

STANDARDS FOR CERTIFIED VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

by Hope M. Bair

HOW "STANDARDS" BEGAN

"Standards for Volunteer Programs" were considered essential when plans were initiated for a central coordinating volunteer service in Summit County, Ohio (population 500,000) in 1947. The Volunteer Service Bureau (VSB) was established the following year in the community social planning council and "Standards" was one of the first committees appointed. Composed of representatives of community agencies, this committee met over a period of four years to discuss and write the community's first "Standards for Volunteer Programs".

In 1952 these Standards were mailed in advance of meetings with groups of agency executives and volunteer directors.

The initial Standards were divided into three sections. The first section established "Minimum Standards for the Organization of Volunteer Programs":

- One individual in the agency responsible for volunteers;
- Each agency to analyze the total work of that agency to identify jobs suitable for volunteers;

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- Agency board and staff realization of the importance of volunteer contributions;
- Volunteers to be given recognition for their services;
- Adequate records of volunteer service to be maintained.

The second section established: "Minimum Standards for the Supervision of Volunteers":

- Interviewing of volunteers;
- Orientation of volunteers;
- Supervision of volunteers by staff.

The third section described: "Minimum Standards for Temporary Volunteer Jobs":

- Relationship to the Volunteer Service Bureau;
- Agency interpretation, instruction and supervision, with notation of the importance of instruction and supervision for teenage volunteers.

By 1959, sixty-one percent of participating agencies had accepted these Standards and were developing their volunteer programs in accord with them. Agency acceptance was entirely voluntary. There was no publicity singling out those agencies which had accepted the Standards. Although the VSB visited agencies to establish cooperating relationships, the visits were designed to

acquaint VSB volunteer interviewers with volunteer needs rather than to verify agency adherence to the published Standards.

HOW "STANDARDS" EVOLVED INTO "CERTIFICATION"

Between 1959 and 1976 the "Minimum Standards for the Operation of Volunteer Programs" were reviewed periodically, always by a group of agency executives and volunteer directors representative of the variety of volunteer programs and always open to others who wished to participate. As the Standards were revised they were presented in community meetings of volunteer directors by a lay representative of the VSB, discussed and subsequently mailed to all agencies that had a volunteer program. As new agencies were formed or programming for volunteers in existing agencies was initiated or changed, the current "Minimum Standards" were given and discussed by the VSB/Voluntary Action Center Director.

When the Voluntary Action Center (VAC) became an independent not-for-profit agency in 1975, all programs, policies and practices were reviewed and evaluated. In 1976 a VAC Task Force was formed to examine the Standards. The volunteer directors of twenty-five agencies, representative of the variety of volunteer programs in the county, painstakingly examined, revised and re-wrote the Standards, using for reference those of Boston, Pittsburgh, and Madison, Wisconsin. In the early stages of the Task Force's deliberations, its members wrestled with the outcome of having the Standards publicized and agreed that stretching to attain them was important and desirable and that the publicity would promote the status of volunteer programs with agency boards, administrators, staff members and community.

When the recommendations of the Task Force were presented to the VAC Board of Trustees, board members questioned the term "minimum". The Task Force responded by changing the title to "Standards for Certified Volunteer Programs" and urged the VAC Board to establish a certification procedure.

In June 1977 the VAC Board adopted the Certification Standards and appointed a "Standards and Certification Committee" to prepare procedures and to make recommendations on certification to the VAC Board.

CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Certification procedures, approved by the VAC Board, were mailed in February 1978 to agency executives and their volunteer directors with an explanatory letter and a

copy of the "Standards". A Certificate was printed, and a fee of \$40 established to cover cost of staff time. Certification was established for a three-year period.

Agencies were invited to request an application. In response to the request, VAC mailed: application form, Standards, list of documents to support adherence to Standards, and a checklist for agency use in preparation for application. The VAC Certification Procedure was included. Completed application, documentation and application fee were to be submitted simultaneously.

An agency visit by VAC Executive Director would then be scheduled within one month of receipt of application materials, meeting with representatives of agency Board, staff, volunteers, and where possible, clients, and also with volunteer director.

Copies of all of these materials are included at the end of this article.

INITIAL AGENCY RESPONSE TO CERTIFICATION

Thirteen agencies requested an application within one month of their receipt of the information. Hospitals accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals are considering whether they need or want separate certification of their volunteer programs. One agency has submitted its complete information and received an on-site visit in April, 1978.

Following the VAC Board approval of this agency's certification, the VAC Board President presented the Certificate to the agency's board at the latter's May, 1978 meeting.

VAC BOARD ATTITUDE

VAC Board members believe that the Voluntary Action Center has the professional expertise and experience to set standards for volunteer programs and that the Voluntary Action Center should publicize the Standards and the agencies who receive Certification. The VAC Board believes agency knowledge of Standards promotes professionalization of volunteer involvement in human services.]

