

# The Valuable, Vital Volunteer Job Description

## Why

By John H. Cauley, Jr.

**M**ANY VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS fail because the role of volunteers in an agency and their relationship to paid staff member never have been defined. This failure results in confusion for the volunteer and resentment on the part of paid staff.

The role of a volunteer in an organization should be to supplement and complement the place of paid staff. A volunteer is not there to do the job of a paid staff member, but to work with that paid staff member to better serve the organization's consumers or clients. The best way to view a volunteer in any organization, then, is to accept a volunteer as a nonpaid staff person subject to specific personnel policies and guidelines. In this way, a volunteer becomes a member of the agency team in a nonpaid status rather than as some vaguely defined functionary of the organization.

It is necessary to plan for the use of volunteers in an organization. If the planning process indicates that a real need for volunteers exists in an agency, then these needs can be transferred easily to written volunteer job descriptions. Job descriptions are definitions of a person's duties and responsibilities within an organization. They are essential to the success of agency volunteer programs. Developing one forces a social service agency to think through its use of volunteers.

Job descriptions meet one of the most important criteria of a good personnel management program: They

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define needs to be met by the recruitment and training of new staff. In developing job descriptions for volunteers or paid staff, an administrator is forced to review the nature of his/her organization and the interrelationships of the staff. This allows him/her to analyze resources, to plan for their best utilization and, ultimately, to organize to meet established goals.

Written job descriptions also are beneficial to volunteers because they outline the specific duties and responsibilities of each volunteer position, the necessary time commitment, and the required qualifications for acceptance as a volunteer. This enables volunteers to know in advance exactly what will be expected of them in any particular job and to avoid encountering a period of uncertainty during which they are forced to define their own roles.

Finally, written volunteer job descriptions should be an integral part of the development of a sound volunteer program and the development of a personnel management program to guide the use of volunteers in the agency. Written job descriptions will serve as the basis for further development of a personnel management program because they are the focus for recruitment, selection, preparation, supervision and evaluation of volunteer workers.

- The use of a written job description can **enhance the recruitment effort** because it details the specific duties and skills required in each job. With this information it is easier to determine the focus of a recruitment campaign to obtain the specific individuals needed. Prospective volunteers will be able to make more intelligent choices about volunteering because they will have a clear understanding of an agency's expectations outlined in written job descriptions.

- The task of **selecting volunteers is made easier** if an agency has developed written job descriptions for volun-

teers. The job description, which includes the necessary qualifications for each volunteer position, should be adhered to in the interview and placement of volunteer workers. Accepting only qualified volunteers for well-defined volunteer positions will enhance greatly the success of a volunteer program.

- Perhaps the **most effective training tool for new volunteers** is the job description. A complete review of the job description serves as a sound basis for initial introduction to a job. The description should state the duties, responsibilities and time commitment for a position. If an agency short-changes volunteers at this crucial point of indoctrination, the success of its volunteer program will fall short of its true potential. Without an adequate orientation-training period, volunteers will be forced to find their own way and to define their own roles. In most instances, such a situation will frustrate the majority of volunteers, and agencies quickly will gain a reputation as a poor choice for volunteering.

- **For a fair and honest performance evaluation**, a volunteer must have a clear and definite understanding of his/her role and duties, and an agency must have specified those duties in the form of a written volunteer job description. The use of a job description in the evaluation process allows a supervisor to recognize good performance and to redirect poor performance in a volunteer worker. Furthermore, if a volunteer fails to meet the minimum criteria for acceptable performance on the job by not performing successfully the duties outlined, the supervisor may use the job description as a basis for documenting the inability of the volunteer in that job.

With proper planning for and integration of volunteers into its program, an agency can add a new dimension to its services. Volunteers can expand services in areas where paid staff are lack-

ing. And they can bridge the gap between an agency and its public. Job descriptions help establish an organization's authority to direct and control the activities of volunteer workers to provide better service to clients.

# How

## By Hope M. Martin

**E**ACH VOLUNTEER ROLE SHOULD have a well thought-out clearly stated job description, designed to ensure that the important elements of the job are properly identified and described. When clearly defined, a job description affords the volunteer a visible place in the agency. It should be used to:

- clarify job responsibilities to help the volunteer understand his/her job;
- clarify relationships between jobs;
- select new volunteers and introduce them to their jobs;
- forecast training needs;
- assure that the volunteer and his/her supervisor agree on the important elements of the job; and
- establish standards of performance for evaluation purposes.

