

[News and Hot Topics](#) » The Money Factor in Volunteer Management

The Money Factor in Volunteer Management

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

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It's income tax season in the United States and I've been busy with financial reporting. So it seems appropriate to devote this month's Hot Topic to money. Certain financial questions seem to surface all the time, so I'm going to air the two big ones here:

1. What should a director of volunteers be paid?

If you look at any of the salary surveys done in recent years for the nonprofit field (and I'm sure there are similar ones for government and for-profits, too), you'll immediately notice one of two things: either the position of director of volunteers is not even included in the study, or we are at the bottom of the list in salary averages. The real problem with these sorts of surveys is that they perpetuate inequities. So an executive who is uncertain as to what to offer to a new coordinator of volunteers looks at the study and, with relief, offers a low figure because "that's what this field earns."

In truth, all the figures are open to question. As has been noted many times before, it is hard--and probably foolish--to draw conclusions from a survey of so many disparate types of organizations. Hospitals will pay all staff members more than a rape crisis center ever can. A neighborhood drop-in center will have a pay scale far lower than a major museum. This is true for every position, across the board.

Which is why, in my opinion, the only valid criterion for determining the appropriate pay for a director of volunteers is whether his or her salary is equivalent to the salary of other similar-level managers in that specific agency. So the real question is not one of dollars. It's at what level of administration is this position valued? If the director of development earns twice what the director of volunteers is paid, or if volunteer leadership is paid on a par with clerical staff, there's a clear message sent. But if the director of volunteers receives a salary on the level of other managers, department heads, or other essential staff, then the amount is right--whatever that amount is, for everyone.

2. Should volunteers be given money as an incentive?

I want to go on record as saying that I do not believe it is necessary to use money as an "incentive" to

get people to volunteer. In fact, in most cases, I find this to be a cop-out approach used by people who never tried to recruit volunteers, but assumed it to be impossible because they couldn't imagine anyone (especially young or poor) would be willing to help.

Please understand: I DO favor reimbursement for any out-of-pocket expenses and any type of support that allows people to give their time as a donation but not to also have to spend money they may not have for the privilege of volunteering. I am speaking here of approaches such as "we give everyone \$25 a week" or some other very low pay.

First, be aware that this sort of scheme is not seen by the IRS as reimbursement for expenses. Because it is pre-determined, paid to everyone, and given regardless of proof of expenses, this type of payment must be reported as taxable income to the volunteer.

Second, the amount offered is usually so low it verges on the insulting and begins to cause confusion in their role with employees. If you have the cash, buy something meaningful with it--or pay for conference registrations and travel, or some work-related type of perk. In fact, the real question is why so few organizations budget for the continuing education of its volunteers. It is possible to have an arrangement with a volunteer that, in exchange for the cost of sending her or him to a state or national conference, s/he will promise to continue as a volunteer for at least a year or will reimburse the agency for the expense. After all, this is routinely done with employees for their college or graduate school costs.

For those of you who are in an all-volunteer setting, by the way, this is not necessarily one of those "us and them" topics that divides agency-based program leaders from volunteer officers. Your big question is: Why do we think it's "skimming off the top" to allocate funds to support our volunteer members?

It is my opinion that something as simple as paying for some hourly clerical help would make the recruitment of volunteer chairpeople so much easier. It is not a defeat to acknowledge that it may be harder to get someone to do the "grunt work" as a volunteer than to do the jobs with higher status. Or what about paying for qualified child care while members are doing their volunteer work? The expense of these kinds of outlays would leverage service of far greater monetary value.

Now I'm going to make a suggestion that will seem contradictory. Sometimes a "token" honorarium allows a great volunteer to justify accepting an extremely time-consuming position. For example, if the volunteer registrar for all organization activities logs ten to twenty hours a week for six months, offering \$500 towards expenses does not begin to "pay" for the time, but acknowledges the extraordinary effort. (Yes, this will probably have to be reported as taxable income by the volunteer.) The difference between this approach and money to all volunteers as a sweetening of the pot to convince them to sign up is that this sort of honorarium would only be offered for those accepting major responsibilities requiring extensive work--and where being a volunteer may actually make

holding a full-time job difficult. Ivan Scheier discusses this idea creatively in his book, [When Everyone's a Volunteer](#).