NEXT STEPS

VAC will publicize each agency's volunteer program as it issues the Certification and will interpret to prospective volunteers the meaning and

value of Certification, but will offer service opportunities in both certified and non-certified volunteer programs in relation to the prospective volunteer's interests.

Because many agency volunteer directors have taken the non-credit course on "Managing a Volunteer Program" taught by the VAC Executive Director at the University of Akron for the last seven years, the VAC Executive Director is knowledgeable about the competencies of many volunteer

directors. However, VAC needs published criteria for evaluation of the competencies of volunteer directors in agencies applying for certification.

Criteria have been established by the Association for Administration of Volunteer Services for certification of volunteer service administrators. As the community becomes ready for it, the Voluntary Action Center will need to incorporate the professional certification of the volunteer director in the Certification Standards.

STANDARDS FOR CERTIFIED VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Adopted by Board of Trustees June 16, 1977

- 1- The administration of the organization shall approve the plan for the volunteer program and shall provide support for its continuing development.

THIS MEANS: The leadership of the organization will have given some serious policy consideration to the initiation and continuation of the volunteer program. The values and costs of the volunteer program to the larger institution will have been discussed. There will be at least an implied long-term or intermediate term commitment to the volunteer program by the organization. Such a commitment is contingent upon some reasonable level of benefits from the volunteer program to the organization relative to program costs.

- 2- All paid staff shall be informed about the philosophy and scope of the volunteer program and about individual staff responsibilities to volunteers.
- 3- The organization shall have a person designated to coordinate and be responsible for the volunteer program.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE POSITION:

A Bachelor's degree or equivalent work experience plus administrative and supervisory experience as a paid professional or as a volunteer.

Required knowledge or abilities:

- 1- Demonstrated inter-personal, organizational, leadership skills and abilities including some knowledge of the Community Organization process.
 - 2- Ability to communicate ideas effectively both orally and in writing.
 - 3- Knowledge of the basic principles and practices of Personnel Management as related to recruitment, selection, placement, training, supervision, and motivation of volunteers.
 - 4- A knowledge of the basic principles of organization, public relations, and administration.
- 4- Volunteers shall not displace a paid worker or be placed in a job slot for which funding is available.
 - 5- There shall be written job descriptions of all volunteer assignments. These descriptions shall be up-dated as needed and shall include time required, skills needed, and duties to be performed.
 - 6- Each prospective volunteer shall be interviewed by the volunteer director or by his/her designee. Assignments shall be individually suitable and made with minimal delay after initial contact.

THIS MEANS: A volunteer's skills and interests should be of significant concern. When the organization/agency is unable to match a volunteer appropriately with an available job, the volunteer shall be directed to the Voluntary Action Center or another agency.

- 7- Orientation to the organization and its volunteer program and policies shall be given the volunteer prior to assignment.

THIS MEANS: The orientation shall include a conceptual overview of the organization and how the volunteer fits into it.

- 8- Initial and refresher training shall be provided as appropriate. Provisions shall be made for upgrading volunteer responsibilities as desired by the volunteer and as appropriate to the organization.
- 9- Records of individual volunteer service shall be maintained with appropriate safeguards for confidentiality. Such records shall contain at least the following information: type of assignment, work performed, hours served, performance evaluation, and basic identifying information.
- 10- Clearly defined lines of supervision shall be communicated so that volunteers will know to whom they are responsible.

THIS MEANS: Direct supervision of individual volunteers shall be provided. Periodic contacts on a regular basis between volunteers and their supervisors shall be held to assure continued communication. The supervisor shall discuss with each volunteer his/her work, focusing on recognition for positive efforts and strengthening areas of weakness.

- 11- Volunteers shall have identification and working conditions commensurate with their job and consideration should be given to providing reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses and liability insurance coverage.
- 12- There shall be periodic written evaluation of the volunteer program performance in the attainment of goals and objectives and adherence to guidelines.

THIS MEANS: Evaluations shall be done in a way that considers the needs of volunteers as well as of clients. The evaluation process shall include representatives of the agency, volunteer pool, and clients. To the degree possible, objectives should be stated in specific, measurable terms and within a time frame.

- 13- An ongoing, planned recognition of volunteers shall be established.

THIS MEANS: The organization expresses appreciation to its volunteers in a formal and/or informal manner.

CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE

WHO MAY APPLY

Any not-for-profit agency or department of government may apply for certification of their volunteer program; proprietary nursing homes with paid resident activities coordinators may also apply.

PROCEDURE

An application form and a copy of "Standards for Certified Volunteer Programs" and a self Checklist will be supplied on request.

