

# Locating a Volunteer Program: Utah's Personnel Office Experience

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In the real estate business, location, location, and location, are the most important factors when it comes down to property values. Traditionally, we think of locating volunteer programs within the Executive Director's Office in private institutions such as hospitals or, in the case of state and local government programs, within the Governor's or Mayor's office. This concept should not differ for private agencies or organizations. But are these the most effective locations? What is best for managing such programs and, better still, for maintaining longevity in these times of budgetary constraints?

This article suggests that a program of volunteerism can best be started and developed within the Personnel Office of a governmental jurisdiction; agency, institution, hospital, or private industry. One point to consider is that the Personnel Office tends to be less political since it is a continuous functioning arm of the organization and is, therefore, more stable. The Personnel Office is the nerve center of the entire organization. From the administrative point of view, volunteerism can be overlaid on the typical personnel functions of recruitment, examination, and classification. Almost every personnel function can be applied to volunteerism. For example, each volunteer job should have a for-

mal written job description which can serve as the basis for recruitment, examining and selection.

Volunteer workers should be governed by internal personnel procedures and rules just like paid staff. Career planning, certification of experience, training, insurance and liability coverage are all necessary ingredients of such a program. One final advantage is that by overlaying volunteerism into the personnel program, a solid, stable foundation is established which will help sell the program to managers and supervisors. In addition, a balance will be established between paid and unpaid staff. This balance refers to utilization of unpaid staff in all areas of the organization with a reasonable mixture of paid and unpaid staff. Too often we tend to place volunteers, the unpaid staff, only in specific areas of an organization. With the cooperation of the Office of Personnel staff, new openings in all areas could be looked at for volunteer involvement.

## THE UTAH EXPERIENCE

A case in point is the Utah scene. The Utah Department of Social Services started its first statewide volunteer program in 1979, housed in the Executive Director's office. This organizational arrangement did not produce the desired results. On a trial basis, the program was placed in

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the Personnel Office, even though the Personnel Manager questioned the move and wondered if other locations should be considered. However, in less than one month the benefits were evident. Soon the Volunteer Services Coordinator learned to place a heavy emphasis on written job descriptions and on written policies and procedures that tied in with policies and procedures for paid staff.

Another benefit developed when the Personnel Manager and support personnel staff became actively involved in the total volunteer program. They made policy recommendations, pointed out legal aspects and endorsed the use of volunteers in all areas of the Department. Now, as standard practice, the recruiter for paid staff asks prospective employees if they have had volunteer experience somewhere. Related volunteer experience is used to meet employment requirements on a regular basis.

As a result of this new teamwork between the Personnel Office and the volunteer program, the focus on training of paid staff changed. Field trips by the Volunteer Services Coordinator to the institutions and human services offices in the state centered around such basic personnel functions as written job descriptions for volunteers. At some of the meetings it was not unusual to spend as much as one hour completing a job description. The volunteer managers, coordinators and directors in the state are now becoming better prepared as "personnel managers" for the unpaid staff. With the help of volunteers, the Department has published its second booklet listing more than 150 volunteer job descriptions in Utah's human services.

The Department of Social Services has a written set of Personnel Procedures. The Volunteer Coordinator, again due to location, was able to write the Section, "Use of Volunteers," in concert with the other personnel staff. The State Volunteer Services Coordinator is es-

pecially proud of a new regulation that recognizes volunteer service credit for career service positions. This is published in the 1982 State of Utah, Personnel Management Rules and Regulations, #13.d. It reads:

*When prescribed by agency management and certified as having participated in an approved volunteer services program, such volunteer service credit shall be recognized for determining satisfaction of minimum qualification requirements for career service positions, as determined by the Division of Personnel Management.*

The Recruitment Specialist for paid positions has been utilizing this regulation, since there is a scarcity of paid jobs and an abundance of applicants. During each interview for a paid job, she asks if the applicant has had volunteer experience. The Division of Corrections has been doing the same, especially in hiring Probation Officers. The administrators state they know what to expect when the volunteers are hired. The Department's Volunteer Probation Officers are given a great deal of responsibility.

Both the Department Procedures and State Personnel Rules and Regulations are updated regularly and the Volunteer Services Coordinator is given the opportunity to recommend changes, additions and deletions to these procedures, rules and regulations. One county government and one city government volunteer program are now picking up on some of these ideas and making them a part of their overall program.

## CLASSIFICATION STUDY

To point out to administration the value of volunteer services, a classification study was made. Each volunteer job description was analyzed and assigned a grade level comparable to paid staff. The study was entitled: "Classification of Volunteer Positions As Compared With Full-Time Paid Career Service Positions

In The Utah State Department of Social Services." Comparisons were made by using a position evaluation plan based on point ratings of ten position allocation factors, each with a different weight (See Table 1).

In using this system, points are assigned to each factor and then totaled. Then, depending on the range of points, a grade level is assigned to each job. In this way, the job itself is evaluated, not the person filling it.

Using this same position evaluation plan, each volunteer position was classified in a manner equivalent to salaried positions. For example:

| <u>Title</u>   | <u>Equivalent Grade</u> | <u>State Salary Rates<br/>Per Hour, Entry Level</u> |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| Clerical & Reception Volunteer   | 11                      | \$4.92  |
| Adult Foster Care Volunteer  | 13                      | 5.52  |
| Probation Volunteer  | 15                      | 6.22  |
| Guardian Ad Litem Volunteer<br>(An advocate for a child who has been neglected and/or abused. The job involves legal and social services training, investigative work and may require testifying in juvenile court.) | 17                      | 6.95  |

The classification study was sent to all administrators and volunteer directors in the Department. One of our institutions, the Utah State Hospital, used the study for an accreditation review. The study is also used in our Management Indicator Reports, which show the dollar value of all volunteer services in the Department. This report is prepared quarterly and is sent to Administration, Division heads, the State Budget Office and the Governor's Office. This classification study has helped the Department obtain a more accurate picture of the true value of volunteerism in the Department. It is enlightening to note that several volunteers have been "promoted" into the ranks of the professional staff, one reward of volunteerism.

