

# PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

Developed by the  
Association for Volunteer Administration (2005)



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## INTRODUCTION

Volunteer administration is the profession concerned with the study and practice of integrating volunteers effectively into an organization to enhance performance and results. It includes people who direct volunteer involvement as a full-time job, those who carry this responsibility in addition to other job duties, and those who serve in this role as volunteers themselves. Volunteer administration embraces both paid and unpaid leaders. Managers of volunteer resources are leaders who mobilize citizens to:

- create a social climate which makes the meeting of human needs possible
- provide for the involvement of persons in the decision making process
- contribute to creative and responsible social development and change
- enhance and extend the work of employed persons in many fields and settings

Those who mobilize, direct, and motivate volunteers must be committed to the following core ethical values<sup>1</sup>:

1. Citizenship and Philanthropy
2. Respect
3. Responsibility
4. Compassion and Generosity
5. Justice and Fairness
6. Trustworthiness

Administrators of volunteer programs should base their decision making on these six core ethical values if they are to maintain a program that:

- is accessible to diverse groups
- operates ethically with all stakeholders
- strives for excellence
- maintains the public trust
- sustains a helping environment
- is at low risk for legal actions against it

This document has been developed with the input of Association of Volunteer Administration members. It is designed as an interactive tool for administrators of volunteer programs and is aimed at helping professionals become strong and principled leaders who make decisions that are founded on core ethical values.

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<sup>1</sup> These core ethical values are taken from: Josephson, M. Making Ethical Decisions. Marina del Rey, CA: The Josephson Institute of Ethics, 1993.

## USING THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is a powerful tool for volunteer administrators committed to making ethical decisions. The publication is designed to assist the user to work through issues in a systematic and value-based manner. This flow chart and worksheet will guide your decision making process and prompt you to record your thoughts along the way. In using this tool, consider the following:

- If you are facing an ethical decision or dilemma, scan the various categories for clues that may fit your particular situation. You can work from the “Program Components” column to the “Core Ethical Value” column or vice versa.
- You may find that more than one core ethical value emerges during your decision making process. Start working through one of the core ethical values and when you have arrived at your decision, go back and see if the decision fits with the remaining core ethical values. Frequently, a decision based on one core ethical value will also be valid when you consider another core ethical value.
- Change the sequence of the steps to meet your learning style. Be sure, though, that you consider each of the steps at some point.
- For really difficult situations, consider working with a colleague.
- Realize that when you begin this process, you will find it difficult and complex. You are learning a new skill, and it may take a while for you to be comfortable with the whole decision making process.
- Readers should understand that all statements under the heading “Program Components” are suggestions only. These suggestions come from the CVA professional credentialing process, professionals throughout the United States and Canada, and serve as guides for readers seeking to resolve an ethical dilemma.

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## ETHICAL DECISION MAKING PROCESS

- Step 1** Identify the primary stakeholders in this situation, based on the mission of your organization and its primary clients. Record on the worksheet on the following page.
- Step 2** Identify the core ethical values or principles being violated in your ethical dilemma. Consider each stakeholder. Record your thoughts on the worksheet.
- Step 3** Generate a list of possible courses of action. Do this for each stakeholder; always consider the option of doing nothing at all.
- Step 4** Decide on the most ethical course of action by:
- Considering the interests of all stakeholders. Use the results on the worksheet to pick the course of action that produces the most positive consequences and the fewest negative consequences.
  - Choosing a course of action based on core ethical values rather than those based on non-ethical values.
  - Only violating a core ethical value if it is *clearly necessary* in order to advance another core ethical value that will produce a greater balance of good in the long run.
- Step 5** Weigh positive and negative consequences. Implement your decision.
- Step 6** Monitor and modify the decision as necessary.

## ETHICAL DECISION MAKING WORKSHEET

*Use this worksheet to record your thoughts. Select the action(s) which have the greatest positive consequences and the fewest negative consequences.*

STAKEHOLDER	CORE ETHICAL VALUE OR PRINCIPLE	POSSIBLE ACTIONS	POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES	NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES
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## SECTION 1

### Core Ethical Value 1:       **CITIZENSHIP and PHILANTHROPY**

#### **Ethical Principle 1A: Philosophy of Volunteerism**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts the responsibility for the ongoing development of a personal, coherent philosophy of volunteerism as a foundation for working with others in developing volunteer programs.

#### **Ethical Principle 1B: Social Responsibility:**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts responsibility to help create a social climate through which human needs can be met and human values enhanced.

### Program Components

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I have a philosophical perspective on volunteerism that reflects sound practice, history, diversity, and human needs.

