

Volunteer Administration as a Career

By *Connie Skillingstad, CAVS*

The past fifteen years have seen the beginning of the profession of volunteer administration. During this time, a heretofore unknown professional field has emerged into a full-blown career opportunity with degree programs, various associations, and a growing body of literature. Much has been written about the skills and knowledge required of an effective Volunteer Administrator, but discussion about such things as salary and position in any agency have only just begun. Volunteer administrators requesting a pay raise may do so apologetically because they have no supporting data and because they are in the business of asking others to do something for nothing. I would propose that an effective volunteer administrator brings a broader base of knowledge and skill to an organization than most realize. How can professionals in this field convince their administrators that such is the case? How can volunteer administrators raise the profession in the sight of other professionals with whom they work?

The following article is not an exercise in demonstrating cost effectiveness. It is a brief look at the profession of volunteer administration with all its titles, lines of reportability, and status or lack of it. In preparation for writing this article the author conducted a limited survey to gather data to use in assessing the profession and in evaluating some hypotheses. Admittedly, the survey lacks some essential components which would make it statistically significant and truly random, but it provides some infor-

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mation about the profession. It may also provide some data for an ambitious volunteer administrator who is looking out for his or her career development and for an opportunity to make a career out of directing or supporting volunteer programs.

The survey questionnaire was given to Minnesotans and others at the National Conference of Volunteerism in Minneapolis in October, 1980 and also mailed to members of the Minnesota Association of Volunteer Directors who did not attend the conference.¹ This immediately skews the results in the direction of those persons who have already made a specific commitment to professional development through attending a conference or joining a professional organization. This also means that those who had an opportunity to participate in the survey were those having some support already identified from supervisors or agency administrators, while not even reaching those who did not come to the conference or are not association members (and may not even know that such opportunities exist). Hopefully, the survey results will have a wide enough distribution to allow such persons to make some use of them, however.

As it did require some volition on the part of persons receiving the survey, the results are, of course, limited to those who voluntarily completed the form. The interest and support expressed by respondents and the many requests for the results encouraged the author in this endeavor, providing convincing evidence that there is a real need for definitive information about the field.

Many issues were considered in developing the survey tool and many pieces of information were gathered which will not be covered in this analysis. The raw data is available and interested persons may inquire if they wish.² The following areas of concern are dealt with here:

1) Title and Reportability

There has been much discussion about what persons in the field should be called and

whether it makes a difference in salary and lines of reportability. Also, do different types of settings make a difference when considering title? How many people report to an executive director and how many to other staff? What are the possible implications of our positions in the agency's hierarchy?

2) Size of Community

Does the size of the community in which volunteer administrators work affect such things as salary range, type of program, and how often they are asked to fulfill two jobs (with varied responsibilities)?

3) Length of Time in the Field and in Present Position

What kind of longevity is there in the field? Is it truly only a transition to another field, or can it be a long-range career? What impact do such things as size of community and salary have in length of stay in the field?

4) Dual Responsibilities

How many volunteer administrators work full time at coordinating volunteer activities and how many have multiple responsibilities or are expected to manage a program while also filling another position?

5) Size of Program

Is there a correlation between the size of a program (in numbers of volunteers) and status or salary? How many administrators of volunteers work alone? And what does this mean when considering need for opportunities to share what we develop?

6) Budget

Does the position administer a separate budget? Is this affected by the size of the program or setting? What other factors affect such a responsibility?

7) Salary

How much do those in the profession get paid? What difference in pay is there among settings and titles? Do agencies have a salary scale and classification system? What might be the impact of this on the future?

8) Education

Finally, how educated are volunteer administrators? What implications does this have for educational programs

designed for volunteer administrators? Does it impact recruiting of others into this fast-growing field?

There are many questions to be answered when exploring the profession and its future. This article provides some indications of many things, primarily food for thought, and some beginnings for future research of a more scientific type by someone with more patience and time.

