

Other duties as assigned

VT Public Library HR minute – MAY 2020



Dear Library Friends,

Before the Pandemic, many of us were looking forward to summer reading and moving forward with an agreed-upon budget voted on at Town Meeting.

COVID-19 has changed how everyone does business – everyone. Could we ever have imagined a landscape of libraries barred to our neighbors? As we continue rowing our boats through uncharted waters, even the things we thought we'd never do, we must do. Story time by Zoom? *Done*. Book club meetings with club participants sitting miles apart? *Done*. Scrubbing door handles, wiping books, and frantically trying to source 70% isopropyl alcohol? *Wait, what?*

As you well know, even before the pandemic, we had to do things that needed to be done, even if they were not expressly written into our job description. The truth of the matter is that most job descriptions could be edited on an annual basis. Even in normal times, change is always with us. [Note: if you have a labor contract under collective bargaining, please read it / seek legal counsel with questions!]

Job descriptions guide our work, inform responsibility and authority, and are used as the underpinning of measuring performance. A *good* job description is priceless, because it tells us who we report to, what our key tasks are and their purpose, and helps define our relationships with customers and co-workers. It tells us about special qualifications and special demands¹. The American Library Association has [examples](#).

As we are shot like a circus performer out of a cannon across the void and into a new world of work, we share common emotions that are tugging at us, including disappointment and uncertainty. We are stretching in our jobs, picking up pieces that we find along our virtual highway to the next destination, and just trying to *make sense* of it all. All the while library workers and volunteers are doing *so much good*, as

they always have, serving as internet outposts, reaching out to the most vulnerable in our communities, and providing a sense of belonging and connection so desperately needed. And, you guessed it, *you* will be doing things outside of your formal job description. Why? Because they have to get done to meet these needs you care so much about and to do the job you are paid to do.

Job descriptions are not “exception descriptions”.

While job descriptions, as noted, are critical guides, they are not and cannot be all-inclusive. At UVM Extension, *every single* staff job description has “other duties as assigned”. This is an intentional organizational acknowledgment that we do what we have to do when we are asked to do it or *see the need* (I also call this “leadership”).

And that brings us back to COVID-19, our libraries, and just getting things done. As we move forward into slowly opening, first with curbside and then with possibly having patrons invited in our lovely libraries again, we *will* do operations differently, including things we may not want to do. It is our job to do them because community and customer needs change. You have moved boxes. You have brewed coffee and picked up muffins for a meeting. Now you must take time to clean. It will be books and doorknobs and desk drawer handles. Library employees clean bathrooms? Yes, possibly, because this task is mission-critical. And you may be saving a life, literally. Supervisors and trustees take note! These new conditions of work will demand time – please keep that in mind when thinking about balancing new needs and expectations of library leadership with those of staff; be empathetic and supportive. And let's do **other duties as assigned**.

Best regards, Gary

For updates and expert guidance please visit **Vermont Department of Libraries' [COVID-19 pages](#)**:

¹ [5 Critical Components Every Job Description Must Contain](#)

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