

less than a full development of his talents and skills in their behalf. And by working toward such a goal he will find widening horizons and a growing satisfaction in his job.¹

Before the Social Security Act was passed, aid for the aged, the blind, or children who are left without support or the necessary care was provided by the State or the local community. A partnership of Federal, State, and local governments, working toward a national welfare program, was unknown. Marked progress has been made in

¹ Kurtz, Russell H., Editor, *The Public Assistance Worker*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1938, pp. 214-215.

improving service for the needy aged, the needy blind, and dependent children. The post-war period probably will bring expansion of present welfare services to meet new needs arising from the aftermath of the war and to secure the place of the four freedoms in our democracy. The past accomplishments in the field of public assistance furnish a growing body of knowledge and point the way to a future public service attractive to able workers who bring with them the basic knowledge and skills and attitudes and a capacity and interest in developing on the job.

Recruitment for Public Assistance Agencies

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UNDERSTANDING OF THE present personnel situation in State and local public assistance agencies requires clear recognition of the nature and extent of the recruitment problem now facing the agencies, of the efforts being made to strengthen the total personnel of the agencies, and of the methods of personnel selection under a merit system.¹

No amount of care in determining how a government shall be organized for the performance of its work, the manner in which the funds necessary for its support shall be raised and expended, and the particular practices and procedures that shall be employed in carrying on its activities, will give even a measurable approach to efficiency in the actual administration of public affairs unless a technically competent and loyal personnel can be secured and retained in the service and a system devised whereby this personnel may be effectively directed and controlled.²

Inherent in this statement, of course, is the recognition that the system referred to will enable each individual to develop and increase his competence as well as fulfill his obligations to the service.

Among the basic principles underlying sound merit-system administration are the following concepts: that all persons who can qualify for any class of position shall have an opportunity to

compete, so that the best qualified may be appointed; that after an established trial period in the positions, those whose performance has been satisfactory shall have reasonable assurance of being retained, with opportunities for individual development and for promotion on the basis of quality of performance; and that the compensation plan shall be based on the general principle of equal pay for equal work, with an equitable entrance salary, an equitable maximum, and appropriate intervening steps to compensate for increased value resulting from long service and superior performance.³ Equality of treatment for all who believe they can qualify, through the impartial application of standards designed to fulfill these objectives, is the essence of a modern merit-system program.⁴

Selection of Personnel

The merit-system amendments to the Social Security Act, which became effective January 1, 1940, are applicable to the personnel of the State public assistance agencies administering old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind, as well as to certain other programs covered by the act. The Social Security Board has the responsibility of finding that State public assistance plans and unemployment compensation laws approved by it provide for necessary methods

* Office of the Executive Director, State Technical Advisory Service. This article is based on material prepared for the Wartime Committee on Personnel, American Association of Social Workers.

¹ For references on various aspects of the subject, see *A Selected Bibliography of Merit System Administration*, Social Security Board, July 1940.

² Willoughby, W. F., in the preface to *The Federal Service. A Study of the System of Personnel Administration in the United States*, by Lewis Mayers, 1922, p. vii.

³ Aronson, Albert H., "The Merit System," *Public Health Nursing*, March 1940, pp. 144-148.

⁴ Mosher, William E., and Kingsley, J. Donald, *Public Personnel Administration*, 1941, ch. 7.

of administration, including methods relating to the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards on a merit basis. As stated in its *Standards for a Merit System of Personnel Administration in State Employment Security and State Public Assistance Agencies*, the Board is interested in the development of effective merit systems, but it exercises no authority over the selection, tenure of office, or compensation of an individual employed in conformity with the provisions of such systems. These standards, issued by the Board on November 1, 1939, cover the generally recognized minimum essentials for sound administration of merit systems.

Eighteen States have State-wide civil-service systems which are applicable to the public assistance agencies. In 8 of these, local public assistance employees are subject to departmental or to county-wide merit systems. Limited civil-service systems applicable to the programs under the Social Security Act and to one or more other State agencies have been established by statute in 3 States. In 30 States, merit-system agencies have been established to serve agencies under the Social Security Act, including the public assistance agencies; 27 of these serve one or more additional agencies administering programs under the Social Security Act, and 3 cover the public assistance agencies only.