OK. Your turn. What do you think about these and other money issues? And may all your returns bring refunds....!

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Submitted anonymously on 22 October 2007

Regarding pay for volunteer managers. I wholeheartedly believe we should be paid more--although the more we are getting paid, the less money our organization has to work with. Our work is extremely valuable, but by working in the non-profit field you have to be prepared somewhat of a pay reduction. With regards to "paying" volunteers I would like to comment to those of you who say that you cannot be a volunteer and get paid. I am currently serving a year as an AmeriCorps*VISTA. Vista stands for "Volunteers in Service to America." While serving I receive a living stipend that allows me to live just above the poverty line. We are forbidden from having any other jobs. We are technically on call 24/7. I work 40 hours a week as a volunteer coordinator. I realize a national service program is different than other volunteer settings but I don't think that by being minimally paid that makes this any less of a volunteer position.

Submitted on 04 October 13 by Allison, WRHS, Operations Manager, Mentor, OH USA

I work for a large non profit and recently applied for the Volunteer Coordinator position within the organization. When considering what tactics to use when negotiating my salary, I thought about adding up the dollar value of all the volunteers I'd be in charge of recruiting and managing. How much money would I be saving the organization? One of the volunteer programs I started 2 years ago (a tacked-on responsibility to my "regular" job) contributed 8,000 hours at a value of \$234,000 in 2003. That's just one of many volunteer programs at our site. So if I added the value of all those programs together and took a percentage of that, I would arrive at an amount that the management would hopefully see the justification for.

Submitted by Kim Kie, Coordinator of Special Events/Volunteer Coordinator, Hancock Shaker Village, MA USA

I agree with the salary--it should be commensurate with other managers. I also know about the "many hats" problem--I have two titles and manage volunteers in both roles--Coordinator of Special Events and Volunteer Coordinator. I agree that incentives may get volunteers interested, but it is the work (and the people they work with and for) that keeps them coming back.

Submitted by Rosie Williams, Lyell McEwin Health Service Volunteers Inc, South Australia

It's interesting to hear how other countries operate their volunteer services. In Australia the Peak National body are looking at the logistics of getting an award for Volunteer Managers. It is a hard task for the reasons mentioned here in that for many it is a role that is "tacked onto" other positions and the award is paid accordingly, e.g. administrative steam or social work or what ever the profession. The discrepancies are vast depending on who you work for. Basically the role is underpaid.

In the area in Adelaide that I work most volunteer managers are part time and the sector is constantly challenging the credibility of the role. The reality is that generally senior management do not have a realistic understanding of the skills and knowledge necessary to run an effective volunteer service. In regards to Volunteer payments it is a given here that volunteers will receive out of pocket expenses and this too varies depending on the role that is undertaken.

Our agency is a hospital based one that has over 400 volunteers working in seventeen different areas and each area has their own policy on what will be paid. My area is a community program that provided in-home respite care to the aged and disabled. Volunteers receive payments for mileage to and from the home, any travel costs when transporting clients and costs to do the task such as lunch, entrance fee to a venue they have taken a client to and so on. The agency provide all volunteers with comprehensive training, both to prepare them for their role and also offer workshops that benefit the volunteer personally.

I worked for a state GOV department and managed two programs, one that paid the workers a minimal amount and the other did not. It gets to be a very messy business and changes the whole meaning of "volunteering" when these types of payments are made.

Submitted by Eileyn Sobeck-Bador, Community Relations Specialist, Humane Society of Lee County, Inc. , SW Florida

It was refreshing to read views that are similar to mine. Volunteer Managers/Coordinators in my area are traditionally well underpaid for their positions and their worth to the organization. I agree 100% that Volunteer Managers' salary directly reflects the 'opinion' of the worth to the organization. If we devalue our salaries, than we are devaluing ourselves. I also agree that volunteers' expenses should be reimbursed. I am having a philosophical debate whether volunteers should be paid though--paid a stipend. In my view they are not really volunteering but performing services at a tremendous discount, almost pro-bono, but not quite. We are thankful for the services all of our volunteers provide, and I am thankful for sites such as this.

