

A CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR COORDINATORS OF VOLUNTEER SERVICES

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The Center for Continuing Education at Northeastern University was established to relate the University to the needs of its community in a period of accelerated change. Its programs are composed of seminars, conferences, institutes, forums and a wide variety of special courses, research projects, and consultation activities designed to meet specific needs. The Center provides in-service programs, custom-built to meet special demands of business, industrial, and professional enterprises. It works co-operatively with trade associations and professional societies, offering a broad scope of programs dealing with current problems. Working with government agencies and community organizations, the Center is becoming increasingly involved in social problems on both the local and national levels.

One recent development at the Center is a continuing education program in Volunteer Administration for Coordinators of Volunteer Services in medical, psychiatric, educational, and community settings. Initially underwritten by the Massachusetts Higher Education Facilities Commission under Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965, the program recognizes that volunteer participation in the care, treatment and rehabilitation of persons affected by a variety of afflictions is an increasingly important facet in the organization of health, education and welfare services throughout the nation.

The purpose of the developing program at Northeastern is to provide a series of residential and short-term workshops for coordinators of volunteer services in all settings that use volunteers, providing them with consistent, systematic training designed to improve their knowledge, creativity and effectiveness and thereby improving the volunteer services which they supervise.

The Spring 1967 course was offered to meet the training needs of coordinators of volunteer services in community and hospital settings and consisted of eight three-hour sessions, one session per week. It was designed to provide better knowledge, in accordance with the responsibilities of a Coordinator of Volunteer Services. Background information gained from the American Association of Volunteer Services Coordinators and discussions with members of the Massachusetts Association Directors of Volunteer Services served to establish the need and the content for such a course. Supporting material was also obtained from Community Services of Metropolitan Boston. Participants included any coordinator of volunteers who desired to attend. Although pointed toward newer coordinators, others were free to attend all sessions.

An underlying approach to the program is that the sequence of topics to be covered by both generic and practical. The concept of voluntarism, including its organization and administration, is imbedded in a sociological framework which defines the place of the volunteer in our existing social system, how he got there, and in what ways he may be expected to develop. The concepts basic to administering any group of individuals working in the formal social structure of an organization are equally valid for the administration of volunteer services. At the same time, these concepts must be applied to the unique elements of a comprehensive volunteer program and relate to the immediate needs of the coordinator. In accordance with this approach experts in their respective fields present basic concepts which are then interpreted by experienced coordinators of volunteer services. Opportunities for group discussion and cross-fertilization of ideas on an informal basis are made readily available.

An outline of the topics presented in sequence during the pilot course was as follows:

1. Orientation to Volunteer Administration—Its Relationship to Institution, Community, and Individual Citizen.
2. The Organization of Volunteer Services—Structure and Dynamics of Management.
3. Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers—Principles and Techniques.
4. Orientation and Training of Volunteers—Principles and Techniques.
5. The Roles Volunteers Play—Dimensions of Placement.
6. Creative Supervision in Volunteer Administration.
7. Working with Professionals as Members of the Team—The Volunteer Administrator's Contribution.
8. Public Relations in Volunteer Administration.

It must be noted that these are not exhaustive categories and other topics can easily be added or substituted depending on the needs of the participating group. Indeed, each of those listed as well as others could very well be full courses in themselves. In fact, the desire for an advanced workshop by the large number of participants in the first course has stimulated development in that direction.

What the volunteer administrator does is usually guided, in part, by his own frame of reference in regard to his perception of the volunteer movement. Because the assumptions which underly each frame of reference determine the kind and nature of the job each administrator does, they need to be continually assessed, reevaluated, and modified according to the changing milieu in which they exist. At a time when fundamental changes are occurring in the health, education, and welfare fields, and undeniable responsibility rests with coordinators or directors of volunteer services for keeping abreast in their field. Through continuous training programs, it is hoped that Northeastern University can contribute to this growth.