of volunteer experience in hiring employees. In order to obtain a reliable sampling, small, medium and large businesses from metro, suburban and rural areas were contacted. Several personal and telephone interviews were conducted to obtain additional information.

It was found that very few businesses request information on volunteer experience on their application forms or in their interviews with job applicants. Most businesses indicated that they have given little thought to using volunteer work as a valid credential for a paid position.

Many personnel directors and employment agencies do not appear to have a clear understanding of what relevant volunteer experience means. Most expressed an interest in learning more about the relationship of volunteer experience to paid employment and were positive in their attitudes. Some raised questions about the need for establishing any new criteria for employment.

Several businesses indicated that they would include volunteer services on their application forms if they saw a trend in this direction - with other businesses in the state doing likewise.

In interviewing volunteers, who have gained employment based on their volunteer experience, their feeling was that assertiveness was necessary on the part of the volunteer, if that experience was to receive consideration when applying for a paid position.

In addition to the above contacts, publications were reviewed dealing with the subject of writing job resumes and use of the job application form. None of these publications suggested or encouraged the inclusion of volunteer services.

As a result of the study findings, the following suggestions are made for possible follow-up action:

1. Volunteer services should be included on all job application forms - with sufficient space allowed for a description of jobs, responsibilities, period of time and references. There is a need for an informational - educational campaign aimed at:

a. encouraging public and private industry in Minnesota to include volunteer experiences, along with paid experiences, on job application forms; and

b. informing public and private industry and employment agencies about volunteer programs and services so they have a better understanding of the scope of responsibilities assumed by volunteers in carrying out their volunteer assignments.

2. Information and educational opportunities should be made available to volunteers, volunteer administrators and agency staff to assist them in:

a. keeping records that document volunteer experience and skill development;

b. translating the skills developed in volunteer work to competencies needed to compete in the job market; and

c. preparing functional resumes based on volunteer work.

3. Agencies concerned with volunteerism should reach out to cooperate with industry in their community to determine ways of strengthening volunteerism in private business and industry.

For further information, contact:

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