Some steps in the selection of personnel, such as that of attracting qualified individuals, are more or less continuing; others are principally recurrent. In general, the major elements of the selection process include: planning examination programs as needed; preparing and distributing announcements and other publicity materials; reviewing applications to determine whether the applicants' qualifications meet the requirements for admission to examinations; preparing, administering, and scoring written examinations; rating training and experience; administering oral examinations when they are required; establishing the registers; handling appeals; certifying eligible candidates; appointing to a position for a probationary period; and separating or making a permanent appointment at the end of that period.

Since maintenance of a merit system is an integral part of the administration of a public assistance program, allocation of responsibility between the operating agency and the merit-system organization will vary with the different

aspects of the recruitment process. Primary responsibility for the written examinations, for example, is vested in the merit-system organization. Only the operating agency, on the other hand, can decide whether the individual is to be retained at the end of the probationary period. Both agencies share the responsibility for attracting qualified personnel.

Current Personnel Needs

Public assistance agencies in 18 States reported a total of 5,321 executive and social work employees in their State and local offices, as of June 30, 1943.⁵ The separation rates for personnel in these agencies during two 6-month periods, computed as the percent of employees on the last pay roll of each period, were as follows:

Office	All employees	Executive and social work employees	All other employees
January-June 1943			
Total.....	21.5	15.2	29.8
State offices.....	28.1	17.2	32.8
Local offices.....	20.1	15.0	28.5
July-December 1942			
Total.....	29.1	24.3	35.1
State offices.....	27.0	15.3	32.2
Local offices.....	29.0	25.4	36.3

During the first 6 months of 1943, almost one out of every six executive and social work employees was separated from the service. This rate is lower than that for the preceding 6 months, but the decrease occurred only in the local offices; the rate in the State offices actually increased somewhat. During July-December 1942 the separation rate for employees in these classes in the State offices was slightly more than half that for employees in the local offices, but in the following 6 months it exceeded the rate in the local offices. The staffing problem in the public assistance agencies has been accentuated by the high turnover among the other types of employees, including accountants, statisticians, and clerical workers.

⁵ Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia. The classes included under "executive and social work employees" correspond closely to but are not identical with the "social work classes" referred to later (visitor-case work series, local supervisory-administrative and State supervisory-administrative classes).

In fact, during the first 6 months of 1943, these employees were separated at a rate almost twice that for employees in executive and social work positions.

Approximately one out of every nine positions in the executive and social work classes was vacant on June 30, as is indicated by the following figures reported by 24 States.⁶

Office	All positions	Executive and social work positions	All other positions
Total.....	8.3	9.3	7.1
State offices.....	6.5	10.8	4.9
Local offices.....	8.7	9.2	7.9

Despite the severe drain on the staffs of the public assistance agencies as a result of wartime transfers, comparison with the experience of unemployment compensation agencies and the U. S. Employment Service, and of educational institutions, reveals that the public assistance agencies may have, in fact, maintained a relative stability.

Current Emphases in Meeting the Needs

Although opinion differs concerning the theory and methods of selection, there is unanimous agreement on the current necessity of reviewing procedures, in order to simplify and intensify the recruitment of qualified public assistance personnel and speed up the process of selection. Various measures have already been inaugurated by State agencies to accomplish these results.

Residence requirements.—In general, residence requirements are fixed by statute and often affect all departments of the State government. The extent to which these requirements influence the recruitment and thus the quality of social work personnel in the public assistance agencies is difficult to measure. Since recruitment in local agencies is, however, conditioned by the requirements of the particular State and by the variation among the States in such requirements, some clue to the complex situation may be gained from a sample study of published examination announcements for the past 2, or in some instances 3, years. Although examination announcements do not reflect the exercise of administrative discretion, they do furnish approximate information on the current situation.

