

# Today's Volunteer Administrator: A MANAGER OF VOLUNTEER SERVICES

By Virginia Cronk, Ph.D.

**T**he position of volunteer administrator was first established within organizations in the mid-nineteenth century. The position has undergone many changes of definition and function since those days of the friendly visitors. Just what does today's volunteer administrator do? Does the trend towards calling this person the manager of volunteer services more accurately reflect the true nature of the position today? What qualifies a person to be a manager of volunteer services? How should a person looking towards entering the profession go about preparing for it?

## The Volunteer Manager's Duties

In 1987, the Volunteer Center of Greater Milwaukee, Inc. conducted a survey of its member organizations to find out what the manager of volunteer services and the agency executives perceived as the duties of the manager of volunteer services. This research showed that the most common duties assigned to the manager of volunteer services included:

- Recruiting volunteers
- Interviewing and screening potential volunteers
- Assigning volunteers to jobs
- Providing orientation to volunteers
- Providing for recognition of volunteers

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## The position has undergone many changes of definition and function since those days of the friendly visitors.

These duties correspond to the critical points in the volunteer management process, so we can safely say that they form the core of the job description of any manager of volunteer services.

There were some differences, however, in what executive directors and the practitioners saw as duties assigned to the manager of volunteer services. Executive directors were more likely to perceive that interaction with other staff was an assigned duty than were the managers of volunteer services. The interactions most mentioned by executive directors were working with other professional staff to design volunteer jobs and training other staff in volunteer management techniques.

The managers of volunteer services saw the administrative task of writing reports as a distinct, assigned job duty. This implies that the executive director, who is ultimately responsible for assuring ade-

quate personnel to carry out the work of the organization, perceives the duties of manager of volunteer services as indeed a manager and as a peer staff member with the professionals carrying out the work of the organization. She/he perceives the duties of the position as more administrative.

The following lists the 15 most commonly perceived duties of the manager of volunteer services in the order reported:

## How the Executive Director Perceives the Volunteer Manager's Duties

1. Interview and screen volunteers
2. Work with professional staff to design volunteer jobs
3. Recruit volunteers
4. Assign volunteers
5. Orientation for volunteers
6. Recognition activities
7. Personal interest in volunteers
8. Public speaking
9. Terminate unsatisfactory volunteers
10. Work with clerical, support staff to develop volunteer jobs
11. Supervise volunteers
12. Do market research on volunteers
13. Train volunteers
14. Keep records on volunteer services
15. Resolve volunteers' grievances

## How the Manager of Volunteer Services Perceives Her/His Duties

1. Orientation for volunteers
2. Recognition activities
3. Interview, screen volunteers
4. Assign volunteers

5. Write reports
6. Recruit volunteers
7. Work with professional staff to design volunteer jobs
8. Supervise volunteers
9. Draft policies for volunteers
10. Personal interest in volunteers
11. Keep records on volunteer service
12. Public speaking
13. Terminate unsatisfactory volunteers
14. Work with clerical, support staff to design volunteer jobs
15. Train volunteers

Executive directors and managers of volunteer services were asked which of the duties performed by the manager of volunteer services were most crucial to the success of the organization. Again, there was enough agreement that we can say that working with professional staff to design volunteer jobs, interviewing and screening volunteers, and providing an orientation to volunteers are the duties of the manager of volunteer services that are perceived to be the most crucial to the successful operation of the agency.

Over one half of the executive directors said that interviewing and screening volunteers, as well as working with the professional staff to design volunteer jobs, were the key duties. This probably reflects the executive's approach to his/her responsibility to staff the organization. On the other hand, the managers of volunteers most frequently mentioned taking a personal interest in volunteers as their key duty, which probably indicated their perception of the importance of interpersonal communications in maintaining an unpaid work force.

All of this shows that the manager of volunteer services is indeed a manager, and that primarily the position is assigned the duty of securing and maintaining an appropriate volunteer work force. What qualifies a person for this position?

### Qualifications

The executive directors, who probably hire the manager of volunteer services and view the job performance in terms of smooth functioning and adequate volunteer services, said that the most important qualification was dedication to the mission of the organization. (Interestingly, research on executive directors repeatedly shows that dedication to the mission is a primary qualification in that position as well.) The manager of volunteer services reflected a different perspective in saying that the most important qualification was

management experience.

The six most important qualification from the perspective of the agency executive director are:

1. Dedication to the mission
2. Personality
3. Management experience
4. Prior work experience
5. Prior volunteer experience
6. Rapport with clients

The manager of volunteer services reported his/her qualifications in this order of importance:

1. Management experience
2. Dedication to mission
3. Personality
4. Rapport with clients
5. BS or BA degree
6. Contacts in the community

**There was enough agreement to say that working with professional staff to design volunteer jobs, interviewing and screening volunteers, and providing an orientation to volunteers are the volunteer manager's duties perceived to be the most crucial to the successful operation of the agency.**

### Preparing for a Career in Volunteer Administration

The Higher Education Task Force of the Association for Volunteer Administration of Greater Milwaukee reviewed the findings of this 1987 survey, and prepared a set of suggested undergraduate courses for people preparing for a career in volunteer administration. This set of courses is recommended on the belief that volunteer administration requires skills and knowledge from many disciplines. No one major field of study is required for entry into the field or to pursue certification from AVA. These courses will provide the broad education which we believe is necessary for a competent volunteer administrator. Additional (or perhaps major) academic preparation may be necessary in the specific area of practice (i.e., social work, art history, recreation, etc.)

