

[News and Hot Topics](#) » Needed: A Multi-level Approach to Credentialing
Volunteer Management

Needed: A Multi-level Approach to Credentialing Volunteer Management

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

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Volunteer management has been an “emerging profession” ever since I’ve been in the field – which is now 40 years. Those who want to further “professionalization” are concerned about finding a way to gain recognition from employers and colleagues that successful volunteer engagement requires special knowledge and competence. They want a universally-accepted “credential.” On the surface, that seems reasonable, but we can’t settle for one-size-fits-all.

During the Australasian Retreat on Advanced Volunteer Management in New Zealand last month, the topic of professionalization surfaced several times because Volunteering New Zealand is working on the Managers of Volunteers Project, “a national initiative promoting the recognition and professional development of Managers of Volunteers.” This, of course, is only the newest of many efforts at codifying the work of those who lead volunteer efforts, whatever the position is called (see the sidebar for several of the most established programs in several countries).

Several Retreat attendees had just finished taking the examination required by the [Council on Certification in Volunteer Management](#) (CCVA) and shared that they felt that some of the questions asked were about unimportant matters; a week later, one of these colleagues learned that she had failed the test; in response, another colleague shared that she had failed it twice in the past.

At some point during my visit Down Under, I had something of an epiphany that crystallized what has been troubling me for a long time about credentialing: **we are in great danger of institutionalizing leadership of volunteers both within a *limited* definition and at its present *low-level* status.** If we test or approve only the narrow basics of our work, we lose the opportunity to reward those already at a much higher level and, worse, send the wrong message about what our profession is really about.

What Is vs. What Can Be

First we need to be honest. While there are many visionary and creative leaders of volunteers to be found all over, the majority of people in this job today do it part-time and half-heartedly. They focus on learning how to do the necessary tasks of volunteer management without any interest in why, philosophy, social context, or organizational development.

Unfortunately, too few directors of volunteer involvement are on their organization's executive management team, expected to participate in system-wide strategizing. Both practitioners and CEOs perceive the role to be a low-rung stepping stone out of which the best people will be promoted into more responsible positions.

One result of this range of attitudes in the field is that our professional associations struggle to accommodate both those who want to pursue the work as a career and those who want to leave it as soon as possible. This also means the basics need to be taught repeatedly to keep up with turnover in volunteer management jobs. This next spills over into workshops, conferences, academic courses, and writing for the field. In order to get participants, registrants, students, and readers, sponsoring groups must appeal to a common denominator, often the lowest one. Anything labeled as "advanced" is a hard sell if it seems to include discussions that are not practical or immediately applicable.

One thing we *have* achieved as a field over the last four decades is some agreement on the basic skills needed to be successful in coordinating volunteers. We have articulated and can teach how to design volunteer work, recruit, interview, screen, orient, train, supervise, keep records on, and thank unpaid workers. But please note that this list – as familiar as it may be – is **entry-level** expertise. It is, as I said, a list of the *basic* skills for *coordinating* volunteers, the hands-on activities of daily work running a volunteer program.

It looks as if Australia offers some way to earn higher levels of accreditation or diplomas, but most of the "professional" standards being applied today are about *doing not leading*. They institutionalize volunteer management as little more than running an unpaid temporary labor force available to those who run the agency as a whole.

What's Missing

Where is our *vision* of what our work stands for, should be, or can be when done with full organizational support? Don't we want to make earning a credential a symbol of top achievement in outside-the-box leadership? Don't we want to prove that our role is vital to volunteers, the organizations they serve, and society as a whole?

Our credentialing programs must lead the way in clarifying language in order to highlight the breadth and scope of volunteerism. For example:

- We must never talk about volunteers as only being part of *nonprofit* organizations, as they are active as well in government/public agencies, for-profit settings, political action, and unincorporated groups. Similarly, we need to include the arts, environmentalism, activism, and

all other causes way beyond the traditional “default” of human services and healthcare settings.