⁶ Includes the preceding 18 States and, in addition, Georgia, Maryland, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania.

During the period covered, eight States have had no residence requirements for any social work class of position. Four additional States which do not require residence have, however, qualified their position by giving preference to State residents. Although the exercise of administrative discretion varies considerably, it is safe to assume that no appreciable numbers of out-of-State residents are employed under this qualification.

Twelve States have relaxed their residence requirements. At the time of the last examination, six had waived their residence requirements for the beginning social work class; in addition, two of these had waived the requirement for both local and State supervisory-administrative classes, one for local but not State staff, and one for State but not local staff in those two groups of classes. One other State, not included in the six, had also waived requirements in connection with the State supervisory-administrative classes. Within the past year or more, five additional States have modified their normal residence requirements for specific classes of positions to conform to the pattern of the preceding seven. Other minor modifications such as a reduction in the length of residence required have been made by certain of these States.

Twenty-six States have made no modifications in their residence requirements during this period. The most frequent requirement—a year—is common to 14 States; 1 State specifies 6 months; 3 States, 2 years; and 5 States, 3 years or more. Three States specify legal residence but no time period.

Despite the fact that, during the past 2 years, 12 States have made some type of modification in residence requirements affecting particular classes of social work positions, the extent to which relaxation of the residence requirements has been effected will appear inadequate to those who consider potential Nation-wide mobility of social work personnel desirable at this time.

Wartime modifications of merit-system rules.—As early as 1942, the Social Security Board reviewed the personnel situation of the State agencies and found a consensus among State officials that the basic merit principles and practices of the standards formulated by the Board would serve wartime needs if there were an intensive effort to make the systems work, and a realistic and positive approach to the problems of compensation,

qualifications, and recruitment. An important factor to be considered is that, while State agencies have responsibilities essential to the war effort, they must build not only for the emergency but also for the post-war period. Recognizing the difficulties which the State agencies face in finding and retaining sufficient qualified personnel at this time, the Board proposed certain modifications of procedures which States may adopt if they wish.⁷

The extent to which States have modified their merit-system practices has varied greatly. In some jurisdictions the oral examination has been eliminated when it has been clear that the entire register of candidates would be used. A considerable number of States have shortened the probationary period. Thirteen States have provided for extension of provisional appointments in the absence of competition, and 12 have provided for tenure limited to the duration of the war. Many States, though reluctant to do so, have also found it necessary to lower minimum education and experience requirements, particularly for the beginning class of visitor. It is difficult to determine how such modifications have affected the caliber of personnel now being attracted to the agencies.

Salary increases.—One of the most effective methods of broadening the area of recruitment is to increase the salaries offered. In establishing their salary scales the public assistance agencies have been and still are handicapped by the ideology surrounding the administration of "relief." Often they have been unable to improve the situation by bringing salaries up to the level of those in other comparable State departments. Continuous efforts on their part have, nevertheless, resulted in major gains during the past 2 years. It seems doubtful that these gains will entirely disappear after the war, despite the fact that in many instances they are due to current inflationary trends and to competition from other positions which at the moment command higher salaries.

During this period, 48 States⁸ have increased the salary scales for one or more of the social work classes. In 13 States the increase has taken the form of a bonus, which is sometimes superimposed on an increased basic salary; in general, the bonus plans are to continue for the duration of the

⁷ State Letter to All Employment Security and Public Assistance Agencies, Social Security Board, March 13, 1943.

⁸ Alaska, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii are omitted from this summary.

war and 6 months thereafter. In the remaining States the increases have been effected by adjusting the existing rates of compensation. In many instances, the increases are effective for all positions in the agency.