A total of 110 surveys were completed and serve as the basis for the study. This represented 102 paid and 8 volunteer persons. A total of 84 were Minnesotans; 24 were from other states entirely, and 2 had a combined Minnesota/Wisconsin territory. These 110 people carried 33 different titles: "Volunteer Coordinator" accounted for 34 of the participants, while "Volunteer Director" was the title of 25 others; 19 were "Executive Directors" or "Chief Executive Officers" of their agency. There were many unique titles represented and each addressed some aspect of the field (see Appendix 1).

The following summaries are organized in the order presented earlier. The conclusions of the data will be presented along with some subjective interpretation.

1) Title and Reportability

There have long been sentiments about the importance of title in determining the status commanded by a person in a particular position. In volunteer administration the coveted title has been "Volunteer Director" or "Director of Volunteers." The feeling seems to be that people will show more deference to the expertise of someone called "Director." (It should be noted that no participant in the survey reported a title of "Volunteer Administrator.")

The data on this issue has been divided into two areas, that of salary and of reportability. The various titles were divided into four groups: Volunteer Director, Volunteer Coordinator, Director (of an agency), and other titles. The volunteers listed did not offer a special title for themselves. Salaries for each category were found not to have a great deal of variation as indicated in the following chart. However, it should be noted that the lowest paid group of administrators were those with the title of Volunteer Director.

Salary by Title

Title	Number in Category	Ave. Annual Salary
Volunteer Director	26	\$14,744
Volunteer Coordinator	39	\$15,497
Director (usually VAC)	20	\$15,714
Other	17	\$15,323
Volunteers	7	---
VISTA volunteer	1	\$ 3,600

It is significant to note here that persons with the designated title of Volunteer Director were generally found in hospital and nursing home settings, which have been shown to have a generally lower salary range. This is especially true of nursing homes.

There is no indication from the data that lines of reportability are closer to the top for any particular group with the exception of the Directors who generally reported to the board or president of the organization.

While 48 persons reported to an executive director (a relationship generally seen as most desirable from the standpoint of decision making); and 18 reported to a board, president or national organization; 38 reported to someone other than the highest level. An additional 4 reported to someone in the volunteer program and 2 were not designated. For those reporting to the highest level, the average salary was \$15,042; for those reporting to someone at a lower level, it was \$17,117. Those who reported to another volunteer program person averaged \$15,375. Persons who reported to a board or president (usually a Director position) averaged \$14,246. Although the survey did not ask the size of agency, the data seems to indicate that those persons employed in larger organizations tend to be paid more, while not at the higher levels in the hierarchy.

Author's Note:

[It is important to be concerned about lines of reportability, particularly because it is top management which sets policy and the farther you move from such decision making, the less impact you can have on the decisions which affect your program and budgeting for it. It seems as though the farther one moves up the levels of responsibility, or at least in responsibility, salaries go down. This may reflect the size of agency, the type of organization, or simply the level of commitment to volunteer programming that is shown by administrators and boards.

In summary, the data would seem to indicate that if a person wishes to move into positions of greater responsibility, accountability or decision-making authority, and yet remain in volunteer administration, it may be necessary to accept a reduction in salary to do so. But the data also indicates that such options do exist.]

2) Size of the Community

The survey asked for information about the size of community in which the person worked.

These responses were grouped into the following relative population sizes:

- A. Under 10,000
- B. 10,000-25,000
- C. 25,000-50,000
- D. 50,000-100,000
- E. Over 100,000

The results were organized into the following table to indicate the numbers and salary ranges of the respondents.

Size of Community	Number of Respondents	Average Salary
Under 10,000	8	\$12,739
10,000-25,000	15	\$14,133
25,000-50,000	16	\$13,899
50,000-100,000	11	\$16,395
Over 100,000	40	\$15,925
No size indicated	8	\$14,464

Although to some extent one might conclude that the larger the community, the higher the salary; one could also conclude that there is not a significant difference. Within the larger communities there was a greater diversity of agencies represented, while in smaller communities there were generally social service, hospital, and nursing home programs. Although volunteer administrators in nursing homes seemed to have more dual responsibilities (such as Volunteer Coordinator/Activity Director), there did not seem to be any correlation between multiple responsibilities and size of the community.

