

Volunteer Administration: Professional Practice

Keith Seel, Editor

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Reviewed by Ryan J. Schmiesing, Ph.D.

The Council for the Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA) has served as the vehicle for the Certified in Volunteer Administration (CVA) credential and now has an outstanding publication as the primary resource for volunteer resource managers. As the profession of volunteer resource management continues to grow, this text will be important for those seeking the credential as well as those in the academic, consultant, trainer, and practitioner community.

The book is arranged according to the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration's (CCVA) core competencies, with respective chapter authors selected based upon their expertise and experience in the respective topic area under the direction of editor Keith Seel, Ph.D. Basically, it is a survey text of the contemporary field of volunteer resource management, and includes the following chapters: (1) Terminology; (2) Ethics – Concepts and Definitions; (3) Ethical Decision-Making; (4) Strategic Management of Volunteer Programs; (5) Operational Management; (6) Volunteer Staffing and Development; (7) Sustaining Volunteer Involvement; (8) Meeting Management; (9) Financial Management; (10) Data Management; (11) Evaluation and Outcome Measurement; (12) Risk Management; (13) Quality Improvement; (14) Leadership for Nonprofit Organizations; (15) Organizational Involvement; (16) Advocacy in Volunteer Administration; (17) Community Collaboration and Alliances;

and (18) A History of the Profession of Volunteer Administration. The text is comprehensive in nature and includes the most critical components necessary for an individual to be successful as a volunteer resource manager.

The book begins with a chapter focused on terminology and addresses the issue of “title”. No less than nine different titles are identified and the chapter authors readily acknowledge that “we have been having this debate for decades and are no closer to agreement than before” (pg. 4). The authors outline criteria for professionalization and detail the progress made and the challenges that lie ahead. Ethical issues are an important component as professions and organizations grow and evolve and the chapter authors relate ethics to risk for organizations, which is sometimes never correlated by professionals. Tied directly to the discussion on ethics is that of ethical decision-making. The framework and worksheets for ethical decision-making provided to the reader outline specific steps and questions to consider.

The strategic management of volunteer programs chapter provides several key ideas that the reader will find useful, including key questions to further understand and assess program context. This particular chapter is full of questions that the volunteer resource manager will find useful in the planning and development phase and guides the reader on using the questions at the appropriate time and situation. Related to the strategic management chapter is a

chapter on operational management. A key aspect of this chapter is the alignment or fit with the mission and vision of the organization. A useful diagram is provided that highlights key considerations for program planners.

The volunteer staffing chapter is appropriately placed in this text as the editor recognized that it was necessary to set the stage, before addressing the staffing (position descriptions, interviews, etc.) issues, which is all too often the first thing identified when considering the development and/or review of a volunteer led program. An area of growing interest and importance is sustaining volunteer engagement and the text provides ample reviews of theories (e.g., Needs Theory; Theory X/Theory Y; etc.) and most importantly, implications to the volunteer resource manager. The authors clearly tie the need to understand individual and group needs, using strategies from the staff chapter, to sustain volunteer engagement.

Meeting management is an important competency for any volunteer resource manager to fully understand. Of significant interest to readers will be the sample agendas comparing the typical board of director's agenda to that of the strategic board of director's agenda. Meeting management and how volunteer resource managers effectively engage organizational leadership is important, as is the role that both paid and volunteer staff has with financial and data management. Recognizing the importance of understanding financial management and effective practices, the author provides examples of management techniques and practices that can easily be adopted by an organization. Additionally, the fact that more and more volunteer organizations collect, store, and need significant amounts of data, the authors provide strategies for

management and acknowledge the privacy issues that must be considered.

Evaluation and accountability are major areas that are necessary, but often misunderstood by many, including practitioners and academicians. The author of this chapter details both basic concepts and more complex strategies to consider. Four fundamental questions are presented that volunteer resource managers should consider before beginning any program evaluation; furthermore, tools, resources, and examples of how program managers might use data that they have on hand or that they have recently collected are provided.

Risk management continues to be important and the basic concepts and strategies on how to evaluate different situations, including the types of questions to ask, remain relevant for all professionals and leads nicely into the chapter on quality improvement. The importance of quality improvement is clearly articulated by the authors with their suggested strategy for evaluating quality, including who to engage in the process(es). The quality improvement chapter provides the critical analysis of the organization that will lead to significant impact on volunteer engagement, sustainability, donor activity, and partnership development/growth.

While the concepts of leadership versus management may be debated forever, the author emphasizes the importance of the volunteer resource manager understanding the motivational foundation of volunteers and how their own leadership abilities help foster volunteer motivation. The discussion on leadership and management evolves into the chapter on organizational involvement. In this chapter, readers are challenged to look beyond their traditional resources to embrace diversity, in many forms. The author presents critical points to consider when evaluating how inclusive the organization is and how it might expand

opportunities. Readers are challenged to review policies, practices, and procedures to determine if they are actually serving as barriers to enhancing organizational capacity.

Volunteer resource managers find themselves serving as advocates for volunteer engagement and often do not even realize it when they are carrying-out their day-to-day activities. Key strategies and resources are provided, in this chapter, including the types of “background” information and research that must be done to effectively advocate. Building and strengthening partnerships and relationships can be a direct result of effective advocacy. Potential strategies to build partnerships, relationships, and alliances are provided and tied to volunteer engagement and sustainability.

It is important to understand the history of any profession or organization and often times, it may appear that individuals struggle to honor important components or

the work of others before them. It seems appropriate that, in this case, the history of the profession is the last chapter as it allows the reader to focus on the future, rather than getting entrenched in the past. The chapter shows the evolution of the profession of the volunteer administrator and the importance in growing and strengthening the profession.

In summary, this text provides a wealth of practical information supported by appropriate literature, research, and experiences of the individual chapter authors. While targeted specifically for those seeking to obtain their certification credentials, it is also a valuable text that many others in the profession of volunteer resource management will find valuable and useful.

About the Reviewer

Ryan J. Schmiesing, Ph.D. currently serves as the Director of Programs for the Ohio Community Service Council with primary responsibility for AmeriCorps programs in Ohio. With more than 14 years of non-profit, government, and community-based experience, Ryan has experience administering volunteer programs on the county, state, and national level. Ryan is a graduate of The Ohio State University where he focused his studies on volunteer engagement, research and statistics, and program development and administration. He serves currently as Associate Editor of *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration*.

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