#### OTHER BENEFITS

For insurance purposes, the De-

partment of Social Services looks at its pool of human resources as both paid and unpaid staff. Since both categories can be placed equally in greater at-risk situations, liability protection for both categories has been the aim. Coverage for volunteers now entails worker's compensation and malpractice insurance in amounts equal to paid staff. Most recently, volunteers were bonded as are paid staff. This has been tried in one area where volunteers handle food stamps.

In orientation and training, volunteers are told they are to be treated as state employees. This especially

applies to confidentiality, performance on the job and open staff meetings. To exemplify this policy, in a meeting at one of the community correctional centers, the question arose: "can a volunteer be left in charge if no paid staff members are present?" The answer was yes. The constant goal: equal status with paid staff.

It may appear to some that the volunteer program is buried within a departmental Personnel Office, but the opposite is true. The Department of Social Services is the largest department in Utah State government utilizing volunteers (the annual average number of volunteers is 6,000). The Personnel Office sees to it that this fact is made visible. This includes better linkage with the Governor's Office. Whenever the presence of Governor Scott Matheson and/or his wife, Norma, is needed for a

Table 1

|     | <u>Factor</u>   | <u>Weight</u> |
|-----|---|---------------|
| #1  | <u>Knowledge Required</u><br>(measures the information which the worker must understand)  | 30%           |
| #2  | <u>Supervisory Controls</u><br>(covers the controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work)     | 15%           |
| #3  | <u>Guidelines</u><br>(covers the nature of work guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them)   | 15%           |
| #4  | <u>Complexity</u><br>(covers the variety and difficulty of tasks performed in the work)   | 10%           |
| #5  | <u>Scope and Effect</u><br>(covers the relationship between the nature of the work and the effect of the work product or services)                    | 10%           |
| #6  | <u>Personal Contacts</u><br>(includes face-to-face and telephone contacts)  | 4%            |
| #7  | <u>Purpose of Contacts</u><br>(purpose of personal contacts range from factual exchanges of information to situations involving controversial issues) | 4%            |
| #8  | <u>Physical Demands</u><br>(covers the physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment)  | 1%            |
| #9  | <u>Work Environment</u><br>(considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings)  | 1%            |
| #10 | <u>Extent of Supervision</u><br>(covers the number of employees directly supervised and additional responsibilities involved in such supervision)     | 10%           |

volunteer ceremony, the utmost of cooperation is afforded. The Governor personally signs all certificates of recognition for the Department. For a recent ceremony at the Utah State Training School, he was asked to sign more than 100 certificates by this Volunteer Services Coordinator. When asked if this was too much to ask, his reply was: "Jeano, the Governor's hands are good for two things: shaking hands and signing."

The question may be asked if personnel staff would cooperate with the volunteer director. Cooperation will happen if administration supports the concept and educates the Personnel Office staff to that need. Also, agency administrators must treat the concept as priority and lend support to both the Personnel Manager and the Volunteer Coordinator or Director.

Too many volunteer programs have been cut all over the country in this time of need for a greater use of volunteers. If the volunteer program is located in another department or becomes a separate division, this invites budget cuts and abolishment of programs. But Administration cannot operate a human services department without a Personnel Office. So being part of the Personnel Office offers stability to a good volunteer program.

As time progresses, the Volunteer Services Coordinator is finding that requests for advice and clarification of rules regarding volunteers come in from all parts of the state. This stems from the fact that policy statements and decisions on personnel rules ultimately come from the Personnel Office. The combined knowledge of human resources of the personnel staff and the volunteer program staff assures authoritative answers to questions.

One overall task of personnel administration is to study and develop new ways in which human beings can be integrated into our organizations. The Personnel Office may be the ideal location to begin to expand our

horizons in volunteerism, in addition to providing a stable environment for such programs.

## SUMMARY

The authors seriously recommend establishing or moving existing volunteer programs into the Personnel Office of the organization. This will cause the Volunteer Coordinator or Director to become more fully aware of policies, procedures and the overall management of human resources. For example, this Volunteer Services Coordinator has learned to appreciate the real value of written volunteer job descriptions. This office is already in its second printing of job descriptions for the Department and is constantly adding new ones. Whenever an agency is concerned about turnover or lack of volunteers, the first analysis begins with the jobs assigned and the written job descriptions.

Another personnel tool is the Position Evaluation Plan for Classified Positions. This is used to classify volunteer positions in relation to paid positions. The Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual is another area in which the volunteer manager should become involved. In fact, a section relating to volunteers should be included in any such manual. The volunteer manager will be better equipped to deal with personnel-type problems involving volunteers, as the unpaid staff.

The Personnel Office is always involved in some form of recruitment and the Volunteer Coordinator can learn new and different techniques. For example, this Volunteer Coordinator learned to send out job announcements for non-paid positions to a selected mailing list. The Volunteer Coordinator can learn to do more detailed documenting of various aspects of the program to provide greater structure and longevity for the program. In many ways, being part of the Personnel Office integrates the volunteer component more logically and permanently than any other location can.