Submitted by Sheilah Hunter, Special Needs Co-ordinator, Greater Coquitlam Volunteer Centre, Coquitlam, British Columbia, CANADA.

I work as a volunteer co-ordinator with special needs clients, individuals who have mild mental handicaps (or, as is the current "lingo", have developmental disabilities), who are referred to me by

their social workers. Regarding this special population group I believe the volunteers SHOULD receive financial incentives to volunteer. These clients, because of their developmental disabilities, have difficulty maintaining any steady full-time or even part time employment. Thus the majority of them must depend on Government Benefits, which as you know are barely enough funds to cover the most basic cost of living. Volunteering provides these volunteers with a sense of purpose and accomplishment, in addition to providing them with meaningful skills and connections. The Ministry of Human Resources in British Columbia offers a financial incentive of \$50.00/month for clients receiving Gain For The Handicapped who are volunteering. I take a very pro-active role in advocating for my clients to receive this money, not to alter the meaning of volunteering, but because these handicapped individuals fall within the "grey" area of service. They are independent enough that some are living on their own with some support, yet must live in poverty at the lowest end of our socio-economic rung because of their mental handicaps.

Submitted by Diane Leipper, Leipper Mgt Group, Nevada, USA

One thing that occurs to me is that the job of volunteer management is often seen as an adjunct to another job. As examples at the local Girl Scout council the positions you are hired for are Program Director, Training Director, etc. In these positions (in this council) it is assumed that you will work with volunteers but the management of those volunteers is not considered a priority to carrying out your job functions. It is similar with the local Red Cross Disaster or Service to Military Families Director. You are being paid to be the Girl Scout Program Director or the Red Cross Disaster Director not the manager of disaster or program volunteers. Over the last several years many hospital volunteer directors have seen their duties change or expand to include all manner of additional functions, many that are not remotely related to volunteers or even community service.

I agree that the salary of the volunteer manager should be commiserate with other managers in the same setting, but how can you determine what the salary should be for the volunteer director when it is seen as only a part of another job? What are you really being paid for? Many people gladly take on other duties and changes in their job title because the stereotypes related to volunteer management very often negatively impact salaries, job stability and other job related issues. How do these "expanded" volunteer manager positions relate to and impact a person whose job title and primary focus is volunteer management? Can the profession of volunteer management stand on it's own WITH the professional respect and appropriate salaries which are based on common recognition of the skills, knowledge and experience required to be a professional volunteer manager?

Submitted by Gloria Litwinowicz, The Benjamin Rose Institute - www.benrose.org, Cleveland, OH

I think that you are right on the money. . . Volunteers are a valuable part of our services. Without them we could not offer the diverse services and could not accomplish as much. When something is that important, it should be supported. The director or coordinator needs to be paid an equitable

salary for the PROFESSIONAL job they are doing. They also need the financial support in order to cover administrative functions as well as forms of affirmation and training for their volunteers. Should volunteers be paid? No. If they are, then they aren't volunteers. Can we offer them incentives such as lunch, reimbursements, awards, other affirmations? We can and we should!!!! These people give of their time and their talent to make our organizations stronger and to better serve our clients. Volunteers are valuable to all we do. Let's show it in the way we support our volunteer programs.

Submitted by Anne-marie Greathead, Events Co-Ordinator, Student community Involvement Program, NSW, Australia

I agree that offering training and other work related perks is a great way of recognising volunteers. In response to interest shown by volunteer speakers, Volunteering NSW will sponsor volunteers to complete an accredited Train the Trainer course which is provided by the School of Volunteer Management.

