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## Just Pay Them: Volunteers' Managers Getting Shorted in Pay

by John McIlquham

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Executive and staff compensation can be a telling point for the emphases an organization places on the way it's managed and the resources used to fund programs. Last month's NonProfit Times 1999 salary study (and the last one of this century, depending on your calculation of when the century ends) made some important points beyond the literal numbers, some of which were disheartening, frankly.

One point constantly made through the years by professional associations and leaders of the nonprofit field is that executives of nonprofit organizations are generally paid less than their for-profit counterparts. It's been a generally accepted point of fact that taking a job with a nonprofit means less money but greater emotional reward. Also, some nonprofits offered better benefits and a certain intrinsic payment for helping others, which was a supposed attraction for burnt-out commercial executives.

Nonprofit organizations, like their commercial counterparts, have compensation packages that vary according to the size of the organization. As in the for-profit world, management salaries are linked to operating income, not revenues, a fact often lost in discussions of who gets paid and why. Volunteers are the heart and soul of every nonprofit organization and therefore part of the revenue stream. They are the both the tangible and intangible badge that distinguishes a flourishing organization from floundering one. Look at any successful nonprofit and it always has an active volunteer recruitment and retention program.

Volunteers are often mentioned from podiums and panels alike as the distinguishing force between the nonprofit and the for-profit world. They are the bread and butter symbol of what makes a nonprofit organization tick. Given the major restructuring going on in volunteer programs, as nonprofits have had to adjust to the alterations of today's labor force and volunteer retention efforts, the urgency to recruit top volunteer directors should become more urgent, not less so. At least you would think that, until you look at our salary survey, which suggests that volunteer directors are one of the most poorly compensated among a variety of nonprofit management positions. On average, last year's volunteer director made only \$33,541, according to our survey. An equivalent middle management position in a sales or marketing organization would be at least \$57,500, according to a recent study by Abbott, Langer & Associates, and probably with not as much responsibility or number of people to supervise.

Also, planned giving officers were barely able to inch out a paltry increase from last year's numbers. A less than one percent climb suggests that planned giving positions may have reached a ceiling and that despite increasing demand for qualified planned giving officers, organizations may have reached their salary limit for that position.

In case you are wondering about the very top, the average nonprofit chief executive officers would fall somewhere between a top marketing communications executive and regional sales manager in the same Abbott, Langer Associates salary survey. Even more discouraging is that development directors, the real "sales managers" for a non-profit organization, fell below the salary levels of both planned giving and major giving officers in our survey. Is it any wonder larger organizations find resistance among development directors to turning over their best donors for cultivation to a planned giving officer or major gifts officer sent from headquarters?

The other amazing aspect to our compensation study is that in larger organizations, there are only small differences between salary levels among titles, other than president or chief executive officer. Organizations may recognize the same value among planned giving, major gifts, direct mail and development. The only exception to that equilibrium is, you guessed it, volunteer director, which falls off precipitously.

Some organizations have purposely depressed salary levels to avoid public criticism. The mind-set that nonprofit managers should be paid less is without foundation. If organizations want the best stewards of their time and labor resources, they should pay for them and justify the performance outcome as any other for-profit company. Volunteers are the bedrock of a nonprofit organization. Managers of volunteer programs deserve better pay and should command more respect.

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