A job description should be flexible enough so that when it is reviewed by a supervisor and volunteer in conference, changes may be made to assure that they are in complete agreement as to the content of the job description.

A job description should include information in five basic categories: general description, skill level, task analysis, end results (evaluation), resources. (See sample.)

### General Description

A general description of the volunteer job should include its title, the program to which the job extends, the supervisor, a list of the tasks to be performed, and

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the amount of time involved (part-time or full-time).

### Skill Level

Every job description should spell out the skills needed to perform the job, such as:

- Specialized, technical or practical skills. State accurately and clearly how much "know-how" is required for the position.
- Human relations skill. Describe just what the job demands in terms of dealing with people.
- Managerial and consultative skills. Describe the job requirements for getting things done through other people and for integrating and coordinating the activities.

### Task Analysis

The tasks are the "do" statements about the job. Concise and clear statements characterize the task. Each statement should start with a capitalized action verb. Example: *Counsel* individuals in management of financial resources. Here are some examples of action verbs:

Accept	Assist	Evaluate
Administer	Consult	Formulate
Advise	Counsel	Guide
Appraise	Create	Interpret
Assimilate	Develop	Implement
Assign	Employ	Keep

Lead	Prepare	Recommend
Measure	Promote	Represent
Maintain	Participate	Recognize
Organize	Review	Schedule
Provide	Recruit	Train

### End Results (Evaluation)

The expected results of the job should be measured against:

- progress toward accomplishment of program objectives;
- success as it relates to tasks assigned; and
- growth of the volunteer in the job.

### Resources

Resources for training for and implementing the volunteer job should be defined as the role is developed. Resources should be identified at three levels:

- supervisory—resources used by a professional staff member in training;
- volunteer—resources for use in carrying out the assignment;
- client—resources the volunteer might need to give to a client. Resources can be as sophisticated as films, slides, filmstrips, or as simplified as a one-page fact sheet. If human resources are available, they should be listed, too. *What is important is planning for support of the volunteer job through provision of training, materials and supplies.*

### SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION

**Agency** Dept. of Human Resources  
**Supervisor** Missy Hamilton  
**Volunteer** Coordinator Vi Valiant

**Program** Programs for the Elderly  
**Job Title** Supervisor and trainer of craft instructors  
**Date** April 16, 1978

**A. GENERAL DESCRIPTION**  
 The volunteer will work under the direction of the staff volunteer coordinator to provide training and supervision of volunteer craft instructors serving Programs for the Elderly. This will be a part-time assignment -- two days a week.

**B. SKILLS**  
 This staff volunteer needs to be capable of creating or interpreting instructions for a variety of crafts at several skill levels. The volunteer may have formal craft training or may through her own interest have developed this skill. The volunteer needs to have the ability to work with people in a harmonious manner.

**C. TASKS**

- Develop a plan for training volunteer craft instructors.
- Establish classes to include arranging sites, sending out advance notices.
- Teach or provide a teacher for craft to be taught.
- Make available simple printed instructions and lists of materials needed for each craft.
- Provide lists of local sources of craft materials.
- Visit program sites to evaluate craft teachers and programs.
- Schedule training in communications and human development.

**D. RESULTS EXPECTED**

- Demonstrate ability in craft skills.
- Exhibit skill in teaching techniques.
- Establish climate enabling senior citizens to obtain optimum self-actualization.

**E. RESOURCES**

**Human**  
 Mrs. Joe Smith (tel. 555-6712) -- Works with eggury, decoupage, bread dough flowers. Will give one day a week to instruction.  
 Mrs. Henry Jackson (555-9234) -- Works with small items using discarded plastic bottles. Has several unique items of little cost. Will train craft instructors.  
 Mrs. Blake Jones (555-9474) -- Works with local clays. Is willing to provide instructions to craft teachers one day per month.

**Materials**  
 Local stores selling craft supplies: Robbies, Great Mills Rd., Hometown; Ben Franklin, Lexington Park; Dotties Needlecraft, St. Andrews; Yarn Barn, Corner Rt. 234 and St. Andrews. Wholesale suppliers: Ceramics, Inc., College Park (555-0241); Crafts, Inc., Wash. D.C. (333-7632).  
 Church Ladies Guild -- Will donate throwaways if sent list.  
 Jr. Chamber of Commerce -- Will hold benefit dinner yearly; proceeds go to craft fund.