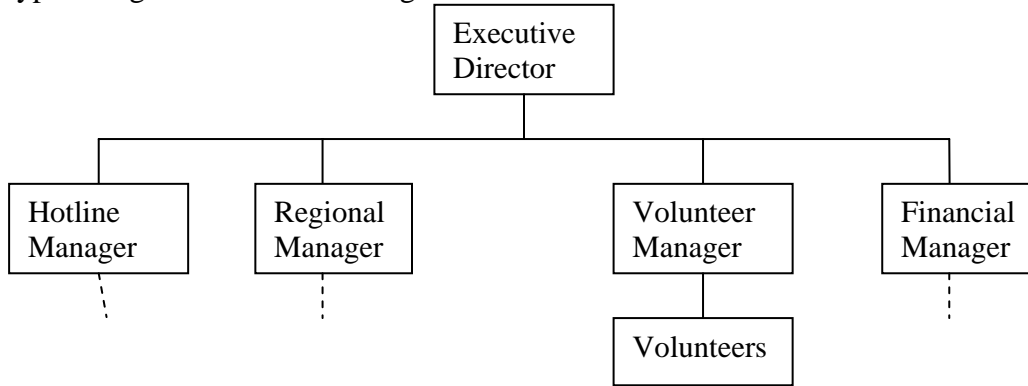


# Some Lessons for Pro Bono Management from Non-Legal Volunteer Programs

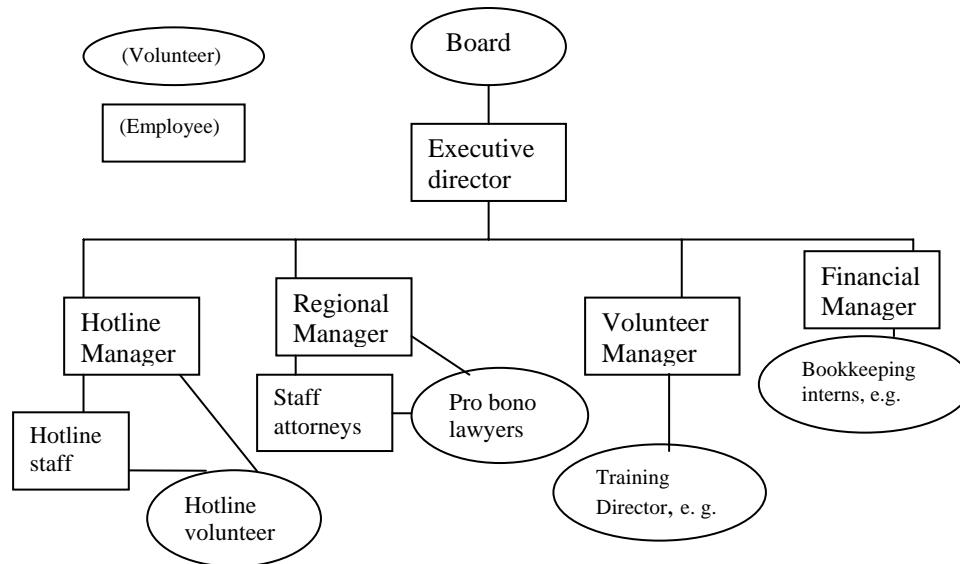
By Marla Elliott

Thirty years ago, most volunteer programs operated separately from the rest of the organizations they supported. The volunteer program manager was the only person who oversaw the work of “her” volunteers<sup>1</sup>. The work that volunteers did was different and separate from the work of paid staff. A typical organizational chart might look like this:



As volunteer programs have become more sophisticated, however, the work of volunteers has become integrated throughout complex organizations. “Volunteer” has become recognized as a pay category rather than a job description.

Many people in a Legal Aid organization may carry the title “Lawyer” and yet perform different jobs: intake, individual client advocacy, litigation coordination, training, management, etc. Similarly, a “Volunteer”, or even a “Volunteer Lawyer” can perform work that furthers many different aspects of the mission of a given organization:



<sup>1</sup> Some pro bono coordinators have tried to tell me that they do not supervise the work of their volunteer attorneys. This means that they choose to engage in only the most minimal supervision of their volunteers. That may not be a conscious choice, but it is a choice. Traditional pro bono volunteers do not seek and are not given much supervision; but that’s not a reason *not* to think about what kind of oversight would be best for both the volunteer and the program.

It seems like common sense to say that volunteers will be more effective if their work is closely tied to that of paid staff. However, integrating volunteer management into multiple levels of an organization takes thoughtful planning and teamwork. Here are some basic principles for doing so:

- The volunteer program must have effective support from the highest levels of the organization.
- There is no reason to think that the paid staff will want, or know how to use, volunteers without your training and support.
- Coercion of paid staff is as ineffective as it is with volunteer staff. The volunteer manager must become as proficient at working with staff as she is at working with volunteers.
- Start by thinking about volunteers from the staff's perspective. Respect their feelings and concerns. Staff may have legitimate reservations about the quality, quantity, and reliability of volunteer work. Orient the staff to the purpose and mission of the volunteer program. Train them to work with volunteers.
- Involve the staff in designing the volunteer positions. Connect those volunteer jobs to staff wishes and dreams: "What have you always wanted to do but didn't have enough resources?" Work with staff to translate those desires into jobs that volunteers will want to do.
- Screen volunteers carefully, and involve staff in the screening process.
- Train volunteers carefully. Involve staff in training and orienting the volunteers.
- Give the staff responsibility and authority to supervise the volunteers who are working with them.
- Monitor the staff/volunteer relationship. Communicate personally and often. Be available to help with problems as they arise. Empathize with staff as well as volunteers. Be creative in solving problems.

### Bibliography:

Most of the ideas here are taken from the following books:

Ellis, Susan J. *From the Top Down: The Executive Role in Volunteer Program Success*. Energize, Inc. 1996.

McCurlley, Steve and Lynch, Rick. *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources of the Community*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Johnstone Training and Consultation Inc., 2006.