These courses have been selected from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee catalog. Similar courses should be available from any university or college.

#### Highest Priority

##### From Business Administration:

Organizations  
 Managerial Accounting or Analysis of Financial Reports  
 Budgets and Budgetary Control  
 Human Resources Management  
 Principles of Marketing

##### From Education:

Leadership and Management of Volunteer Programs  
 Principles of Adult Education or Program Planning in Adult Education  
 Community Educator as Change Agent  
 Foundations of Human Relations  
 The Group as a Framework for Community Change

##### From Communications:

Public Speaking  
 Leadership and Communication  
 Interviews and Interviewing

##### From Social Work:

Introduction to Human Services

##### From Mass Communication:

Introduction to Public Relations

##### From Sociology:

Introduction to Social Psychology

##### From Educational Psychology:

Overview of Counseling  
 Statistical Methods (could also come from

the departments of Sociology or Business).

I recommend two companions to academic preparation for the position of manager of volunteer services. The first is reading to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the voluntary sector and the service approaches reflected in the missions of the organizations in which he or she might work.

In 1985 the Volunteer Center of Greater Milwaukee, Inc. wrote to national and local leaders in the voluntary sector and asked the question: "What books or articles have been most useful to you in your work within the voluntary sector?"

The responses to this mail survey came from staff and volunteer leadership in such national organizations as VOLUNTEER—The National Center, United Way of America, Family Service of America, American Red Cross National Headquarters, American Heart Association National Center, Girl Scouts of the United States, Boys Clubs of America, The Foundation Center, Kiwanis International, Business Committee for the Arts, American Symphony Orchestral League and League of Women Voters of the United States.

The most frequently cited writings were *The Bible*, books by Brian O'Connell (INDEPENDENT SECTOR) and Peter Drucker. The books that have been most influential on the local and national leaders who responded and should be included on a reading list for managers of volunteers are:

#### **Social Issues, Philosophies of Approach:**

##### *Bible*

*The Predicament of Democratic Man* by Edmund Cahn

*The Gift Relationship* by Richard Titmuss  
*Of Kennedys and Kings* by Harris Wofford  
*Reclaiming the American Dream* by Richard Cornuelle

*Blaming the Victim* by William Ryan  
*Reveille for Radicals* by Saul Alinsky  
*The Future of Work* by Charles Handy  
*Caring* by Willard Gaylin

*Voluntary Simplicity* by Duane Elgin  
*Helping Ourselves* by Bruce Stokes  
*How Can I Help?* by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman

*Creating Alternative Futures* by Hazel Henderson

*The Backyard Revolution* by Harry C. Boyte

*Voluntary Agencies in the Welfare State* by Ralph Kramer

*The Other America* by Michael Harrington  
*Seek the Widening Path* by Orin Arnold  
*Activism That Makes Sense* by Gregory Pierce

*New Rules* by Daniel Yankelovich

#### **History:**

Any of the works of American historian Daniel Boorstin

*Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck

*By the People* by Susan Ellis and Katherine Noyes

*Centuries of Childhood* by Phillippe Aries

*Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville

*America's Voluntary Spirit* by Brian O'Connell

*The Men Who Wear the K* by L.A. Hapgood

*Women Volunteering: The Pleasure, Pain and Politics of Unpaid Work from 1830 to the Present* by Wendy Kaminer

*Germinal* by Emile Zola

*Great Moments in History* by Barbara Tuchman

*The Citizen Volunteer* by Nathan Cohen  
*Work and Family in the U.S.* by Rosabeth Moss Kanter

#### **Management and How-to's:**

Anything by Marlene Wilson

Anything by Peter Drucker

Anything by John Gardner

*Mega-Funds* by John Naisbitt

*Volunteers from the Workplace* by Kenn

Allen, Shirley Keller, Cindy Vizva

*Developing Successful Volunteer Programs* by Susan Casey

*The Successful Volunteer Organization* by Joan Flanagan

*Effective Leadership in Volunteer Organizations* by Brian O'Connell

*In Search of Excellence* by Peters and Waterman

*Harvard Business Review*

*Strategic Management for Non-Profit Organizations* by Unterman & Davis

*Managing Your Board of Directors* by Joe Weber

*Foundation News*

*Trustees and The Future of Foundations* by John Nason

*The Effective Voluntary Board of Directors* by William Conrad

*Marketing for Non-Profit Organizations* by Phillip Kotler

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Another approach to assist in the preparation for a position of manager of volunteer services is to participate in a volunteer activity which gives the opportunity to develop management and leadership skills, and which provides opportunity to sharpen interpersonal skills or "personality." Service clubs, political or activist organizations, community or neighborhood organizations and youth groups are especially appropriate for providing volunteer positions on committees, boards or as group leaders. Active participation in a local Association for Volunteer Administration or DOVIA (Directors of Volunteers in Agencies) offers the opportunity to learn from practitioners, as well as to develop leadership and group process skills.

While volunteer management has a long history in our country's care of people, education and culture, we are entering a time when this management arena has as great a need as all others to develop enhanced skills. The changes which are seen in the work force are the same changes we see in the volunteer force. It is more important than ever to define the functions and to identify the academic and life experiences which prepare today's managers of volunteers.