I am aware that volunteerism is understood differently by people coming from other cultures.

I know that I can answer questions about the role of volunteerism in my agency and community.

I regularly discuss my beliefs about philanthropy and volunteerism with my colleagues.

My volunteer program is viewed positively by others internal and external to my organization.

I am aware of the trends and issues, emergent and existing, in my community, my service area, and my profession.

I work with a range of diversity including genders, abilities, ages, cultures, sexual orientations, family types, and religions.

I communicate with persons developing legislation, policy, or plans that affect volunteerism.

I support people with a proactive social agenda.

I would be willing to stand up and mobilize others as an advocate for volunteerism and positive social change.

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## SECTION 2

### Core Ethical Value 2: RESPECT

#### **Ethical Principle 2A: Self-Determination**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts the responsibility to involve people in decisions that directly affect them.

#### **Ethical Principle 2B: Mutuality**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts the responsibility to promote understanding and the actualization of mutual benefits inherent in any act of volunteer service.

#### **Ethical Principle 2C: Human Dignity**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts responsibility for the development of volunteer programs and initiatives that respect and enhance the human dignity of all persons involved.

#### **Ethical Principle 2D: Privacy**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts the responsibility to respect the privacy of individuals and safeguard information including written, electronic, audio-visual and verbal formats identified as confidential.

#### **Ethical Principle 2E: Safeguarding Confidential Information**

The Volunteer Administrator understands the importance of confidentiality and works to protect confidential information.

#### **Ethical Principle 2F: Accessibility**

The Volunteer Administrator works to understand and treat with respect individuals from diverse backgrounds.

### Program Components

I am knowledgeable of and familiar with all local, state/provincial, and federal legislation regarding personnel practices, human rights codes and cultural diversity.

I develop and distribute volunteer policy & procedure guidelines to volunteers.

I review and update volunteer policies & procedures with volunteer and staff input.

I give copies of our organization's policies to each volunteer and have reviewed them in person with each volunteer.

I work with staff to ensure that a positive working relationship exists between staff and volunteers.

I have a complaint resolution process in place to ensure a fair and efficient avenue for volunteers and staff to resolve any complaints or problems that might arise during the performance of their duties.

I am aware of and share information on the changing needs of the organization, clients and volunteers.

I develop ways in which all stakeholders in my organization can share perspectives and insights on volunteerism, service delivery, and community issues.

I establish guidelines for surveys and questionnaires.

I work with staff and volunteers to discuss opportunities of mutual interest and benefit.

I involve both staff and volunteers in program design, implementation and evaluation.

I develop volunteer opportunities that are flexible and allow volunteers to achieve their personal goals while meeting the needs of the organization, clients and its stakeholders.

I strive diligently to provide the best possible match between the volunteer and the tasks that need to be done.

I provide training opportunities that accommodate diverse ages, cultures, backgrounds, abilities, learning principles and styles.

I train volunteers in all areas of the tasks they do and respond to their needs as they emerge.

I outline all workplace hazards to volunteers and ensure that they understand how to respond in a crisis situation.

I provide opportunities for skill sharing among volunteers in either a buddy system or mentor relationship.

I am aware of all current state, federal and provincial privacy legislation and create processes to protect the confidentiality of the volunteers and clients.

I ensure that all volunteers sign a confidentiality statement and clearly explain what information must be kept confidential.

I obtain written permission from volunteers and/or their guardians prior to releasing any written, electronic, audio-visual and verbal formats when using quotes, photographs, or their name in public communications.

I review records on volunteers regularly to ensure that all information is up to date and accurate.

I have labeled all sensitive material as confidential.

I ensure that all confidential information and volunteer records are stored in a secure location with limited access.

I am aware of the legal legislation, boundaries and guidelines for disclosing any form of confidential information to the volunteer's immediate supervisor.

My volunteer program is representative of the diversity in the community.

I have reviewed my volunteer program for potential forms of systemic discrimination.

I have received and offer diversity training to volunteers and staff.

I know how to communicate appropriately with people from diverse backgrounds.

I meet with stakeholders and individuals from diverse communities to talk about improving accessibility of my volunteer program.

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## SECTION 3

### Core Ethical Value 3: RESPONSIBILITY

#### **Ethical Principle 3A: Staff Relationships**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts the responsibility to develop a volunteer program that will enhance and extend the work of the organization's paid staff

#### **Ethical Principle 3B: Professional Responsibility**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts responsibility to contribute to the credibility of the profession in the eyes of those it serves.

#### **Ethical Principle 3C: Diligence**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts responsibility to be reliable, careful, prepared, and well informed.

