

# DETERMINING WHO VOLUNTEER

By Terrence H. Dunn, Ph.D

**O**ne daily challenge of programs involving volunteers is determining what volunteers will do within the framework of the program's objectives. If this challenge is not met, volunteers are likely to have inappropriate job assignments which waste their valuable time and energy. Also, the time and energy of salaried staff will be wasted because they will be doing jobs that volunteer staff could do as well or better. Inappropriate involvement of salaried *and* volunteer staff in carrying out program tasks wastes the organization's financial resources and hampers implementation of objectives.

Any effort to deal with job determination should be considered from the perspective of both volunteers and salaried staff. It is best if decisions for determining who can and will do what are decided by both groups as a team effort. Many experienced managers of volunteer intensive programs have learned through trial and error to work their way through this job determination process; but new managers, or those experiencing daily challenges in this area, will find the following steps helpful.

- STEP 1.** Review what is currently being accomplished within the program and what needs to be accomplished. Both volunteer and salaried staff need to participate in this process.
- STEP 2.** Divide program components that need to be accomplished into specific jobs. Simply take the "big job" and divide it into many "little jobs."
- STEP 3.** Evaluate each of the "little jobs" from the perspective of its time demands. Some jobs can be accomplished in an hour; some happen only once a week or once a month; others must function every day, all day; and others happen only once a year.

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# WILL DO WHAT— AND STAFF

- STEP 4.** Rank each job according to its importance. Some jobs absolutely *must* be accomplished; others should be done—some are important, but if they do not get done, the program will survive; and others are extras or “icing on the cake.”
- STEP 5.** Evaluate each job according to its ease of accomplishment. Many jobs can be done by just about anyone and without their having special training or experience, but not too much; and others require in-depth professional training, skill or knowledge.
- STEP 6.** Special considerations! Sometimes there will be jobs that have special considerations or requirements. A job might require travel, it might have concerns for confidentiality, it might require certification, or it might require special communications skills such as fluency in another language.
- STEP 7.** Determine whether a volunteer or salaried staff member should accomplish the job. Some jobs will be suitable for salaried staff only; others are suitable for salaried staff, but could be assigned to a special, unique, unusual, super, fantastic volunteer; and some jobs are only suitable for volunteers.

The bottom line of this job determination process is to help program managers determine what jobs both volunteers and salaried staff should accomplish within the operations of the program.

By working through what jobs need to be accomplished, and by deciding ahead of time who should be assigned to do them, challenges related to appropriate job assignment can be lessened, if not eliminated. In addition, the program or organization will be utilizing its salaried staff in a more productive manner. An important aspect of this process is communication.

When both volunteer and salaried staff know what they are doing and what they can and cannot do, the program or organization should function in an improved manner. ■