

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS  
IN  
VOLUNTEER SERVICES  
ADMINISTRATION



Adopted at the 1975 Annual Meeting of the Association for Volunteer Administration.

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# PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN VOLUNTEER SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Volunteer services administration exists to provide the leadership, structures and functions which facilitate the mobilization of human and other resources—

- to enable the meeting of human needs;
- to create a social climate which makes the meeting of human needs possible;
- to provide for the involvement of persons in the decision-making processes which affect them in social, economic, political, health and other realms;
- to contribute to creative and responsible social development and change;
- to enhance and extend the work of professional and other employed persons in certain service fields.

Volunteer services administration is based on (1) a commitment to social responsibility, (2) the need of every human being to express concern for other persons, and (3) the right to human dignity and self-determination. Along with the right of a person to volunteer as a means of self-actualization, there is the right of the recipient of services to accept and to define the circumstances of that help, or the right to reject help altogether. These rights are to be seen in the light of social responsibility. Thus, in any given situation considered from an ethical perspective these three dimensions are held in tension. No one of them is absolute.

Out of such considerations, guidelines for ethical principles in the practice of volunteer administration can be drawn. The members of the Association for Volunteer Administration pledge themselves to the following principles and guidelines:

**PRINCIPLE 1, PHILOSOPHY OF VOLUNTEERISM,** The Volunteer Services Administrator accepts the ethical responsibility to develop a personal coherent philosophy of volunteerism as a foundation for working with others in developing a volunteer program.

This means that the Administrator will:

1. have an understanding of the history, the goals, the ethical implications and the basic principles of volunteerism both philosophical and practical.
2. be in communication with colleagues who can contribute to the continuing growth of his/her own philosophy.
3. share that philosophy with immediate staff in the development of the volunteer program and of staff relationships.
4. develop a volunteer program which is consistent with the philosophy held and be able to interpret why volunteers should or should not be involved in certain roles.
5. interpret to the community, the staff, the recipients of the service, and the volunteers, the rationale for volunteerism.

**PRINCIPLE 2, HUMAN DIGNITY,** The Volunteer Services Administrator accepts the ethical responsibility to develop a volunteer program which will enhance the human dignity of all persons related to it.

This means that the Administrator will:

1. develop a volunteer program which respects the right of the recipient to privacy and promotes self-determination and self-help.
2. promote the welfare and interests of the recipients, the organization members, the volunteers and the agency or organization and its staff.

3. encourage an atmosphere in which innovation and creativity are valued.
4. examine with care any proposed research to insure that the integrity of individuals is not violated.
5. accept in the name of the agency or organization only those donations of materials, time, money and skills which are consistent with the goals of the agency, using them appropriately and in accordance with the intent of the donor.
6. provide the volunteers with opportunities for training, personal growth and advancement which is not in conflict with employed staff roles.
7. provide supervision for volunteers in such a way as to respect their personal integrity and to build on their strengths, offer advice or assistance where indicated.
8. establish an agreement with volunteers which includes a commitment to the goals and policies of the agency or organization and interprets honestly and realistically the expectations of both volunteers and agency.
9. take all proper precautions for the welfare of volunteers including informing them of possible physical or emotional jeopardy.
10. provide a support system for volunteers which will insure meaningful and appropriate work assignments at which they can succeed and which will also insure responsible assignment, promotion or termination when appropriate.
11. provide written statements of policies and procedures to insure that all persons are treated fairly in their relationship to the agency organization.
12. provide volunteers with appropriate and sufficient information to carry out their responsibilities, keeping them informed of new approaches and policies.

**PRINCIPLE 3, MUTUALITY,** The Volunteer Services Administrator accepts the ethical responsibility to promote the understanding and actualization of inherent mutual benefits for all parties involved in any act of volunteer service.

This means that the Administrator will:

1. develop volunteer placements which will provide opportunities for mutual benefit.
2. help volunteers and recipients be conscious of the mutuality of their common experience.
3. encourage volunteer/recipient relationships which recognize the valuable contributions of each to the other.
4. assist the volunteer in defining his/her goals for volunteering and in understanding how the recipient contributes to the achievement of those goals.
5. assist all staff and other persons related to the volunteer program in recognizing that the mutuality involved enhances the dignity of each participant.