#### **Ethical Principle 3D: Doing One's Best**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts responsibility to pursue excellence even when resources are limited.

#### **Ethical Principle 3E: Perseverance**

The Volunteer Administrator will seek to overcome obstacles to excellence.

#### **Ethical Principle 3F: Continuous Improvement**

The Volunteer Administrator commits to improving his/her knowledge, skills, and ability to make judgments.

#### **Ethical Principle 3G: Self-Disclosure And Self-Restraint**

The Volunteer Administrator commits to reflective decision making with the intent of advancing the long-term greater good.

### Program Components

#### I include volunteers in the development of organizational and departmental goals and objectives.

I develop guidelines for determining the requirements of a volunteer position.

I identify and distribute a list of all volunteer position descriptions.

I have a process for creating new volunteer position descriptions.

I have a "volunteer development program" that clearly illustrates placements and positions, including all opportunities for volunteer growth, development, and advancement, and shared it with staff and volunteers.

I provide training to all paid staff supervisors in "volunteer-staff working relations" and provide one-on-one volunteer management support to paid staff as necessary.

I demonstrate pride and integrity when representing the organization and strive to instill the same in other staff.

I work through appropriate organizational channels when introducing, promoting, or soliciting support for volunteer involvement or issues.

I consistently solicit feedback from volunteers and paid staff regarding the level of satisfaction with volunteer placements.

I participate in evaluations within my organization.

I participate in professional development activities such as attending the professional conferences each year, maintain personal performance standards in my current position, and take every opportunity to grow as an individual and as a professional.

I view volunteer administration as a profession and act as a professional in my work with other administrators of volunteers.

I develop and maintain standard operating procedures for the recruitment and retention of volunteers within the organization that are supportive of the organizational vision, mission, goals, and objectives.

I continue to supplement both my educational and experiential growth at every opportunity.

I participate as a trainer/facilitator in the area of volunteer administration when opportunities arise.

I submit articles to newsletters, magazines, etc. regarding volunteer management practices and experiences.

I work in collaboration with volunteers and paid staff in developing position descriptions and writing personnel performance standards to assure the distinction between paid jobs and volunteer positions/roles.

I communicate clearly and specifically with all stakeholders, verifying the accuracy of information before it is distributed.

I am active in the profession of volunteer administration and take on a leadership role when possible.

I seek education and training related to professional development.

I am aware of and practice risk management in volunteer administration.

I know of and am familiar with federal, state or provincial laws and regulations pertinent to volunteer administration.

I ensure that staff receive appropriate training on how to supervise volunteers.

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## **SECTION 4**

### **Core Ethical Value 4: COMPASSION and GENEROSITY**

The Volunteer Administrator assumes the responsibility to be kind, compassionate, and generous in all actions so as to minimize the harm done to others in the performance of one's duties.

#### **Program Components**

I strive to assure that all volunteer recruitment and placements are respectful of each individual's skills and readiness for his/her volunteer role in order to maintain the highest level of integrity. I show concern for staff and volunteers.

## SECTION 5

### Core Ethical Value 5: JUSTICE and FAIRNESS

#### Ethical Principle 5A: Procedural Fairness

The Volunteer Administrator assumes the responsibility to have an open and impartial process for collecting and evaluating information critical for making decisions.

#### Ethical Principle 5B: Impartiality

The Volunteer Administrator assumes the responsibility for having impartial and objective standards that avoid discriminatory or prejudicial behaviors.

#### Ethical Principle 5C: Equity

The Volunteer Administrator assumes the responsibility to treat all individuals with whom he/she works equitably.

### Program Components

I involve paid staff and volunteers in gathering information pertinent to the issues at hand.

I continually review and update all recruitment plans, recognition plans, and guidelines for the supervision of volunteers to assure fairness and impartiality.

I know how to listen to the concerns and suggestions of staff and volunteers.

I develop and utilize standards of performance that are directly related to the tasks to be done.

I review performance standards and related policies to ensure that they are not discriminatory or prejudicial.

I have a culturally diverse recruitment plan that targets particular markets for particular volunteer positions or tasks which are free of barriers to participation.

I develop consistent standards for the recognition of volunteers in my organization.

I develop and distribute standard operating procedures for the utilization of volunteers that consistently indicate supervision responsibilities and expectations.

I continually work with staff to ensure the consistent application of standard operating procedures for involving volunteers.

I regularly review and revise as necessary: volunteer personnel policies, standard operating procedures and the grievance process. This assures consistency and appropriateness for the organization and is continually monitored for adherence by staff.

I support and promote, throughout the organization, the positive nondiscriminatory roles staff have in helping volunteers grow in competency and experience.