Application and Volunteer Program Data may be submitted at any time to VAC Standards & Certification Committee, accompanied by the Service Fee. (Check for \$40.00 should be made payable to Voluntary Action Center).

Plan for on-site visit by VAC representative will be made with agency within one month after receipt of Application and Volunteer Program Data.

Purposes of on-site visit:

- To meet with board representative, executive, volunteer director, and service volunteers;
- To discuss information provided in the Application and Program Data.
- To determine adherence to published Standards for Certified Volunteer Programs; and
- To provide consultation, if needed, to bring program up to these Standards.

DECISION ON CERTIFICATION

Decision on Certification will be made by VAC Board of Trustees on recommendation of VAC Standards & Certification Committee.

Signed Certificate will be provided to qualifying agency by VAC, showing date of Certification and period which Certification covers. Certification is for a period of three years.

Note: The support of the agency administrator and the qualifications of the volunteer program director determine, more than any other factors, the stability and strength of the agency's volunteer program. The University of Akron offers a non-credit course each Fall on "Managing a Volunteer Program" taught by VAC Executive Director.

When there is a change in agency staff in either position, VAC consultation, without fee, should be requested to assure continuity of Certification.

Date Received _____

Date of Action _____

APPLICATION

FOR CERTIFICATION OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

AGENCY NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

VOLUNTEER CONTACT PERSON:

NAME _____ TITLE _____

OFFICIAL ACTION TO INITIATE OR CONTINUE AGENCY INVOLVEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS:

ACTION TAKEN BY: _____
(Board, Administrator, Other)

DATE OF ACTION: _____

ACCOMPANYING VOLUNTEER PROGRAM DATA SUBMITTED BY:

NAME _____

TITLE _____

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM DATA

AGENCY NAME _____

DATA SUBMITTED BY: _____

TITLE: _____

YEAR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM ESTABLISHED _____

NAME OF CURRENT VOLUNTEER DIRECTOR _____

ATTACH CURRENT JOB DESCRIPTION FOR THIS POSITION:
(Include duties, qualifications and salary range)

PLEASE SUBMIT INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTS SUPPORTING YOUR RESPONSES TO THE
FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. How are paid staff informed about philosophy and scope of your volunteer program and about individual staff responsibility to volunteers? By whom? How often?
2. What are the current goals and objectives of the volunteer program?
3. Please attach a written job description for each current volunteer assignment, whether or not this assignment is now filled by a volunteer. Include date when each assignment was established or revised.
4. Describe your procedure for recruiting, interviewing and assigning new volunteers.
5. Describe your plan for orienting new volunteers.
6. Describe your plan for initial and in-service training given to volunteers.
7. Describe your agency's provision for the supervision and evaluation of volunteers. What provision is made for volunteers capable of and interested in assuming greater responsibilities?
8. What identifies your volunteers as volunteers?
9. What procedure is used to evaluate your volunteer program as a whole?
10. Describe the recognition plan for thanking your volunteers.
11. Describe the record-keeping procedures used in your volunteer program. Attach one copy of your major reporting/record-keeping forms.
12. Describe the source(s) and procedure for financing your volunteer program. List budget items in which the volunteer program has input and management responsibility.
13. Attach a copy of the agency's Affirmative Action Plan and Procedure for the recruitment and involvement of volunteers.

CHECK LIST -- STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

As you are initiating, developing, or strengthening your volunteer program, this CHECK LIST can be used to identify areas needing attention. The numbers correspond to those in the Voluntary Action Center's STANDARDS FOR CERTIFIED PROGRAMS.

- 1- In planning our volunteer program we utilized the consultant services and publication resources of the Voluntary Action Center _____
- Our board and administrator carefully studied and approved a plan for involving volunteers _____
- The understanding and cooperation of paid staff have been secured for our proposed or ongoing volunteer program _____
- The overall responsibility for coordination of our volunteer program has been assigned to one staff person (paid or volunteer). _____
- We prepare a regular, carefully considered budget for our organization's volunteer program _____
- 2- New paid staff members are oriented to our volunteer program at the time of their employment _____
- We make a systematic effort to keep staff oriented to working with volunteers _____
- Administration approves the content of volunteer orientation. _____
- Top management (board and/or administrator) and designated director of our volunteer program are closely involved in volunteer orientation _____
- Staff who supervise volunteers have a leadership role in our volunteer program and receive recognition for this responsibility _____
- 3- We have a regular position of Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services _____
- The Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services feels he/she has enough time to do the job adequately _____
- The Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services is paid commensurate with professional staff in our organization _____
- The Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services has continuous relationship with the Voluntary Action Center _____
- The Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services has an office near other staff and is regularly invited to attend staff meetings at the supervisory level. _____
- The Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services keeps up with current knowledge in the field _____