- Are we striving to be skilled in *administration*, *management*, or *leadership* (just to name three common terms)? Do we run volunteer *programs*, *resources*, *services*, *engagement*, or ????. And is there a difference among all these terms?
- What about all the many forms of voluntary service that too often feel no connection to the vocabulary of “volunteering”? The CVA designation should imply ability to work with boards of directors, student interns, stipended national service participants, court-ordered workers, self-help groups, pro bono advisors, etc., etc. Does it now?
- The model of volunteers working alongside paid staff in an agency is only one form of community engagement. The personnel office functions that succeed there are too limited for leadership of all-volunteer associations, professional societies, faith communities, unincorporated neighborhood groups, and online communities. Someone accredited in volunteer management ought to have at least some understanding of how to mobilize volunteers when the formal human resources approach isn’t appropriate.

It is rare to see any mention of this enormous range of volunteerism in existing accreditation literature or exams. Unless this diversity (and sometimes controversy) is front and center, we risk continuously narrowing volunteer management only to the tiny part of our field that uses the words *volunteer*, *work*, *program*, *nonprofit*, and *human services*. Unfortunately, the new 500+ page “textbook” from CCVA falls into many of the traps above, partially because – again, in order to achieve external acceptance – academics were sought as writers and they simply didn’t have any vision of today and tomorrow, only the paltry research of yesterday. Yet it is the study of that flawed textbook that is being tested in the exam my Kiwi colleague “failed.”

When will we distinguish, or at least explain, the difference and the connections between the work we do and that of such fields as fundraising and development, association management, service-learning, special events organizing, human resources, community organizing, and more?

Finally, at what point do we see our future inexorably linked to the way the world perceives and treats volunteers themselves? *Advocacy for volunteering* ought to be a requirement for certification, with candidates demonstrating the value they themselves put on participatory democracy and how they work to remove barriers placed continually in front of people who want to give their time to important causes.

The Ultimate Question

At what level of authority do we feel leaders of volunteers should be placed within an organization and is that one of the criteria for earning a credential? Or do we allow someone eight levels below the

executive team and the status/salary of a secretary to become certified in exactly the same way as the person who is second in command and instrumental in making organizational decisions?

We must push for and reward an updated *career ladder* in volunteer management. Let's identify today's credentials as entry-level and define the promotional possibilities for everyone to aim at them (employers, too!).

This may mean having to develop accreditation in ways different from other professions. We may possibly have to do this without the academic research so often used to validate best practice – at least until university faculty catch up to where our field is today. I do not have the answer to how to do this yet, but individualized peer review is the key (which CCVA does do well as part of the portfolio process in addition to the exam).

If we are unwilling to fight for our acceptance at our rightful level, we will never be a “profession.” We will instead continue down the path of putting seals of approval on competent worker bees. Ultimately we will turn away the best and the brightest who have found new and different ways to unleash the potential of volunteers. Those colleagues won't pass the tests or fit the molds we are institutionalizing and they won't care.

We have to aim much, much higher.

- *What are your feelings about certification, standards, qualifications, etc. for volunteer management?*
- *Have you earned such a credential and how has it helped you? Have you tried and failed to earn a credential and what did that mean to you?*
- *If you have no interest in credentialing, why not?*
- *What would make certification relevant to you – and meaningful to the future of our profession?*

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Submitted on 31 July 2011 by Gerald (Jerry) Pannozzo, CVA, Program Coordinator, MSHQ, New York, NY, USA

Credentialing within any profession includes: measure up to established standards; understand the field and best practices; ability to implement; leadership; etc. Most professions involve school, mastering skills and then entering the field. I applied for CVA after I had been in the field for two or three years since it was “performance based”. I've used my CVA credentials to start conversations. I pitch “performance based” since school programs are unfamiliar (or non-existent) to persons I've addressed over the years. After receiving my CVA I enrolled in the NYC Big Brothers Big Sister and Fordham University Graduate School of Social Services one-semester class and earned a certificate in mentoring supervisor. I don't pitch it because it is sector specific. After I entered healthcare I didn't go for the CAVS because I wasn't sure how long I'd work in healthcare. Last fall I enrolled in a college therapeutic recreation (TR) program – something !

