

# From **Volunteer** to Paid **Employee**



IN THE 1980s I VOLUNTEERED AS AN ARCHIVIST at the local historical society serving under a volunteer coordinator who had trained several archivists through the years. In my orientation, I was appalled to see that there were many different catalogs of donated historical items, each set up and catalogued by a different archivist over the period of thirty years. It seemed that as the coordinator trained an archivist, he had each one set up a file and catalog the items as they arrived so that he could go back and oversee the work, eventually combining all of them into one coherent catalog. He never did that because he was also a part-time volunteer and had many other duties plus a full-time job in the private sector.

It occurred to me that there had to be a better way for non-profits to handle their workload. If the museum had hired one person to work full-time as an archivist, paid even a stipend, there probably would have been continuity in the catalogs and much less frustration for end users. This museum was a prime candidate for some paid employees. It was funded by private donations and tax revenue. It consistently ran “in the black” yet no one ever asked to be paid for their time.

How can a person morph from a volunteer to a paid employee? Usually not easily. Most non-profits are notoriously under-funded, unlike the museum, and are dependent upon free labor. And why pay when you can get the job done for nothing? There are an estimated 1.6 million non-profit organizations in the United States employing 8.7 million people, equivalent to 5.9 percent of all workers.

Just because you work for a non-profit does not mean you cannot be paid. The finances of non-profits are usually public knowledge. Find out if where you volunteer

does have money to pay you. If they do, ask to be hired when a opening occurs and after you have fully learned your position and have become a valuable asset to the organization. Take on responsibilities above and beyond what is expected of you. Show initiative by taking on special events or promotions. Offer ideas for advancing the organization. Remember, as a volunteer the directors know your work ethic, your abilities, and your level of involvement in the paid positions you want. If you have exhibited them in day-to-day duties, they most likely will value your contributions and want to keep you even if they have to pay for the privilege.

Has the organization hired other volunteers? Find out from them how they moved from volunteer to paid employee. If none have been hired, it may be policy that they don't hire volunteers. Consider going to another organization that does hire within their volunteer pool.

If the non-profit does not have money to pay you, are there grants available? Many non-profits hire grant writers to acquire available money. If they are willing and it is not burdensome, try to consult with them to see where money is available and how to get it. Maybe you can write a grant under their tutelage and learn a new and valuable skill at the same time.

If these methods don't yield a paid position for this nonprofit, check out the Internet for nonprofits looking for employees. Skills such as working under pressure, dealing with budgets, and multi-tasking learned in a non-profit setting transfer from one organization to another and even into the private sector.

Free labor is wonderful if you can get it, but sometimes it ends up that “You get what you pay for.” ☞

Take on responsibilities above and beyond what is expected of you. Offer ideas for advancing the organization.



#### Other resources:

- [www.Grants.gov](http://www.Grants.gov)
- [www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com)