

the 43 States with approved plans in November 1940, rose unevenly in 42 States and declined slightly in 1 (South Carolina). In South Dakota, where the program was getting under way in 1940, the increase was largest (69.4 percent), but 3 other States (Arkansas, Washington, and Oklahoma) had increases of more than 50 percent. In 17 States, percentage increases were higher than that for the group of States. The following tabulation of average payments in November 1940 and December 1942 shows the result of these changes:

Average payment	Number of States	
	November 1940	December 1942
Total.....	43	43
\$10.00-19.99.....	7	4
20.00-29.99.....	11	7
30.00-39.99.....	19	18
40.00-49.99.....	5	8
50.00-59.99.....	1	5
60.00-69.99.....	0	1

Averages per family are not available for insurance benefits in December 1942, but there is reason to believe that the averages remained relatively

stable over the 2-year period. For the country as a whole, the maximum possible reduction in the size of the insurance family was not great, and the changes in average widow's current benefits from the awards of 1940 to the benefits in current-payment status on December 31, 1942, were relatively small. If the State averages per family are based only on the change in average widow's current benefits, 32 were higher and 11 lower than the assistance averages on December 1942, compared with 36 higher and 7 lower 2 years earlier.

Payments for aid to dependent children appear to better advantage when the averages are based only on counties in which 50 percent or more of the employment was covered by old-age and survivors insurance.<sup>20</sup> In 13 States these averages were above those estimated for survivors insurance and in 30 they were below. Of the 4 States which had approved plans in 1942 but not in 1940, 1 had a higher assistance average, while the other 3 had higher insurance averages.

<sup>20</sup> The average for the selected counties was 10-25 percent higher than the State-wide average in 10 States, 5-9 percent higher in 6 States, and less than 5 percent higher in 19, in 5 States there was no change, and in 6 there were decreases.

## A Career in Public Service\*

THE STATE public assistance agencies are responsible for providing, within the framework of the respective State statutes and agency policy and procedure, cash assistance and other appropriate services for the special types of public assistance. The agencies frequently administer additional programs, such as general assistance, and, at times, such temporary programs as civilian war assistance, in which capacity they act in behalf of the Federal Bureau of Public Assistance and the Social Security Board.

Since these programs are State programs, operating through Federal grants-in-aid, their operation varies from State to State. In some instances the public assistance agency is part of a public welfare department which includes other programs, such as probation and parole, care for the mentally ill, and general assistance financed without the aid of Federal funds. In

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other instances the public assistance program is administered in a separate agency. Some of the programs are State administered; others provide for administration by the local agency, supervised by the State agency. The Federal act gives the State agencies wide latitude in establishing and operating the assistance programs, but it requires certain basic conditions, such as State-wide operation of the plan through a single State agency, financial participation by the State, and opportunity for a fair hearing for applicants denied assistance. Methods of administration must provide proper and efficient operation of the plan, including methods for establishing and maintaining personnel standards on a merit basis, and for adequate reporting.

### *What Kind of Persons Are Needed as Workers*

Persons employed to fill social service positions in the State public assistance agencies are called upon to do work which presents great variety and which calls for exercise of considerable judgment.

Skills are needed in relating oneself to applicants, recipients, and the general public, so that they may understand what the public assistance agency is able to do. The work calls for the personal characteristics needed by those who work with people in any profession: sympathetic understanding, sensitivity, resourcefulness, and intellectual integrity.

From the job of visitor—the beginning class in the visitor-case work series of positions—the worker who improves in competence can, through professional education and through development of skills on the job, progress to positions carrying heavier responsibilities and larger salaries in the agency. The possibilities of a career service in public assistance, therefore, include positions in all areas of the service—local, State, and Federal. While some if not all of these positions call for certain identical special skills, additional skills are needed in specific positions. To illustrate, a case supervisor needs the knowledge and skills demanded of a visitor in establishing and maintaining human relationships, in using and helping develop community resources, in obtaining, assembling, and evaluating evidence and drawing valid conclusions therefrom. But the case supervisor needs additional knowledge and skills. She must be able to help a visitor discover the basic strengths and weaknesses in her work and learn how to apply to specific case situations principles acquired through reading and discussion. She needs skill in developing and maintaining a relationship with the visitor so that the visitor will be stimulated to develop on the job, to seek and use supervision effectively, but not to become dependent upon it.

Initial responsibility for determining eligibility of applicants for public assistance, and for making and carrying out the assistance plan is placed in the visitor-case work positions. The beginning class of visitor contains the largest number of positions of the social work classes.

### **Minimum Qualifications**

The minimum qualifications for classes of positions normally specify an educational requirement and an experience requirement. A shorter period of experience is usually required of a person with the amount of education the agency prefers than of one with less educational background. For example, a recent study showed that, for the

visitor class, a majority of the States required a minimum of 2 years of college education coupled with 2 years of experience in social work or related fields. In 40 States, experience was not required for persons who were college graduates.