I'm exploring. TR is a profession with similarities – the TR professional is often not recognized as requiring a specific skill set. In the beginning I learned a TR specialist is “...personally responsible for maintaining and improving knowledge, involved with research, and has an obligation to colleagues and the profession.” We don't have such a universally accepted introduction into our profession.

Career vs. a job issue made me think of a previous Hot Topic about the perception of the profession (anyone can do the job) in contrast to what is involved with effective volunteer resource management. That is why I think credentialing has value when it comes to promoting qualifications and advocating credibility. The current options might have flaws; however, we need to start somewhere. I'm intrigued by the advanced credentialing and see it as valuable for some. My concern is that we don't have (for example) an associate degree or undergrad degree in place. How do we add the master degree program? I'm not saying it shouldn't be a goal.

I think we are challenged by the diversity of environments where we work. These various work places and their different cultures influence those who hire us. Within places that employ us there can be a wide range of skill sets they are looking for in the person who manages, administers, leads, coordinates, etc. the volunteers, volunteer programs, volunteer services, volunteer engagement, etc. These factors further challenge those working on standardizing certification venues.

Remaining optimistic and looking forward to the discussion as it continues in the October 2011 [e-Volunteerism!](#)

Submitted on 29 July 2011 by Anne B. Schink, Consultant in Volunteer Management, , South Portland, Maine, USM

My colleague, Larry Ullian, and I created Competencies for Managers of Volunteers to demonstrate the breadth and depth of competencies required of the typical manager of volunteers. The competencies include four categories: managing oneself, managing people, managing projects, and leadership and advocacy. In many respects they mirror the Body of Knowledge required for the CVA. A unique feature is the Novice to Expert continuum that accompanies the competencies. This is the most relevant component for this discussion on what makes up an 'advanced' program to train or document the skills required of an experienced manager of volunteers.

A “Novice” level manager acquires the basic vocabulary and knowledge required of a new manager of volunteers. An “Intermediate” level manager knows how to apply skills and knowledge in the design and implementation of a successful volunteer program. An “Advanced” manager has most of the skills under his/her belt, and realizes that it isn't entirely working. At this point a manager can Plan, Do, Study, Adapt (PDSA), as the classic experiential education model describes. An “Expert” manager knows how to apply knowledge in a range of contexts.

The implication for training is not that the content of training needs to be different (recruiting volunteers, managing fundraising events, advocating for your program) but the approach to teaching

needs to be significantly different. An advanced course in volunteer screening needs to build on the experience of participants. The trainer becomes a facilitator of shared learning on the part of participants who often have enough experience in the group to support one another as they struggle with the challenges of building a program with depth on the foundation of the basic criteria of a sound volunteer program. While a presenter at the novice level may get away with standing in front of the room with a power point presentation about the elements that make up a basic level of understanding of a volunteer program, a presenter for an advanced course must 'trust the wisdom of the group' to share their own knowledge and wrestle with the complexities of situations, dilemmas, and ethical considerations. This is the essence of reflective practice and is considerably more rewarding for advanced practitioners.

At the risk of shameless self-promotion, Larry Ullian and I would also note that two chapters on Professionalism and Advocacy in the new Volunteer Management Handbook 2nd Edition, to be published by Wiley in November, deal extensively with these concepts of taking volunteer management to the next level, both how individual practitioners find their own voices and use them to advocate for their own job, program, and organization and how managers of volunteers advance the profession of volunteer management as it is regarded in the wider world.

Submitted on 29 July 2011 by Pat Younger, Director of Volunteer Services, Mountain Valley Hospice and Palliative Care, Mount Airy, NC, USA

First let me say I am proud to be a graduate and certified as a CVA from the CCVA. And for the record, I did not pass it the first time, either. A side-effect of the process was that I learned a great deal about time management and self-determination.

I had the opportunity to pursue the state CAVS credential, but felt it too narrow, so I chose the international certification offered by the CCVA. It was one of the most thought provoking, in-depth studies I have ever done. I had to examine the reasons why I am in this field and that self-analysis has prompted me to become a huge advocate for elevation and recognition of this discipline--and it is a discipline.