3- (Continued)

- Each direct supervisor of volunteers is responsible for a manageable number of volunteers _____
- 4- Each volunteer assignment is approved by the Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services as appropriate for volunteer placement _____
Each volunteer assignment is approved by the Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services as not displacing a paid worker _____
Each volunteer assignment is approved by the Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services as necessary and lacking funding as a paid position _____
- 5- To fill its volunteer assignments, our organization deliberately makes an outreach to conform to its Affirmative Action Policy and Plan _____
We have definite plans and make deliberate efforts to involve all types of people as volunteers: minority, younger, older, poor, handicapped, etc. _____
Volunteer positions are open to qualified applicants without regard to age, sex, race, religion, or socio-economic status _____
We have written descriptions of volunteer assignments _____
- 6- Each volunteer applicant is individually interviewed before acceptance _____
In addition to intuition, our organization's interviewer employs specific compatibility criteria, such as home location, interests, sex, age, etc. in placing volunteers on assignments _____
When a volunteer assignment requires one-to-one relationship with a client, we deliberately seek maximum compatibility of volunteer and assignment by asking and assessing both volunteer and client/assignment. _____
Volunteers sign or explicitly assent to a work contract of specific time commitment to fulfill the needs of the assignment _____
Before accepting a volunteer, we use and study a volunteer background registration/application form _____
Each volunteer is provided with an accurate description of his/her duties and responsibilities _____
The Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services utilizes the consultation services of the Voluntary Action Center for volunteer applicants for whom no suitable organization assignment can be arranged _____
- 7- Appropriate, complete volunteer orientation to our organization is provided and required before assignment _____
We provide each volunteer with information about the volunteer's responsibilities to our organization and our organization's responsibilities to the volunteer. _____
We provide each new volunteer with written orientation manual _____

- 8- We provide training opportunities for volunteers to help them perform their responsibilities in a way that is satisfying to them and for the organization _____
- We provide volunteers with opportunities for personal growth and development as well as for learning new skills _____
- We provide an opportunity for volunteers to assume greater responsibility in leadership roles _____
- Of the volunteers who complete training, at least two-thirds are with our organization at the end of their agreed-upon assignment period _____
- 9- We require signed volunteer time sheets and we report regularly to our Board on services that volunteers perform for our organization _____
- Each new volunteer is instructed about maintaining agency records of work performed and hours served _____
- Identifying information on each volunteer is kept current. _____
- We maintain a confidential record on each volunteer that includes: application, service agreement, assignment(s), service time, and periodic notations of performance evaluation _____
- Within five minutes, the Director/Coordinator of Volunteer Services can tell:
 - a) exactly how many volunteers our organization has; and
 - b) for any individual volunteer, their current address, assignment, and assigned client, if any _____
- 10- Each volunteer has received clear explanation of lines of communication with paid and volunteer staff _____
- Each volunteer knows to whom he/she is directly responsible in his/her assignments in our organizational structure _____
- Each volunteer has been instructed about confidentiality, limits of authority, and extent of responsibility _____
- There is a definite plan for regular, periodic supervisor contacts between each volunteer and his/her immediate supervisor _____
- 11- Each volunteer has and uses an I.D. card, lapel pin, or other suitable identification as a volunteer in our organization _____
- Volunteers have a desk or other designated place of work at our organization _____
- Working conditions are appropriate for the volunteer assignment _____
- Arrangements are made for needed parking for volunteers _____
- Provision for reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses is made when permitted by organization policy and available funds _____
- Volunteers are covered under our organization's insurance policies for injury on assignment _____

- 12- The planned volunteer program of our organization is periodically evaluated in writing by each of our organization's constituents; board members, administrator, director/coordinator of volunteer services, paid staff, volunteers, and clients/consumers. _____
- At least yearly, paid staff is asked to review and evaluate the objectives of current volunteer program and recommend objectives for the next year _____
- At least yearly, both volunteers and clients are asked to review and evaluate the objectives of our current volunteer program and recommend objectives for the next year _____
- Each volunteer program objective or commitment is stated in specific and measurable terms with a time limit _____
- Paid staff understand the basis of a voluntary organization or governmental function and their role and responsibilities in working with volunteers _____
- Volunteers can become actively involved in decisions regarding our organization's volunteer program _____
- 13- Our organization has a plan for showing appreciation to its volunteers _____
- Prompt appreciation is demonstrated to each volunteer, appropriate to the situation _____
- Our organization has a newsletter for our volunteers, monthly or bi-monthly. _____
- Local/area daily or weekly newspapers have at least three favorable articles on our volunteer program each year _____
- Publications of our organization recognize the value of volunteers to our organization _____



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