



UNITED WAY/CENTRAIDE CANADA
VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

VOLUNTEER AND STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

by
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Introduction

Ralph Waldo Emerson over a century ago wrote, "An institution is really only the lengthening shadow of one man." In not-for-profit agencies, as in other organizations, the leadership of the top administrator often dictates the degree of success that an organization achieves. Leadership, today, in social service agencies has never been greater. With charitable organizations receiving 39.56 billion dollars in 1978 contributions¹ and with many agency budgets at a level tenfold over those of just a few short years ago, executive directors are being held accountable for a wide array of activities far removed from their professional training. They are expected to develop long-range plans for funding as well as for programs; they are expected to stay current with legislative issues affecting personnel practices; they are expected to know and to employ new budgeting techniques; they are expected to know how to motivate their employees to peak performance—all this in addition to making sure that the services delivered adhere to accepted professional standards. In short, agency directors today are expected to be professional managers.

This demand for professionalism in the administration of agencies has created a new breed of agency director trained not only in the traditional social service mold but also in the operational aspects of management. Just a decade ago many agencies were run by philanthropists who dispensed services as they saw fit. Then many executive directors were mere errand boys—runners for lifetime members of the board. Today, the typical agency must not only adhere to professional standards but must also provide accountability for its activities to various publics.

The overall objective of most volunteer agencies is to provide services to people in an *effective* and *efficient* mode. These latter two qualifications highlight the need for professionally managed agencies. This manual has been written toward the achievement of this goal. Its main objective is to discuss the role of both staff and volunteers to better clarify the goals of the agency and its functionaries.

To understand the interrelationships of the many groups that work to carry out the goals of the agency, one must first examine those functions that are either directly mandated or implied in the charter of incorporation.

Areas of Agency Responsibility

In general, the primary functions of voluntary agencies consist of: policy administration, program development and evaluation, public and community relations, personnel and finance. Although there are obvious variations in the functions of different agencies, nevertheless, these constitute the major ones for most agencies. One may note the existence of some duplication of responsibilities of the agency, the executive director and the board. Still, this is not surprising since the board in effect delegates some of its responsibilities to the executive director who in turn delegates some of these responsibilities to the professional staff. Despite this apparent duplication of functions, the agency does have many clear-cut responsibilities. Among the major functions, a more detailed accounting of responsibilities would include:

General Administration. This implies an obligation for the day-to-day functioning of the agency. This includes:

- policy formulation, determination and implementation
- public accountability
- maintenance of facilities
- legal activity
- reporting to various bodies on a regular basis

Financial Management. This function concerns general fiscal accountability, both external and internal, and includes:

- development of budgets
- administration of government grants
- fund raising
- auditing
- fiscal planning
- investment of funds

Personnel. This general category is concerned with all the functions regarding the agency staff and includes:

- recruitment and selection
- staff development
- wage and salary determination
- termination
- staff organization
- job descriptions
- staff evaluation
- policy manuals
- labor contracts
- collective bargaining

Program Development and Evaluation. Some people may quarrel regarding the amount of involvement of the board in the development of programs. Nevertheless, this is fundamentally a responsibility shared by the board and the executive director. Programs should cover:

- determination of target population
- assessment of population needs
- evaluation of existing programs aimed at meeting such needs
- development of new programs designed to meet service needs
- determination of program priorities
- periodic evaluation of each program
- termination of programs

Public Relations. While board members may play a part in the following activities, these activities remain primarily the responsibility of the agency director.

- interpreting agency goals and services to various publics including: board, staff, volunteers, contributors and the target population served by the agency
- annual report, press releases, special events, speaker programs, special literature, etc.
- media relations

Community Relations. This function generally concerns community awareness of the agency's programs and representation of the agency in community activities. It embraces:

- staff representation on community committees
- staff participation in committee groups
- involvement by community organizations in agency operations through representation of board, use of agency facilities, tours of the agency, etc.

Board Relations. A key function of any agency

executive is to maintain suitable relations with board members. To ignore this function is to underplay its importance. Board relations would include:

- professional resource to board (a broad function with very special meaning)
- keeping the board informed
- education of the board
- recommendations to the board (ranging anywhere from salary adjustments to capital expenditures)

As noted previously, not all of the areas here mentioned are applicable to every agency, nor are all the functions necessarily covered.