I received certification in December of 2010 and had been a Volunteer Manager since 1996. While differing degrees of certification may be worthwhile, maintaining this credentialing at the very least acknowledges that the manager is skilled in core areas of volunteer management. While I agree CVA studies seemed to lean more toward health care and definitely non-profits, it was a great fit for me because that's my field. Again, the CVA study and credentialing process took me from a mediocre manager with a local view of volunteer management to an advocate for the profession at the national level. As for being a better manager because of the CVA piece of paper--absolutely. The process itself was invaluable and worthy of my time and attention.

It would be interesting to see different levels of credentialing though. As we all know--if we're changing, we're learning and vice-versa.

October Issue of *e-Volunteerism* will be devoted to credentialing.

The conversation on credentialing has been so lively here, and the whole topic so important, that we have decided to devote an entire issue of *e-Volunteerism* to it. This special themed issue will be available in October 2011, opening the 11th volume year of the publication. It will include articles explaining the various credentialing programs operating in different countries and comments from those administering certification and those with personal experience obtaining it – or choosing not to. Thanks to all the people who responded here, giving us a head start.

Note from Susan, 21 July 2011

On July 12th, Norman Shaw from England posted his thoughtful reply here as a cross-posting from his blog called "Uncollectiveconsciousness" on i-Volunteer. He has generated some wonderful and thoughtful discussion -- and has even posted a second part and a third part rebuttal! Read all (links broken, 2014):

- Wanted Bricklayer: Thoughts on VM Qualifications: <http://www.i-volunteer.org.uk/uncollectiveconsciousness/wanted-bricklayer...>
- Wanted Bricklayer, part 2: <http://www.i-volunteer.org.uk/uncollectiveconsciousness/wanted-bricklayer...>
- I'm Already a VM...(rebuttal): <http://www.i-volunteer.org.uk/uncollectiveconsciousness/im-already-a-vol...>

Good stuff!

Submitted on 13 July 2011 by H. Roberts, President, PLNJ Inc., Keyport/NJ, USA

The replies to this hot topic have been interesting to read but questions remain:

<http://cvacert.org/resources-and-media/cva-registry/>

- Could someone explain the purpose behind a public registry of CVA graduates and why before 2000 graduates were grandfathered from having to re-certify? Or why the graduate after 2000 contains a high number of discontinued studies; marked as expired. Are expired CVA graduates retired? Does an expired mark appearing before a working professional name make sense to anyone?
- It would be interesting to learn how CCVA tracks graduates progress in the field; what constitutes re-certification and why a professional outcomes study does not appear on the organizations website.
- Who beyond the Board members, sponsors and delighted graduates evaluates the progress and impact of CCVA over time?
- Like any continuing educational pursuit that involves solid research, a financial investment in your career and the hopes for a positive outcome, many general guidelines are missing for someone still not convinced by "in house" high praise alone.

Before learning about a multi level approach, understanding the current approach for the readers of this valuable topic seems quite appropriate.

Submitted on 12 July 2011 by Bruce Summers, Principal, Summers "Engagement" Consulting, Annandale, VA, USA

Thank you for the thought provoking hot topic.

A few thoughts...

- When I received my CVA 6 years ago, several of my peers asked why did you go for your CVA, several of these colleagues were also national volunteer engagement leads for their organizations, my answers: why not, also, I wanted to model that working towards a CVA was a good thing for the other 700 Directors and Chairs of Volunteers in my network at the American Red Cross.
- My vision was that one day executive directors and CEOs would automatically include CVA as a preferred credential and that there would be a ready source of CVAs inside of and outside of the Red Cross for hiring managers to choose from.
- I am proud to say that a large number of Red Crossers have subsequently worked hard, studied, prepared, completed practical experience and completed CVA.
- Externally the number of applicants for CVA continues to increase, while at the same time CCVA continually works towards enhancing resource materials and requirements. This is a good thing.
- Perhaps, Susan is noting that we have reached that watershed moment when the CVA credential is being recognized by employers as a preferred or as a desired credential. This also is a good thing.
- Six years ago hiring managers were asking... how hard can it be to pass out applications to potential volunteers? It sounds like we are making progress, that the CVA ensures at least a minimum floor of competency, and sometime it indicates much much more (well at least some organizations have gotten past thinking the only qualification for a volunteer manager is that they can spell volunteer correctly 2 times out of 3 or that they worked as a volunteer).