Information available on salary offered at the time of appointment to a position, which usually corresponds to the minimum for the class of position, indicates that 45 States have granted increases in one or more of the social work classes. The largest number of increases has occurred in the visitor-case work series of classes; 41 States have raised the entrance salary for the beginning class and 19 have made increases at the next level. Basic rates for one or more of the local supervisory-administrative classes have been increased in 36 States, and increases for the same groups of classes in State offices have occurred in 35 States. Thirty-one States, in turn, have increased the entrance salary for one or more classes in both visitor-case work and supervisory-administrative groups, while 14 have limited the increases to classes in the latter group. The percentage increases vary from class to class and range from 3 to 58 percent. In general, the lower the original entrance salary the greater the percentage increase.

These data do not take into account the fact that, in a few States, appointments may be and undoubtedly are made above the minimum of the salary range, or that promotions based on quality and length of service have been accelerated. Undoubtedly also in some instances the revised compensation schedules have not actually been put into operation.

Improved recruitment and selection.—The heart of recruitment is the presentation of the work to be done and its values. Since the salaries of public assistance agencies are in general comparatively low, other satisfactions must be stressed. Major emphasis must be laid on the satisfactions which grow out of successful achievement in a program established on a democratic basis to serve large groups of individuals in need. To these satisfactions may be added those accruing when employees are protected through sound personnel principles applied to the fullest extent possible within an agency. Although much still remains to be done, considerable progress has been made in clarifying and stabilizing the content of the jobs, the levels of achievement to be expected, and the personnel practices used.

Recruitment efforts have become more positive on the part of both the merit system and the operating agencies. Relatively less reliance has been placed on the distribution of written materials, such as examination announcements, and more on personal contact. Resources have been expanded, with increased use of such organizations as the U. S. Employment Service, educational institutions, and professional associations.

Several States are now receiving applications on a continuous basis for the classes of positions requiring the most applicants, so that examinations may be given as soon as a sufficient number of applications has been received to constitute reasonable competition. Examinations are also being held more frequently for classes of positions in which the need is greatest; there is a point, however, beyond which the frequency of examinations for a single class in a given jurisdiction cannot be increased satisfactorily. To attract more members of graduating classes of colleges and schools of social work, direct recruitment is being emphasized and examinations are frequently scheduled considerably in advance of the end of the school year.

The processes of selection have been expedited also, to an extent which would not have been considered possible in an earlier period. There have been occasional instances in which a register has been established within a week after the examination was held. It is difficult to specify a period that may be considered as the average time required to establish a register. In view of the appreciable gains made by many of the

agencies, however, 3 or 4 weeks may prove to be the usual time required.

Improved personnel practices.—Ability to retain satisfactory personnel is, of course, as essential as the ability to attract qualified staff. All improvements in the quality of administration that stimulate and develop the workers' satisfactions in performance on the job are an important adjunct to recruitment efforts. Among the most important of the personnel practices of any agency are a sound promotion system, a consistent program of staff development which includes competent supervision and opportunities for educational leave, and provision for impartial and intelligent consideration of dissatisfactions. When such programs are combined with salary scales at least equal to those of other comparable departments of the State government, the effect on recruitment is likely to be considerable.

In a tight labor market, vigorous and imaginative interpretation by the agencies is vital if the unfavorable effects of the war emergency upon personnel are to be kept at a minimum. Every device which improves the selection process and the other aspects of personnel administration bears directly upon the caliber of personnel secured. After the war, the anticipated availability of workers at present employed in related programs must be capitalized upon. Only by such measures can the competence of personnel in the public assistance agencies be maintained at a sufficiently high level for fulfillment of the societal obligations which the agencies were created to satisfy.

Some Experiments With Contribution Rate Differentials in British Unemployment Insurance

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WITH VARIOUS OBJECTIVES, and at different periods in the development of its unemployment insurance program, Great Britain has experimented with differential contribution rates. The first experiment offered refunds—or, for a brief period, exemption from the contribution requirement—to employers who stabilized employment, or to workers who stayed on the job or refrained

from exercising their benefit rights when unemployed, instead of drawing on the unemployment fund. The second experiment excepted from coverage under the general over-all insurance system employments offering substantially permanent tenure. The third plan permitted an industry which met certain conditions to "contract out" of the general system and cover its workers in a "special scheme" set up for that industry only.

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