Role of the Executive Director

Not-for-profit organizations are similar in many respects to the profit-oriented firm. The same management principles apply to either setting. The role of the manager and the role of the board do not differ significantly, and accountability is present in both instances. However, the programs and objectives pursued by the profit organizations have a base different from that of the voluntary organization.

The executive director is the chief operating officer in the voluntary organization and as such has full line authority. The responsibilities should be clearly spelled out in the job description (see Appendix A).

The executive director is responsible for carrying out the programs, goals, objectives, policies and decisions formulated by the board. While in actual practice the executive director may contribute substantially to the formulation of the agency's objectives, he should not and cannot dictate the objectives. The effectiveness of the voluntary organization, and indeed its survival, rests upon the participation and support of the community. It is the task of the executive director to promote and foster the leadership of the community. Without citizen participation the voluntary agency plays a specious role.

While the backbone of any voluntary organization is the volunteers themselves, the key to mobilizing and using them effectively is the executive director. Because volunteers have limited time, their effectiveness depends upon a competent professional staff that can marshal their valuable contributions.

The ultimate in agency efficiency occurs only when all the organizational systems operate in harmony. This is particularly important for control. Given the delicate relationship between the board and the executive director, accommodation and compromise are required of both parties. This relationship becomes better established if both parties understand their roles and major responsibilities. Differing perceptions of

roles cause disagreement and conflict. By delineating the roles of all major participants, job expectations will be clarified.

A recent study providing much information on the perceived functions of the executive director and board members was carried out by the Greater New York Fund, Inc., in 1974. Over 200 agencies and their boards participated in this study, thus providing a good deal of statistical data. That differences exist in the perception of the roles of the various groups carrying out the functions of the agency is evident from an examination of the data. Tables 1 and 2, adapted from that study, show the comparative ranking of the responsibilities of the executive director, as viewed by oneself, by the corporate president and by the board members.²

An examination of the tables shows perceptual differences of the priority of the executive director's functions, with fairly general agreement on the 10 top functions. Many of the responsibilities noted here have already been spelled out in another manual by this author under the heading, *The Board and its Responsibilities*. There it was mentioned that some of these functions were indeed functions of the executive director while some of them may be delegated to staff and others performed by various committees. The point to be stressed here is that the board and the executive director should agree on the degree of responsibility in each of the various functions.

While the areas of responsibility may be spelled out in job descriptions, the job description cannot clearly describe the *amount* of authority vested in the position. For example, although the executive director is responsible for program development, the board may have final authorization for any new program. How much authority the board delegates to the executive director is dictated by a number of factors. Koontz, in his book, *The Board of Directors and Effective Management*, suggests several criteria to be considered for the amount of authority delegated.³ These criteria have application irrespective of the type of organization:

1. Size of commitment. Obviously, size is relative but if one program or service will take 90% of the available monies, then this program should have board approval. Likewise, if a capital expenditure is a large amount (e.g., a mini-computer, or a new building) then approval is warranted. No specific limits are suggested here, although such limits should be spelled out for the agency. An executive director feels much more comfortable knowing that he/she needn't get approval for each class of items.

2. Length of commitment. To commit an agency to provide services for a multi-year period when funding is questionable is obviously a decision of more consequence than a decision for a one-year period. Long-term commitments have a greater impact on future organizational operations than short-range decisions and the extent of such a commitment relative to the agency's ability to provide that commitment is important.
3. Inflexibility of a course of action. When decisions can be altered with little effect on the organization, then the decision is of less importance than when the decision is inflexible. If an agency is committed to providing a certain service to meet a community need in a prescribed manner, irrespective of the availability of staff resources, then such a decision requires special consideration.
4. Extent of certainty. Another factor affecting the importance of decisions requiring management attention is the certainty of current and future situations. For example, if an agency's source of funding is questionable for the coming year, then more attention is required for decision-making. Or, if the community planning council is planning the creation of a separate agency to meet a community need that was provided previously by your agency, these decisions under such uncertainty need more attention.
5. Quantifiability. Still another factor affecting the amount of delegation is the extent that the variables involved in the decisions can be quantified. If the variables in the decision can be easily quantified, then the solution (decision) requires less judgment and therefore can be delegated with less concern. For example, a subordinate may be given the task of handling all inquiries by contributors up to a certain amount. Anything over that amount might receive the special attention of the executive director. In this situation, a limit has been established.
6. Human impact of decisions. A standing rule adhered to by many organizations is that the greater the human impact of a decision the greater attention should be given it. For example, the decision to curtail certain programs or eliminate certain services requires considerable attention by top management or the board.