3) Length of Time in the Field and Position

It has been difficult to measure whether people remain interested in volunteer administration as a career or not. People often move in and out of the field within a short time, in part because the position in most agencies is not connected to any career ladder. Volunteer administrators are one-of-a-kind in all but a very few of the largest agencies, which causes many to move out of the field into higher level positions.

Participants were asked to indicate both the length of time they had been in their current positions and the length of time they had been in volunteer administration as a field. The results are indicated below.

Length of Time...	In Position	In Field
Less than 1 year	21	16
1 - 3 years	38	28
3 - 5 years	14	21
6 - 10 years	13	18
More than 10 years	9	12

Author's Note:

[The survey seems to indicate that a sizeable percentage of people, at least of those surveyed, have been in the field (40%) have been in the field and in their present positions (43.3%) for three years or less. This might simply reflect the fact that volunteer administration is a young profession, or it may have greater significance and bear out a concern that the turnover is very high indeed. Since approximately one third have been in the field for more than 5 years, it might also reflect a general trend toward mobility which may be seen in other fields as well. Obviously some movement is healthy for a profession; however, if there is, in fact, a high turnover in the field, it would seem that it warrants a closer look.]

4) Dual or Multi-Job Responsibilities

There has long been recognition that volunteer administration is often the catch-all position for those functions for which no one else is responsible. This is frequently appealing as a means of acquiring broader experience but also creates some "schizophrenia" as one tries to juggle the many responsibilities thrust upon or assumed by the "helpful" volunteer administrator. The survey indicated that not only was this true within unified jobs, it was also true that job titles were split between responsibilities.

Of the persons surveyed, 72.5% worked full-time, 7.3% three-quarters time, 1% 4/5 time, 9.2% half-time, 2.8% 3/5 time, and 1.8% worked less than 1/2 time. The salaries for those who worked less than full time were converted into full-time figures for purposes of analysis. This may have skewed the salaries toward the lower end, because there was a definitely lower average for part-time people when put on a full-time scale.

Author's Note:

[When a position is split, part must suffer, and in many cases it is the volunteer program. There must be recognition that split jobs are less effective and that managing a volunteer program requires a volunteer administrator who does not need to be a jack-of-all-trades...attractive as that may be for some volunteer administrators or agencies. However, an obvious argument in favor of a diversified job is that it truly does provide the opportunity to grow and develop marketable skills in areas as different as trainer, personnel director, public relations expert, community development specialist, and so on.]

5) Size of Program

In number of volunteers the following

general statistics emerged:

Number of Volunteers in Program	Number of Respondents	%
Less than 50	20	18.8
50 - 100	28	26.4
100 - 200	15	14.2
200 and over	43	40.6

The number of volunteers appears to bear little relationship to any of the other factors. Initially it seemed as though length of time in program would be a factor, but this was also less significant as more data was examined. Salary level also did not show a definite relationship to size of program nor did setting, although setting may have a higher relationship than anything.

Author's Note:

[Hopefully, as there are opportunities to demonstrate our credibility as professionals, less attention will be paid to the number of volunteers in a program and a great deal more will be paid to the quality of work volunteers are doing. As we grow in professionalism, we must continue to develop more legitimate criteria for assessing the impact of programs on service delivery in terms of service units or some other usable measure.]

6) Size of Program Staff and Budgets

Are volunteer administrators loners, unique in their professions within their organizations? Do agencies give volunteer administrators a budget over which they have control? Obviously different agencies use different budgeting procedures which impact the possibility of a controllable budget specific to the volunteer program.

The survey indicates that less than one-half of the respondents have a separate budget with which to conduct recognition, recruitment, program development, promotion, and so on. This was a difficult question to tabulate because people understood it differently; when an agency director responded, it was frequently with the budget for the entire organization. Therefore, no conclusions could be drawn from the data. However, it is necessary to reiterate that it is essential to have some funds identified to develop programs if they are to succeed. There is need for money for some kind of reimbursements as well.

Volunteer Program Staff					
Self Only	2	3	4	5	More than 5
46	16	18	14	5	6
43.8%	15.2%	17%	13.2%	4.7%	5.7%

As one can see from the previous table, the majority of those responding to the survey

have at least one other person within their office. Because of the wording of the question, it is possible that even those answering "one staff," did have some clerical support and should have been tabulated in the 2 column. Frequently the support was a clerical person and often a number of volunteers.