Submitted by Joshua Ramey-Renk, Volunteer Coordinator, The National Steinbeck Center, California, USA

I feel that giving a volunteer money is only appropriate in order to re-emburse out of pocket expenses. Once you start handing out dollars for other reasons, no matter how few bucks we're talking, it removes the work from the volunteer to the paid realm. I think that taking whatever money we might consider appropriate to "spiff" a volunteer and buying them a gift certificate, a small gift (a useful, highly personalized item), or a special one-on-one lunch would fit better into the volunteer concept. There are some agencies out there that will re-emburses mileage for volunteers regardless of where they volunteer. The RSVP group re-emburses some of my senior volunteers for mileage up to \$10 per month, and that mileage covers their trips to and from my agency. This allows them to do their volunteer work without hardship and costs my agency and my program nothing.

Submitted by Rick Devich, Director, Community Development, VOAMN/Senior Resources, MN

Having led two consecutive national demonstration projects of which incentives for volunteers was a core element, and a former Senior Companion Supervisor, let me offer the following in abbreviated form: 1) Incentives are sometimes necessary to engage certain groups of volunteers, particularly low-income and/or communities of color. 2) Incentives generally do not retain volunteers, the work does. 3) The line between incentives and recognition is not clearly de-marked. 4) To achieve certain impacts, incentives tied to consistent volunteer contribution are necessary for effective management, particularly from an agency view. 5) Many perceive the pure altruistic position (i.e. incentives sully volunteerism) as reflective of much of volunteerism's history: white, wealthy, women. 6) There are many kinds of incentives such as Elderhostels, frequent flier miles, etc. Money continues to be the Universal Gift Certificate. In summary, there is a place for judicious use of incentives, particularly in focused activities necessitating the inclusive involvement of volunteers

representative of the broader community. There are also volunteers that would be insulted to be offered a stipend and many volunteers contribute their out of pocket expenses as part of their volunteering. Given the diversity of our nation, one-size-fits-all thinking will yield one-size-fits-all results.

Submitted by Marcia Hale, Volunteer Services, Inc., Oregon

I couldn't agree with you more, Susan, regarding pay for managerial positions. I recently negotiated a salary that is substantially higher than other volunteer managers in the area where I'll be working. I maintained my position throughout the negotiations, of taking on a responsibility that involved far more than the management of a volunteer program. In my view, I was being given a job that was at a level of senior management for pay that was at the level of higher paid clerical. When I was asked what I earned before, I replied that my other salaries were not relevant to the discussion as I was living in a state with a lower cost of living, and I was on a grant for my last position. I continually came back to the responsibilities outlined in the job description I was being asked to fill. In the end I negotiated a salary a little over 30% higher than the top end of the non profit's pay schedule for the Volunteer Manager position..If you know and believe you are worth more and you can prove it via your track record vs. what the non profit wants, you CAN get paid more. You have to be willing to be a tough negotiator and be willing to take a stand, that we as volunteer managers are more than clerical people, and are more than entry level managers. Without our programs, many non profits will find it impossible to accomplish their goals, why should we not be paid what other senior level managers are paid?

Submitted by Sr. Margaret, Philadelphia, PA

I am at the beginning of developing a volunteer program. I attended a workshop for Catholic Religious orders setting up Volunteer Programs. You may be familiar with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps or the Lutheran Volunteer Corps for example. This type of program encourages the volunteer to live in community with other volunteers, live simply and spiritually. The Director of Volunteers places the volunteer in a non-profit volunteer position either with the Religious group or with another not for profit group. This "agent" then employs the volunteer at minimum wage. The paycheck goes to the Volunteer Program. A certain amount covers the stipend (say \$50 a month) for the volunteer and the rest goes toward the rent, car, food, activities of the community etc. The benefits of the minimum wage are that the volunteer is then part of the non-profit insurance plan and workers comp. If a non profit group has full time volunteers and cannot offer them insurance or workers comp. what can they do? What are the "laws" in this regard? In our case we cannot offer any compensation aside from an annual gift. We could employ some volunteers (those who want to give more time) so that they receive coverage...and just apply tax, FICA etc to the stipend. The rest would go toward room & board. Thank you.

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