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE:
A COMPARATIVE RANKING OF HIS MAJOR FUNCTIONS BY
Executives, Presidents and Board Members**

	Ranking* by		
	Executives	Presidents	Board Members
Attend board meetings	1	4	5
Recommend policy to board	2	8	4
Keep board informed regarding organization operations	3	3	1
Serve as professional resource to board	4	5	6
Plan program policies	5	9	9
Evaluate organization's program	6	7	8
Administer all phases of organization's operations	7	2	3
Engage in community relations	8	10	10
Hire and supervise staff	9	1	2
Participate in board committee activities	10	12**	16
Prepare board meeting agenda	11	12**	11
Prepare and write reports for board and members	12	11	12
Implement program policies	13	6	7
Coordinate board operations	14	14	14
Orient new board members	15	16	18
Accompany board members on important fund-raising calls	16	13	15
Represent organization at community functions	17	17	13
Help organize fund raising	18	15	17
Recommend members for board offices and committees	19	19**	21
Train new board members	20	18	19
Recruit new board members	21	22	24
Represent organization at social functions	22	21	20
Prepare minutes of board meetings	23	19**	22
Recruit new volunteers	24	20	23

* 1 = most major; 24 = least major
** Equal rankings occur

Executives N = 219
Presidents N = 197
Board Members N = 1643

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE:
A COMPARATIVE RANKING OF HIS MINOR FUNCTIONS BY
Executives, Presidents and Board Members**

	Ranking* by		
	Executives	Presidents	Board Members
Represent organization at community functions	1	4	4
Recommend members for board offices and committees	2	8	9
Recruit new board members	3	3	8
Recruit new volunteers	4	2	3
Train new board members	5	7	7
Orient new board members	6	6	6
Accompany board members on important fund-raising calls	7	5	2
Help organize fund raising	8	9	10
Coordinate board operations	9	13	14
Prepare minutes of board meetings	10	11	12
Prepare and write reports for board and members	11	10**	5
Represent organization at social functions	12	10**	15
Prepare board meeting agenda	13	10**	11
Participate in board committee activities	14	12	13
Engage in community relations	15	1	1
Implement program policies	16	16	17
Serve as professional resource to board	17	17	18
Hire and supervise staff	18	21	23
Plan program policies	19	14	16
Keep board informed regarding organization operations	20	19	24
Administer all phases of organization's operations	21	20	22
Evaluate organization's program	22	18**	19
Recommend policy to board	23	15	20
Attend board meetings	24	18**	21

* 1 = least minor; 24 = most minor
** Equal rankings occur

Executives N = 219
Presidents N = 197
Board Members N = 1643

The above factors determining the amount of delegation that takes place are the same for profit as for not-for-profit organizations. One can profitably look back on specific decisions in which agency board members wished to be involved in light of these six criteria.

Volunteer/Staff Relationships

Thus far the responsibilities of the executive director have been discussed with little consideration given to interrelationships between the executive director and the board. The management of a voluntary agency is a volunteer/staff partnership. The executive director and staff have an important role to play which is distinct from, but interlinked with, the role that the board of directors and its committees play. The agency must recognize the distinctive contributions of both volunteers and staff and must make sure that they function as a team, if the overall agency goals are to be attained.

The board of directors is the responsible legal body of the agency, whereas the executive and program responsibilities are functions of the professional staff. Three principles differentiate the tasks of board members from those of staff.

- Policy formulation is the task of both professionals and board members. It is a cooperative effort.
- Policy determination is the responsibility of the board alone. More specifically, policy is determined by board action derived because of its legal status.
- Policy execution is the responsibility of the professional staff. Once established, policies are carried out by the staff even though board members may be involved in the process.

The board chairman heads the board and supervises the activities of its standing committees and their chairmen. The executive director holds similar responsibility with regard to the staff—leading the staff and holding ultimate authority for the ongoing activities of the agency.

Volunteer board members engaged in guidance and control of the agency contribute in the following ways:

- Represent their own group;
- Represent the community as they understand it;
- Bring knowledge of community needs and interests;
- Bring certain abilities and skills needed in the conduct of agency activities;
- Commend and interpret the agency to the community.

Volunteers should be recruited and selected for each job according to the particular talents they may have. In addition they should have a genuine interest and

belief in the agency and know something about its purposes and work. Volunteers are approached for service to the agency by the chairman of the appropriate committee or by another appropriate volunteer rather than by the staff.

