

# State Vocational Federation of Teachers

## Position Paper On Volunteerism

For many years, union members (and the general public) have volunteered their time and expertise. Many organizations doing great work credit their success, and in many cases their existence to support from volunteers. Labor unions also rely heavily on the work of volunteers. This experience can result in an intangible, incalculable reward for the volunteer, while producing an invaluable benefit to those receiving services. The community is often a beneficiary as well. Such sacrifice should be encouraged.

Potential volunteer opportunities must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. As unionists, it is our responsibility to ascertain that:

- volunteers are not being used in lieu of, or to supplant, a workforce
- the service being provided should not be compensated, either by money or other privileges
- there is no conflict between the philosophy of the organization using volunteers and the principles espoused by the union

The decision to volunteer is analogous to a consumer deciding to make a purchase - and in both cases rests solely with the individual.

As educators, we are occasionally asked to volunteer - to chaperone a dance, to supervise a club, etc. The contract recognizes situations in which the school administration may need to solicit volunteers (early morning duty) and addresses the proper protocol. Historically, because the status of some assignments has changed, the paid vs. unpaid standard does not provide a clear definition of what is voluntary, and what is not. Class advisors for underclassmen were not paid and now are; BEST mentors used to be paid and now aren't; the position of CAPT Coordinator (formerly filled by a volunteer from the instructional staff) is now assigned to another bargaining unit.

When volunteering is done at the worksite a number of union issues are raised. The following principles should be recognized:

- ✓ There is **no** connection between volunteering and professionalism.
- ✓ Volunteering today does not establish a past practice - which will become the expectation tomorrow.
- ✓ The decision not to volunteer must be without retribution.
- ✓ Every teacher must be free to choose.