I look for opportunities to provide constructive feedback about the organization's volunteers for the betterment of the organization and the growth of the individual.

I support and promote an atmosphere of teamwork in the pursuit of common goals.

I emphasize the use of positive performance results obtained from regular evaluations and constructive feedback.

## SECTION 6

### Core Ethical Value 6: TRUSTWORTHINESS

#### **Ethical Principle 6A: Truthfulness**

The Volunteer Administrator is committed to the truth and assuring that all verbal and written agreements and contracts for volunteers and staff are founded on the premise of open and honest interaction.

#### **Ethical Principle 6B: Candor**

The Volunteer Administrator is committed to fairness and forthrightness.

#### **Ethical Principle 6C: Sincerity/Non-Deception**

The Volunteer Administrator will interact with all volunteers in a forthright manner with the utmost sincerity and good intent, never conducting business in a deceptive manner and continually promoting that principle throughout the organization.

#### **Ethical Principle 6D: Principled**

The Volunteer Administrator understands and works to promote the core ethical values.

#### **Ethical Principle 6E: Moral Courage**

The Volunteer Administrator will base his/her actions on core ethical values and will not compromise those values for convenience.

#### **Ethical Principle 6F: Reasonability Of Commitments**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts the responsibility to be reasonable, realistic, and professional in determining the appropriateness of expectations or requests.

#### **Ethical Principle 6G: Clarity Of Commitments On Behalf of the Organization, Staff and/or Volunteers**

The Volunteer Administrator accepts the responsibility to assure clear communication regarding commitments made on behalf of the organization, staff, or volunteers. In order to maximize success of everyone involved, the Volunteer Administrator accepts the responsibility to establish contracts and agreements that are understood and practiced

#### **Ethical Principle 6H: Limitations To Loyalty**

The Volunteer Administrator understands personal and professional limits of his/her loyalty to his/her volunteers, clients and organization, and prioritizes them clearly and appropriately to minimize liability and risk to everyone involved

#### **Ethical Principle 6I: Addressing Conflicts Of Interest**

The Volunteer Administrator is responsible for identifying policies, procedures and circumstances that might result in a conflict of interest by appropriately and professionally addressing the issue at hand and eliminating it as a conflict.

### Program Components

In dealing with issues, I clearly differentiate between my own personal opinion/philosophy and established organizational policies and procedures guidelines.

I present to new and potential volunteers specific information regarding their responsibilities, expectations, and the skills needed, and openly discuss their individual skills to determine suitability for the volunteer position.

I assess all volunteer placement for risk before designing or placing volunteers and interact with staff to ensure a safe, appropriate environment/position.

I work with volunteers and paid staff in such a manner as to assure that all interaction is sincere and honest.

I support and promote fairness in all situations with paid staff and volunteers and emulate appropriate behavior.

I assure that I have all the necessary and available information and include input from staff, volunteers, clients/consumers and other stakeholders

I stand firm on the values and principles related to sound volunteer management.

I have an understanding of the core ethical values and share this with others.

I model integrity and support its growth in those around me.

I regularly have conversations about integrity and values with volunteers and staff.

I strive to maintain the highest standards of the organization's volunteer program so that it is viewed positively by others internal and external to the organization.

I provide draft documentation prior to discussions or meetings regarding mutual agreements and follow up with written documentation to ensure clear and mutual understanding of all involved in the organization, clients and other stakeholders.

I develop guidelines and standards for allowing sufficient time to assess volunteer requirements and commitments.

I make certain that I clearly communicate the recruitment process and procedures to staff to keep expectations and

commitments reasonable and appropriate.

I have a process for receiving requests for volunteers and tracking recruitment to ensure that staff and volunteer commitments and expectations are reasonable and appropriate.

I receive and file signed confidentiality statements from all staff and volunteers according to established organizational policies and procedures.

I know how to protect vulnerable individuals who share information that could negatively impact them if disclosed.

The information I collect and have in my files is necessary to the volunteer program.

I have a safe and confidential process for supporting persons with hidden disabilities including persons with HIV/AIDS, who may not want to make such information public, while still providing a safe workplace for staff and volunteers.

I know when I need to make others aware of conflicting loyalties.

I set clear boundaries for working with staff, board, volunteers, and any personal relationships that could evolve.

I ensure volunteers serving on the organization's Board of Directors clearly understand and have declared possible conflicts of interest.

I am aware of my management responsibilities to the organization and proactively avoid possible conflicts of interest.

I have a policy or procedure for dealing with gifts (monetary or material) which may be given to me, my volunteers, and fellow staff.