The professional staff members are expected to bring expert knowledge regarding the traditions, ideals, and goals of the agency and the needs of the community. Interpersonal skills, including *enabling* committees to do their jobs through group effort, *facilitating* and *coordinating* committee work, and *providing* facts about issues being considered by committees are equally important. Specifically, staff are expected to provide:

- A knowledge of traditions and ideals of the organization;
- An ability to unite representative people and incorporate them into the agency's program;
- A knowledge of human and financial resources, and possibilities for agency enterprises and activities;
- An alertness to social needs, the ability to make others aware of them and the know-how to meet them;
- An ability to discern the interests and needs of people and aid in satisfying them;
- A competence in focusing these needs and interests and organizing to meet them;
- A perspective and skill for realizing the goals and objectives of the agency.

In working with boards and committees, staff must see that a suitable training program is laid out and implemented. Training may vary according to the kind of job to be done. Committee members and task forces should have one kind of training, whereas board members are trained in different areas of responsibility. The orientation program for new committee or board members should acquaint the new volunteers with the agency and should inform them of their responsibilities as well as train them in the basic skills needed to carry out their assignments. Further development of volunteers should come through the actual carrying out of assignments, with the continued support, assistance, and encouragement of the staff. Periodic formal volunteer training sessions may be needed if the committee or board has to tackle new tasks or wishes to improve its present performance.

Staff should be aware of potentially sensitive issues that can arise during meetings with boards or committees and should discuss these issues with the parties involved. If major tensions or conflicts center on an issue, the volunteer chairman may want to contact the

parties involved before the meeting. Such prior discussion can help the committee discuss the issue more rationally. It will also help if a respected and trusted member of the group presents the issue at the meeting. The reasons for the decision, as with any decision, should be clearly and concisely stated.

Information affecting an important decision should be mailed out by the staff prior to a meeting. Committee members resent making decisions without having all the facts ahead of time. Often an issue will be tabled until the facts are available for study. If because of time pressures a committee is forced to decide on an issue, it is apt to make a decision that will later prove to have been a mistake.

Sometimes during the process of a meeting, a member will make an incorrect statement of fact. If the error is not corrected by another member or by the chairman, the staff must interpret the facts or truth about the situation. This should be done in a manner not to embarrass the member or group responsible.

Another situation with possible interpersonal conflict occurs when a particular point of view expressed by a member is disregarded by the group. Staff must use personal judgment in deciding whether or not a verbal reference to the view is warranted at some point during the meeting (perhaps during a summary of the issues) or whether speaking to this member after the meeting about some other committee related subject will be enough to bring this member back into the group.

Finally, it is inevitable that conflict situations will arise when the group is divided on an issue. Where possible, staff should assist the group in reaching a compromise. The minimum conditions which the resolution must meet, however, should always be kept in mind. On occasion a committee will find that it cannot satisfy the wishes of all its members without sacrificing important agency goals. In this case it must proceed to make the right decision and take the risk that it can either mend the schism among its members or afford to accept their withdrawal from the agency.

Other guidelines for staff in working with committees apply to situations external to the committee meeting itself. As the staff and the committee chairman plan the work of the committee, they should be thinking of those who will be affected by the decision and should incorporate the input of their representatives into the formulation of decisions. In situations where this is not appropriate, these persons or groups should be informed of the issues, the problems that these issues present for the agency and the process by which resolution will be made. This will minimize the potential for conflict or for poor community relations. Secondly, the presiding officer and staff should continuously seek the advice and counsel of individual members and

prominent citizens. Generally it is more practical for the staff to do this, however, the chairman should be informed of and in agreement with the contacts the staff makes. Finally, periodic progress reports should be given to important persons in the agency to insure that the desired goals are being achieved.

Another important clarification of the role of volunteers and staff needs to be mentioned. The staff at times functions as the administrator/coordinator for the chairman and the committee. Staff generally handles all of the ongoing contacts with committee members and other interested parties between meetings. There are times, however, when the chairman should make these contacts himself. Usually these instances are situation specific and depend largely on good judgment. However, all official written communications to committees, exclusive of technical reports prepared by the staff, should come from the chairman. With respect to formal communication between committees and other interested parties, the general rule is to have staff communicate with staff and volunteer with volunteer.

