TASKS, TASK CONTENT, AND WORK ENVIRONMENT OF ADMINISTRATORS OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS: SOME FINDINGS

Volunteer administration is a relatively "young" occupational practice that is just now beginning to map its boundaries, establish competencies needed by its practitioners, and identify the knowledge base that supports its practice. The Virginia Tech study reported here attempted to describe some dimensions of volunteer administration as a career and how volunteer administrators conduct their work. Findings included the following:

1. The volunteer administrators surveyed were predominately female, middle age, and white. They most frequently held a bachelor's degree, but almost one-third held less than a bachelor's degree. Their degrees had been taken in a variety of subject areas, but the most frequently reported areas were the social sciences, education and counseling, and psychology. Only 25.9% had actively pursued a position in volunteer administration. Hence they were in a career which they did not actively seek and for which they had not been specifically prepared through professional education programs. A majority, however, once in the position had developed a professional commitment to the field.

2. In the agencies where the administrators worked, the volunteer program had high status. They held a middle management position, tended to be the sole staff or to work with one other person in managing the volunteer program. They usually reported directly to the chief administrative officer of the agency or to another administrator.

3. Of the 32.6% who held less than a bachelor's degree, only 8.9% indicated they were working on such a degree, and of the 38.8% who held a bachelor's degree, only 8.2% were working on a master's degree. The limited use of educational degrees in support of career mobility is consistent with the minimum educational preparation volunteer administrators believe is needed for their positions. For 70.4%, the minimum level is the bachelor's degree, and for 21% the minimum level is the high school diploma.

4. In an occupational practice, all practitioners perform specific functions that are common to all, regardless of the agency in which the practitioner works. The findings indicated that volunteer administrators perform certain tasks more frequently than others and that they use some strategies more frequently than others.

The differences in frequency may be due to many factors. Administrators of volunteer programs may define parts of their job as more important than others, may hold assumptions about the need for performing certain functions, or may be constrained by agency policy and support. For example, 53.8% of those surveyed very often provided a structured program to orient volunteers to the agency, but only 21.8% conducted orientation programs for staff on the use of volunteers. In addition, 43.8% very often provided a structured training program to prepare volunteers for specific jobs, but only 15.1% very often conducted structured training programs for staff on the supervision of volunteers.

5. Approximately one out of four volunteer administrators indicated that they also conducted fund raising campaigns and solicited donations of clothing, materials, and other goods for clients or programs.

6. The respondents in this study reported a wide variation in the extent to which they engaged in out-of-agency professional activities. This variation ranged from no activity to considerable in all categories. Many did not engage in out-of-agency professional activities. But the findings revealed a group of volunteer administrators who are actively engaged in presenting papers, publishing articles, attending professional conferences, conducting training and consulting functions, and lobbying for volunteerism.

This study was conducted by Harold Stubblefield and Leroy Miles, Adult and Continuing Education Program, Virginia Tech. For more information about the study, contact the authors or the Center for Volunteer Development.