

The Value of an Internship in Volunteer Administration

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A hospital's department of volunteer services offers various support systems that invaluable enhance the institutions effectiveness as a health care facility. Not only does the volunteer department provide services for patients and assistance to staff, but it functions also as a main channel of communication between the hospital and the larger community. Because of the increasingly important and diverse roles of volunteers in hospitals and in all areas of the non-profit sector, effective leadership in volunteer administration has become a recognized necessity. Nevertheless, pre-professional programs in the field are as yet few and largely experimental. As director of Volunteer Services at Magee-Womens Hospital in Pittsburgh, I became aware of the lack in western Pennsylvania of any formal training structure for prospective professionals in volunteer management, and in response I have established at Magee a Volunteer Administration Internship Program. During the five years of its operation the program has "graduated" sixteen interns trained in various aspects of volunteer administration.

The internship program at Magee has fulfilled the purpose of providing interested individuals with an effective mechanism through which to test and verify experientially the responsibilities involved in vol-

unteer administration and to develop necessary professional skills. It also provides benefits to both the hospital and to the director of volunteer services who implements the program. The hospital receives the services of the talented and conscientious persons serving as interns, while the director is enabled not only to sharpen important managerial techniques, but also to strengthen his or her own understanding of the profession's demands and objectives.

The internship program is on-going throughout the year, and in the past from three to seven interns have participated at any one time. Each intern commits his or her services for a minimum of two days a week for six months. A college degree is a requirement for admission, although interns have offered a variety of educational background and have included those with master's degrees as well as Ph.D. candidates. Interns are carefully selected after candidates have been interviewed to determine whether they have adequate motivation and ability to perform duties required, which are essentially those of an assistant director of volunteer services.

Once selected, an intern is assigned tasks that match his or her specific interests and talents. The assignments performed by the interns are varied, and their contribution to the effectiveness of Magee's health service has been evident. In the past, interns have been responsible for the following projects: the writing of assignment guides, coordinating a CPR program for volunteers, establishing activity programs for patients, coordinating educational programs for volunteers, handling recruitment and supervision of the Junior Volunteer Program, assisting in the writing of a grant proposal for a patient aide program on nursing units, assisting with the presentation to the Governor's office on a convention for volunteerism, assisting with the implementation of a TB tine testing

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program for volunteers, writing a volunteer handbook, organizing and writing an administrative manual for the department and assisting with the development of risk management programs.

Through their many valuable services to the hospital, the interns are able to define for themselves the demands and objectives of a volunteer administration position. Because they assume the responsibilities of an assistant director, they gain awareness of necessary skills and receive initial training in the profession. In addition, through participating in a staff structure of three or more interns and a director, with required weekly meetings for reporting and assignments, interns receive valuable managerial experience in interpersonal communication. Further career preparation is provided interns by acquainting them with the professional organizations in which the director participates, including the American Society of Directors of Volunteer Services, the Western Chapter of the Pennsylvania Society of Directors of Volunteer Services, the Volunteer Action Center, the Association for Volunteer Administration. By attending meetings of these organizations, the interns secure a variety of employment contacts and broaden their understanding of volunteerism.

The high proportion of "graduates" who have secured positions in volunteer management of related fields indicates that the program's objectives of providing job verification and pre-professional training have indeed been met. Of the sixteen graduates, all but three have entered the profession directly or continued graduate work in health administration. For example, one intern who enrolled in the program in search of career opportunities in volunteer administration worked diligently at Magee, performing a variety of management services. Following her internship, she received a position as volunteer administrator for a community-based radio station. Other "graduates" have attained such positions as director of student activities in a local college, volunteer coordinator at a public library, and director of volunteers for a female offenders' program.

In addition to meeting the needs of the interns and the hospital, the internship program lastly benefits the Director of Volunteer Services in ways which have more than compensated for the extensive time and effort

required in implementing the program. A group of dynamic interns working together in a variety of assignments has offered the department a continual supply of added vitality through which it has grown and expanded at an accelerated pace. The interns also stimulate fresh and original insights into ordinary daily problems, a contribution so valuable to a director in reevaluating the department's day-to-day performance. The loneliness of the position is also lessened greatly when he or she can discuss problems with the individuals who understand and share the department's objectives and can offer solutions. I have found also that the friendship and meaningful professional ties gained in the process constitute a valuable and rewarding bonus.

More important, perhaps, I have discovered that the program has offered me, as Director of Volunteer Services, a clarified perspective on the profession and an opportunity to practice and strengthen necessary skills. By meeting the needs of the interns, the director focuses on professional demands and responsibilities and defines the scope and requirements of the position. In the process of participating with the interns in a staff structure, the director also sharpens managerial techniques so necessary to effective volunteer administration. Based on my experience in coordinating an internship program at Magee, the director becomes involved in an exciting and rewarding personal and professional experience while guiding the interns in their own training.

The results of the Administration Internship Program at Magee are conclusive: the program provided viable training in volunteer administration and benefits the institution served as well as the coordinating director. As yet, the role of such internships in the future of volunteerism remains uncertain. The success of the program at Magee, however, raises a major question for consideration by those concerned about volunteer administration in the non-profit sector. Should an internship system be integrated into the curriculum of a university degree program in volunteer administration? Certainly the lack of defined and tested pre-professional programs in the field demands that every proven training mechanism, such as that operating at Magee, be fully examined for its potential contribution to the goal of effective volunteer administration.