While these requirements may frequently be satisfied by a variety of types of education and experience, in many instances preference is given to persons with education in a graduate school of social work. Individuals who meet the minimum qualifications can be admitted to examinations or receive provisional appointments pending examination. For permanent appointment, an applicant must demonstrate in a written and/or oral test that he possesses the knowledge and abilities required for satisfactory performance of the work and, after appointment, must demonstrate during a probationary period his actual competence on the job.

As might be expected, the qualifications established for similar positions vary among State agencies. The following typical class specification shows the duties and responsibilities as well as the minimum qualifications for a visitor.

#### *Definition*

Under immediate supervision, in accordance with well-defined rules and regulations, to determine eligibility and extent of need of persons who apply for public assistance; to make recommendations for such aid within defined limits subject to review and approval; to perform related work as assigned.

#### *Examples of Work Performed*

To take applications and interview applicants for public assistance;

To make visits, interviewing applicants and recipients, for the purpose of giving and obtaining information as to requirements of eligibility for public assistance and related services;

To communicate with relatives, employers, representatives of other social agencies and of the community in order to obtain information necessary in establishing eligibility for need and in developing assistance plans;

To obtain documentary evidence of birth, marriage, divorce, death, and property resources;

Through the use of available resources, to plan with applicants and recipients ways of meeting health, educational, and recreational needs and problems of family interrelationships;

To obtain budget information and prepare family budget estimates;

To determine extent of need and to make recommendations regarding initial assistance payments, subsequent changes and cancellation of assistance grants;

To prepare certificates of eligibility and to maintain

current information in case records and other designated records, write letters and make reports;

To interpret to individuals in the community the provisions of the public assistance program;

To consult with supervisors in working out plans for recipients of assistance and to attend staff conferences;

To make follow-up visits to the homes of public assistance recipients;

To recommend certification of eligibility of applicants and recipients.

#### *Minimum Qualification*

1. (a) Education equivalent to graduation from a standard 4-year high school and successful completion of 2 years of college education in an accredited college or university, and at least 2 years within the last 15 years of successful full-time paid employment; or

(b) An equivalent combination of education and experience, substituting successfully completed college education in an accredited college or university for the required employment, year for year.

2. Some knowledge of the State social security laws and the Federal Social Security Act as it relates to old-age assistance, aid to the needy blind, aid to dependent children, and maternal and child welfare; some knowledge of individual and group behavior; some knowledge of individual and community health problems; and knowledge of current social and economic problems; as evidenced by a passing grade in a practical written test in these subjects.

3. Ability to work with people, to make clear and pertinent comments and statements, to exercise good judgment in evaluating situations and in making decisions, as evidenced by an investigation and a passing grade in an oral interview.

Positions involving a greater degree of responsibility appropriately require more education and experience. Hence, one interested in a career in the service would do well to acquire professional education, as soon as possible after graduation from college. An integrated or group major in the political and social sciences in the undergraduate course is considered valuable.

Some States impose no residence requirements upon prospective workers. Still others will waive residence requirements if they cannot find qualified personnel within the State. Some require residence for certain positions only, while other agencies require residence for all positions.

#### *Salaries of Public Assistance Workers*

Salaries in public assistance agencies vary considerably, depending on the size and population of the local area, the scope of the program, and the number of persons applying for assistance. Annual entrance salaries for the beginning visitors'

positions range from \$900 to \$2,200. For other positions with primary responsibility for carrying case loads, the salaries range from \$1,200 to \$2,600. Salaries for supervisory positions in local offices run from \$1,440 to \$3,240. The range of the entrance salaries for county administrators is from \$1,100 to \$6,000. Supervisory and administrative salaries in State offices range from \$1,500 to \$10,000.

#### *Opportunities for Training for Employed Workers*

All the agencies administering public assistance appreciate to varying degrees the need for establishing and maintaining opportunities for workers to improve their competence on the job. Most agencies provide a period of orientation for newly inducted workers, to acquaint them with the principles and objectives of the agency and with the use of agency and community resources. Agencies are also interested in utilizing regular supervision to help workers improve their performance. Most agencies also use other training resources, such as institutes, lectures, planned attendance at conferences of social work, committee work study groups, and directed reading. In addition, some public assistance agencies have developed plans for educational leave through which carefully selected workers who are college graduates are sent to schools of social work for full-time study, with a plan for placement of those workers on their return from school so that the agency profits from the workers' period of education.

Employment practices in the public assistance agencies regarding vacations, sick leave, and retirement benefits differ throughout the country. Usually they correspond to practices in effect in other departments of State government. The fact that agencies are recognizing the need for training opportunities and are concerned with the health and welfare of their workers makes employment in such agencies increasingly attractive.

Many satisfactions come to public assistance workers which cannot be measured in terms of material advantage and are more difficult to describe. One writer has expressed it in this way:

The public assistance worker who sees his task as more than a routine job and who wishes to make the most of it will find, then, ample opportunity for growth. As he considers the needs of the people he serves and their right to his understanding and intelligent helpfulness, he will be dissatisfied with anything

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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

### *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.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> Mosher, William E., and Kingsloy, J. Donald, *Public Personnel Administration*, 1941, ch. 7.