One last recommendation to staff and to committee chairmen relates to responsibility for motivating volunteers. To maintain the interest of volunteers in the agency, volunteers must feel that they are appreciated, that what they are doing is important and that they have the opportunity to grow and to achieve. This has been documented in a number of motivational studies. One of the best ways for staff and committee chairmen to get volunteers to increase commitment and involvement in the agency is for staff and committee chairmen to allow their volunteers to take full responsibility for an assignment and to carry it through to completion.

It is important that both the volunteer chairman and appropriate staff provide recognition for the completed task. This in no way threatens or detracts from the performance of the volunteer chairman or the staff. It does insure that work gets done more effectively and it does make for a stronger, more effective voluntary agency. As in a profit-making organization, managers (be they volunteer chairmen or staff) who allow their volunteers to excel and who recognize achievements of subordinates are likely to progress to positions of increased responsibility. With volunteer chairmen, this allows promotion of newer volunteers, thus providing the organization with a cadre of committed volunteers able to assume positions of leadership in future years. In the case of staff, supportive relationships created when volunteer committee or board members assume and carry out a responsibility and receive the recognition deserved, will build a relationship of trust and an ability to communicate and work together readily. This will definitely be of value when more difficult, less desirable tasks requiring volunteer effort, must be tackled.

¹Quoted from 1978 Annual Report, *Giving USA*.

²Nelly Hartogs and Joseph Weber, *Board of Directors: A Study of Current Practices in Board Management and Board Operation in Voluntary Hospital, Health and Welfare Organizations*. Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., pp. 186-187.

³Harold Koontz, *The Board of Directors and Effective Management*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.

APPENDIX A

JOB DESCRIPTION

POSITION TITLE: Agency Executive Director

DATE: September 28, 19XX

UNIT/ORGANIZATION: Executive Office

REPORTS TO: Board of Directors

PREPARED BY: _____

Purpose of Position:

Plans for and administers a program providing service to clients in accordance with the agency's stated purpose and in such a manner that optimum results are achieved in relation to the resources of the agency; operates under the general direction of the agency's Board of Directors.

Key Responsibility Area: General Administration

Specific Duties:

Recommends policies to the board and/or assists the board in the formulation of policies for the effective and economical operation of the agency; ensures implementation of policies adopted by the board. Has chief administrative responsibility for public accountability of the agency, maintenance of agency facilities and regular reporting to various bodies. Carries chief staff responsibility to ensure that legal obligations of the agency are met.

Key Responsibility Area: Financial Management

Specific Duties:

Prepares agency budgets related to physical, financial and human resources, and is accountable for control of these resources once approved. Directs all financial operations of the agency. Participates in fund-raising activities by writing letters, making speeches, and stimulating activities of others in direct fund raising, and, may provide overall direction.

Key Responsibility Area: Personnel

Specific Duties:

Supervises and directs key staff members in the performance of their duties; evaluates the performance of key staff members; and provides overall control and direction for the personnel function of the agency, including active participation in or approval of personnel actions.

Key Responsibility Area: Program Development and Evaluation

Specific Duties:

Evaluates the services being provided by the agency in relation to specified goals and standards and recommends modifications, where appropriate. Recommends and/or provides input on proposed new programs.

Key Responsibility Area: Public Relations

Specific Duties:

Interprets the function of the agency to the community through direct involvement and through public relations programs, including personal contact, literature and the media.

Key Responsibility Area: Board Relations

Specific Duties:

Develops and recommends to the Board of Directors specific, written, long and short-range plans for the development of agency programs and services; maintains appropriate relations with the agency's board and various board committees and keeps them informed. Interprets trends in the field(s) of service in which the agency is engaged, by maintaining involvement in the professional field as a whole. Administers an orientation and training program for the board.

Key Responsibility Area: Community Relations

Specific Duties:

Acts to maintain highly effective client relations under all agency programs. Maintains appropriate relations with other professional and social service groups in the community and serves on appropriate community committees.

Relationships:

Internal: Board of Directors; key agency staff.

External: Agency coalitions; funding sources; federal, state and local government units; other agencies in similar field of service.

Minimal Job Requirements

Education: B.A. or B.S. degree in social service or related field. M.A./M.S. preferred. May substitute 3 years experience for advanced degree.

Experience: Three years of supervisory or managerial experience in social service or related field.

Skills: Ability to work effectively with volunteer boards and committees; ability to plan, monitor and evaluate budgets; ability to manage people; ability to organize, plan and implement activities appropriate to further organizational goals.