Author's Note:

[There is a need, given a 59% answer to 2 or less staff, for professional organizations to bring volunteer administrators together to discuss common concerns and learn from one another and from the experts. We must continue to share in any way possible to help the profession grow and mature. Through pooling the knowledge and research base available, the professional body of knowledge that truly makes a profession can be developed.]

8) Salaries and Settings

The volunteer administrators in the survey represented the following settings:

Type of Setting	Number of Respondents	Average Salary
Public Social Serv.	12	\$16,640
Private Social Serv.	21	\$12,550
Undifferentiated Social Services	11	\$13,308
Hospital:		
Acute	13	\$15,993
Psychiatric (state)	5	\$15,668
Nursing Homes	12	\$10,076
Corrections	4	\$17,403
Arts	3	\$17,400
Education	10	\$17,340
VAC	9	\$13,560

Since some of the average salaries represented a small sampling, one cannot generalize to a population. However, this does give a sense of where the differences lie. One can see that nursing homes and private social services (which represented a large number of grass roots organizations) do not, and possibly cannot, pay their people at a level commensurate with other settings.

Author's Note:

[Since this profession is largely composed of women, and women have been generally identified in research as less well paid, we can conclude that our salaries are quite competitive with other related professions. Less than one-half of the respondents even have an identified pay scale (48-yes; 56-no). This would be an interesting statistic to observe as a sign of the development of the profession and of the organizations which

have volunteer administrators on staff.]

9) Level of Education

Volunteer administrators are on the whole well-educated individuals. This would seem to have some impact on the kinds of training they are being offered. Graduate programs would seem more attractive to many than undergraduate programs; however, recruitment of new people into the profession will come from undergraduate and re-entry programs offering credentialing of life experience, so the profession needs to support the development of these programs.

The survey indicates that, of the respondents:

- 16.5% had graduate degrees
- 27.5% had some graduate work
- 39.4% had a B.A./B.S. degree
- 15.6% had some college
- 1.0% had a high school diploma only

This type of data indicates that attention needs to be given to offering advanced level learning opportunities for volunteer administrators in order to keep challenging them and keep them interested in the field.

Summary

Though lacking in the sophistication of many research studies, the foregoing information offers an opportunity to reflect on our profession: who are we? where are we? where might we want to go? These are questions which we must answer independently, but must also be answered collectively by those in organizations representing the volunteer administrator. We are at many levels in organizations, but truly in our infancy as a profession.

It is hoped that this data will add some insights into professional growth and development, and help us to define more clearly who we are and what we are in the human services arena.

Notes

1. The author's thanks are offered to the members of MAVD for their participation and encouragement and to Bob Munson of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota for his critique of this article's first draft.
2. For more information about this survey, write to Connie Skillingstad, CAVS, Volunteer Coordinator, St. Joseph's Home for Children, 1120 E. 47th Street, Minneapolis, MN, 55407.

APPENDIX 1

Titles of Volunteer Administrators Completing Survey			
Volunteer Coordinator	34	Field Placement Supervisor	1
Volunteer Director or Director of Volunteers	25	Chairperson	1
Director or Executive Director	19	Foster Grandparent Director	1
Program Director	3	Administrator	1
Activity Director	3	District Supervisor	1
Social Worker	2	OTR and V.C.	1
Coordinator of Aging & Volunteers	2	Community Relations Coordinator	1
Project Director	2	Teacher/Coordinator	1
President	2	Director, Community Service	1
Administrative Advisor	1	Facilitator of Volunteers	1
Family Service Director	1	Director, Volunteer Service & Community Relations	1
Co-director	1	Supervisor	1
Project Assistant	1	Director, Bureau of Volunteer Services	1
Volunteer and Training Coordinator	1	Adult Development Director	1
		Volunteer Recruitment Coordinator	1
		VISTA - Ombudsman	1
		Assistant Director, Volunteer Services	1
		Supervisor, Division of Citizen Participation	1