

Vermont Library Association Statement on Unpaid Hours

Approved by the VLA Board

December 11, 2014

Introduction

The Vermont Library Association (VLA) conducted an online survey during October 2014 in an attempt to ascertain how widespread and to what degree Vermont public library workers work unpaid hours at their jobs. The survey asked fourteen questions using an online polling service. The responses were anonymous, and it was made clear to respondents that the answers were anonymous. Though the survey was not completely scientific, it yielded some interesting results. In short, a majority of respondents put in hours in addition to their regular work schedule each week for which they are not paid. Most of this unpaid time is spent doing work that is part of their regular job description.

Survey and methodology

The VLA posted a survey of fourteen questions online via the SurveyMonkey online polling service in October 2014. This survey was publicized via listservs that public librarians in the state use regularly. The response rate was high, garnering 138 responses from library workers at Vermont's 183 public libraries. Over 60% of the respondents are public library directors, with the remainder classified under the term "librarian." Librarian was interpreted on the survey to mean anyone else who works at the library but is not the director.

The survey responses were anonymous. The survey was not fully scientific because no mechanisms were in place to prevent respondents from taking the survey more than once. There is no evidence that respondents skewed the results through multiple responses, and, to the contrary, the survey generated a number of comments from respondents that were of unique content. Still, because of this potential for bias, the results should be considered in that light.

Results

Eighty-five of the 138 respondents identified themselves as library directors. 53 of the 138 respondents identified as "Librarian." Librarian is best interpreted to mean someone who works at a Vermont public library who is not a library director, but does work that is directly related to library service.

Nearly 97% of respondents work at only one library, but the number of hours worked per week varies greatly. The median library worker surveyed is paid for 30-39 hours per week, but 41% of respondents are paid for less than 30 hours per week, with nearly 17% paid for less than 20 hours per week. Just under 27% work 40 hours per week or more. This means that

nearly 3 in 4 library workers are paid for less than 40 hours per week, yet nearly 65% of respondents said that they work unpaid hours each week.

This means that there is a significant portion of Vermont library workers—mostly directors—who are working less than forty hours per week, but are asked to work additional hours for no pay. The numbers bear this out.

The good news is that 82 respondents indicated that they are paid for administrative hours each week. 29% said that they are paid for 1-2 hours, 28% 3-4 hours, 20% 5-6 hours, and nearly 22% said that they are paid for 7 or more administrative hours per week.

Another positive is that the vast majority of respondents have positive feelings about their jobs, with over 96% responding that they are either highly satisfied or somewhat satisfied. Over 55% responded that they are highly satisfied with their jobs.

The survey also yielded a number of interesting comments. Here are a few samples:

“It’s frustrating knowing the job ‘requires’ more hours than the ones I am paid to work. I really enjoy working in a library, but I can’t get what needs to be done in the time I’m given.”

“Management of expenses is usually the root cause of unease. In a rural library, much of the preparation for programs involves travelling to stores. This type of activity is often done off the clock by the director. But, as director, I insist that any other staff member be on-the-clock for all library related activities. Trustees often ask me to shop without considering that it cannot be accomplished during regular business hours.”

“Directors and librarians should be earning more money for the very complicated and technologically challenging new library services.”

“I have become more and more unsatisfied as unpaid hours have built up without any care from trustees and town that this time is needed in order to run the library on a weekly basis. The time should be paid and incorporated into the budget. I am the only employee running every aspect of this library and should be compensated for that.”

“Not enough hours in the day to do the job I am expected to do because of limited staff.”

“No one has ever asked me to work unpaid. Sometimes I catch up before the library is open or from home because I’ve chosen to be available to patrons, staff, and volunteers during library hours in a way that doesn’t allow me to work on the budget, plan a program, write an article for the local paper, etc. I feel very much appreciated by trustees and community members, some of whom have expressed regret that the budget doesn’t allow for better pay and benefits. I knew what I was getting into taking

a job in a small town with a small library budget, and there are a few things I love about this job that are directly related to its location. That said, of course better pay would help my family and me.”

Conclusions:

People who work in Vermont libraries like their jobs. One can clearly see that in most of the comments and the responses about job satisfaction. This should not be a surprise to anyone who has spent time in many of Vermont’s 183 public libraries.

Unfortunately, with this enthusiasm comes a degree of exploitation. Many library boards and towns are taking advantage of the good will of library workers, either consciously or unwittingly, by not paying them for all of the hours that they are working.

This is the opportunity for education, of both library workers and trustees. Trustees must be led to understand that library employees cannot be expected to volunteer time that is the same work that they are paid to do. This is not only unfair, it is against the law, as explained in the [US Department of Labor summary of rules governing hours worked](#).

Librarians and library directors need to understand that they must draw the line at working unpaid hours, regardless of how much they love their jobs. It is damaging to libraries everywhere and to the future of the profession to set a precedent that librarians need not be paid for their work.

These important implications are at the heart of this problem. Often, library workers and trustees are simply following precedent. It is the role of VLA and informed library workers and trustees to take this message to heart and change the current reality in Vermont’s public libraries.