**PRINCIPLE 4, SELF-DETERMINATION,** The Volunteer Services Administrator accepts the ethical responsibility to promote the involvement of persons in decision-making processes which affect them directly.

This means that the Administrator will:

1. involve recipients of the volunteer service in the determination of what that service will be, and guidelines for its operation, as well as the evaluation of its accomplishments.
2. provide opportunities for volunteers to express their recommendations, concerns and questions to the agency or organization and provide for the continuing involvement of some volunteers in the policy making and planning affecting volunteers.

3. provide opportunities for employed staff affected by the involvement of volunteers to contribute to related decision-making processes.
4. establish channels for the wisdom growing out of the experience of the community to be incorporated into the planning and decision-making processes of the employing agency or organization.

**PRINCIPLE 5, PRIVACY,** The Volunteer Services Administrator accepts the ethical responsibility to respect the privacy of individuals and safeguard information received as confidential.

This means that the Administrator will:

1. make it clear to those who give information what kind of information cannot be kept confidential.
2. keep records which are accurate, contain only necessary information, and respect the privacy of individuals.
3. provide appropriate and accurate information from records when it is requested by the proper persons and protect records and information from unauthorized persons.
4. make certain of the anonymity of any anecdotes, case histories or illustrations used in speeches or in print.
5. not discuss work-related individuals or their problems in casual conversation.

**PRINCIPLE 6, STAFF RELATIONSHIPS,** The Volunteer Services Administration accepts the ethical responsibility to develop a volunteer program which will enhance and extend the work of all professional and other employed persons.

This means that the Administrator will:

1. play a positive role in a staff support system, keeping in mind the interests of the volunteers, the recipients of the services and the agency or organization.
2. develop responsible and effective roles for administrative and service volunteers while promoting an understanding of and respect for distinctive roles of all employed staff.
3. develop advancement for volunteers which is not in conflict with staff roles nor will displace paid personnel.
4. interpret to employed staff through appropriate staff training and consultation the value of volunteerism and their responsibility to volunteers.
5. provide staff members not so closely related to the broader community with a fair interpretation of the community perspective on the concerns of the agency or organization.

**PRINCIPLE 7, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY,** The Volunteer Services Administrator accepts the ethical responsibility to help create a social climate through which human needs can be met and human values enhanced.

This means that the Administrator will:

1. develop an understanding of the mores of the community and treat them with respect while not removing them from the arena of criticism and change.



2. demonstrate sensitivity to the influence of the employing agency or organization upon the social conditions of the community.
3. understand the role of volunteerism in relation to social conditions in the community.
4. be aware of the relationship of the volunteer program to the social issues in the community.
5. contribute to creative and responsible social development and change.

**PRINCIPLE 8, PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY,** The Volunteer Services Administrator accepts the ethical responsibility to contribute to the credibility of the profession in the eyes of those it serves.

This means that the Administrator will:

1. maintain high standards of professional competence.
2. act with integrity and objectivity in the professional role.
3. work for implementation of ethical practices in all types of volunteerism in the community.
4. refrain from any action which takes advantage of information or situations arising from professional contacts.
5. make a clear distinction between statements and actions which are personal and those which are representative of the employing agency or organization, the volunteers, or the professional organization.
6. accept employment in an agency or organization only when it is possible, with integrity, to align himself/herself with its policies and goals.

7. work within the accepted structures and procedures of the employing agency or organization or work in open and constructive ways to bring about change.
8. assure the validity of information used in publications, news releases or other information devices before becoming responsible for its release.
9. accept responsibility for providing professional consultation consistent with his/her own personal integrity and will request and accept consultation when it is needed.
10. carry on continuous and realistic evaluations of all programs for which he/she is responsible, such evaluation involving recipients of the service, volunteers, staff, agency or organization administrators and representatives of the community.
11. work diligently to enhance his/her own professional growth.
12. contribute to the expanding body of knowledge about volunteerism.
13. assume a fair share of responsibility for the effective functioning and development of the professional organization of which he/she is a member.

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