

Forum for Discussion: The Employer's Role in the Professional Development of a Volunteer Administrator

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The following is presented as a *training design* for readers who wish to replicate the program presented at the 1991 Conference.

GROUP TYPE AND SIZE:

Presenters:

One experienced facilitator and four panel members, representing each of the following categories: a CVA (meaning a person who has earned the credential "Certified in Volunteer Administration" from the Association for Volunteer Administration); the employer of a CVA (preferred) or the employer of a non-CVA (second choice); a volunteer administrator (AVA member preferred) who is not a CVA; a corporate representative whose responsibilities include company volunteer programs or community service.

Participants:

Although the group most invested in the topic certainly will be the more experienced administrators, there is much to be gained by including newer members of the field, for their career guidance. We recommend no restrictions on participants, with size limited only by the available facilities.

OBJECTIVES:

This seminar demonstrates interactive dialogue between employers of volunteer administrators and diverse members of the field, in order to explore issues of professionalism and credentialing in volunteer administration as a career field.

TIME REQUIRED:

Subject to variation, a ninety-minute session would be recommended, although the three-hour session at the International Conference on Volunteer Administration allowed for more depth of discussion.

MATERIALS:

1. Either overhead projector, slides, pre-written flipchart pages, or handouts, with highlighted findings of the 1989 AVA Survey on Employer Recognition. (Note:

Joanne Holbrook Patton, who chaired AVA's surveys on Higher Education for Volunteer Managers and Employer Recognition, is Owner/Director of Patton Consultant Services. *Richard Koonce*, a PCS registrant, is Vice President of EnterChange, a national management consulting and transition firm and a regular commentator on jobs and the workplace, on National Public Radio. They served as moderator and facilitator respectively at the Seminar on this topic held at the 1991 AVA International Conference on Volunteer Administration.

copies of the overhead texts utilized at the 1991 AVA International Conference on Volunteer Administration may be obtained by writing Joanne H. Patton, 650 Asbury Street, South Hamilton, Massachusetts 01982.)

2. Flipchart and markers
3. Handouts of discussion questions
4. Copies of the 1989 AVA Survey on Employer Recognition for each panelist (Note: copies are available from the AVA office or Joanne Patton.)
5. Podium (microphone as necessary) and table with chairs for four panelists (microphones as necessary).

PHYSICAL SETTING:

For almost all audiences, a theater-style arrangement is acceptable. In the smallest group, a circle of chairs may be more conducive to discussion. In that case, panelists would sit in the circle, with the moderator in the middle, facilitating.

For an expanded three-hour version, seating at round tables would enable the facilitator to have small groups address some of the discussion questions, with a spokesperson from each table assigned to report the consensus recommendations.

PROCESS:

Well ahead of the event, the planners need to find and secure the key participants: the facilitator/moderator and the four panelists. All panelists must be willing to have read the AVA Employer Recognition Survey (which the planners will provide) prior to the session. In lieu of the full survey, the participants may read the summary which appeared in the Fall 1990 issue of *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* ("AVA Survey on Employer Recognition: A Report to the Membership" by Joanne Holbrook Patton). If the proceedings of this seminar are not to be taped for later transcription or excerpting, a recorder should be assigned to take notes for post-conference summaries.

The panelists should be asked to prepare a five-minute response to the following question:

What do you consider to be the most significant findings of the Employer Recognition Survey, from your perspective as a volunteer administrator or the employer of a volunteer administrator?

The panelists also are asked to come prepared to answer or discuss any of the following questions, which may be posed by the moderator:

- a. *Do you consider Volunteer Administration to be a profession? If so, why — if not, why not?*
- b. *What do you consider to be realistic career expectations for a person embarking on a career in volunteer administration?*
- c. *What advice would you give a volunteer administrator who seeks employer support for his or her career development?*
- d. *What support do you think should be expected from the employer or employing agency of a career-directed volunteer administrator?*
- e. *What recommendations would you give AVA toward involving the employer of a volunteer administrator in the career development process?*
- f. *How could AVA help various types and categories of volunteer administrators relate to each other as members of a generic professional field?*

At the opening of the seminar, the facilitator/moderator introduces the topic, giving a brief background of the Survey (10 to 15 minutes). If overhead slides are available, those

may provide background for summarizing some of the survey findings and recommendations. If not, a pre-marked flip chart may be utilized to focus on key points. If handouts are used in lieu of either, they should be simple, clear, and focused on the highlighted findings.

The moderator then introduces the panel, asking each for the five-minute commentary he/she has prepared from the question provided earlier.

When all panelists have spoken, the moderator asks them to comment on each other's points, if they wish. The audience is then invited to comment.

Depending on the flow of discussion, the moderator introduces the optional questions to the group. Typically, a question is posed to one panelist, and the others (and audience) are invited to respond.

(At this point, if the time and space are available, the moderator may direct that the participant tables address one or more of the discussion questions, calling for summarized comments from the table reporters at the end of a reasonable time.)

In all cases, time must be protected at the end of the seminar for a prioritized listing of the group's recommendations to AVA for action. This is best accomplished by having a separate recorder at the flip chart, to take down the suggestions. A second assistant can be a "runner" to take the sheets as filled and tape them to an adjacent wall space.

When only about ten minutes remain, the moderator must call for prioritizing by the full participant group (including the panelists). Each must select the top 5 priorities, in their individual view. A hand count is taken and the top 5 are acknowledged by the moderator with the concurrence of the participants.

At this point, there are two options:

1. A previously-assigned AVA representative (such as a Regional Chair) is identified, who briefly acknowledges hearing the recommendations and promises to pass them to the Board of AVA.
2. The moderator (with the prior concurrence of the planners) announces that the top five recommendations will be recorded and mailed to the participants, following the seminar, for their critique and returned to the planners, prior to sending them to AVA. This will require additional funds and paperwork on the part of the sponsors, but will allow for further involvement by the participants.

VARIATIONS:

As may be seen, there are many possibilities of variation within this training format. Key to its effectiveness, however, is keeping the panel composition balanced, with a variety of types and roles represented. Agencies represented should be of different types as well, if at all possible, unless the purpose is to explore the questions within a single setting (such as hospitals).

Following the initial seminar, a second step with much to commend it is to convene career discussion sessions in succeeding months, inspired by the seminar discussion. More informal and internal in scope, they would allow AVA or DOVIA members in smaller groups to explore some of the philosophical and practical issues related to their professional development. Tools for those discussions might include lists of questions such as the following, prepared by Richard A. Koonce, facilitator at the 1991 AVA International Conference:

As volunteer administrators . . .

- What do we call ourselves?
- How do we refer to ourselves?
- What words do we use in defining our profession?
- What is our individual responsibility in defining our career and its directions?
- How do we empower ourselves?
- How do we communicate across different languages and cultures in relating to our colleagues, internationally?

- What is the profile of today's volunteer?
- What will the need for volunteers be in the future?
- How will this impact on the volunteer administrator's career development?
- Who can be a member of AVA? Who is excluded?
- How can we make our language inclusive?
- What life experience is relevant to our field?
- Do the values of the CVA outweigh its burden to us individually and as a field?

Designed by Mr. Koonce in his professional role as a career counselor, these questions are meant to involve individuals in examining professional issues about which the individual is challenged to take a position.

Many other relevant and provocative questions could be suggested, and should be, by local planners in order to promote reflective discussion and involvement by their members in serious career questions.

SUGGESTED READING:

Richard Koonce recommends the following as reading in career and professional development, for volunteer administrators and others: *Careermap: Deciding What You Want, Getting It, and Keeping It* by Neil Yeager, John Wiley & Sons, Publishers; *Taming Your Gremlin: A Guide to Enjoying Yourself* by Richard Carson, Harper & Row, Publisher; *Do What You Love and the Money Will Follow: Discovering Your Right Livelihood* by Marsha S. Sinetar, Dell Publishers.