I for one advocate that colleges and universities do two things...

- First - add more meaty volunteer engagement curriculum to their nonprofit studies degrees.
- Second - search for the more advanced volunteer engagement practitioners, thought leaders and academics to make these courses come alive for students.

As Susan notes it is an evolving, exciting and intriguing field and we need to continue to raise the bar for the field for basic, intermediate and more advanced practitioners.

Submitted on 12 July 2011 by Norman Shaw, Volunteer Manager, Manchester, England

WANTED BRICKLAYER

Thoughts on VM qualifications:

Have I got relevant qualification/s in volunteer management?

The answer YES

Does that make me a better volunteer manager?

The answer NO

Why do I say this; well for the following reasons:

Having recruited/interviewed many people for both paid and unpaid roles in my time, I have found that text book learning gained from "classroom" settings, be that in industry, commerce, or indeed volunteer management is no different; in that such text book learning is often quickly out of date, and rarely matches the real world and environment, with its many local, national, global and/or subjective challenges and imponderables.

A world which seems to change ever faster in respect of politics, culture, philosophy etc, to such a degree that qualifications per's a are now often outpaced, and can no longer keep up with such a morphing environment.

Equally, I have come across many people who have numerous high level paper qualifications, in the form of diplomas, degrees, masters, etc, for some it seems enough to wallpaper a living room; and yet despite all of these qualifications, upon speaking to them, there is still something fundamental that is missing. For such qualifications alone, can never demonstrate that inner spark; and the quality that many desire to be demonstrated in a volunteer manager; in other words the difference that sets us aside from managers who manage paid staff.

It is I feel, because I have done both, that I have found that there is a crucial difference between the two disciplines, and as a result I have concluded that the paid manager square peg, does not fit the volunteer manager round hole!

Here in the UK, in part I believe as a result of the governments concept of the "Big Society", we now seem to be awash with all manner of volunteer manager qualifications of one form or another, and at one level or another; together with an ever increasing number of authors, and so called "expert consultants" who are apparently seeping out of every big society crevice, some of whom have no personal experience of volunteer management and/or have had any contact with the voluntary sector, over and above dropping a few coins into the charity tin on a street corner collection, in much the same way as many solicitors were conveyancing experts one week, and accident/injury specialists the next, why; well you work it out?!

Qualifications do have a purpose; the purpose is to demonstrate to others that as a volunteer manager, you can answer a set of pre-prescribed questions; questions that more and more are being

directly ported from courses in generic HR, Business management, and can be answered with the same tired and predictable corporate one size fits all clone approach to managing people, and appropriately cut and pasted in order to gain the qualification.

(Not that anyone would ever do that, in order to become volunteer managers in the shortest possible time!)

Therefore the question is; is this what we want?

Do we want an attack of the clones!, well we could all sit down and do a SWOT analysis, that would no doubt help (then I woke up!)

Ok, So what does make a better, more "qualified" volunteer manager, I hear you ask?

The answer, as always is experience, and plenty of it!

After all, would you let a bricklayer build your house, based on a paper qualification alone?

Submitted on 12 July 2011 by Claire Teal, Project Manager, Volunteering New Zealand, Wellington, New Zealand

Thank you for mentioning the Volunteering NZ Managers of Volunteers Project in your Hot Topic. I do feel I need to correct the point you make, though, that this Project is about 'codifying the work of those who lead volunteer efforts'. Sure, we are looking at a qualifications pathway for Leaders and Managers of Volunteers in NZ, but that is one part of the much bigger whole that is the Project. The Project is about the development of a Learning and Development Pathway for Leaders and Managers of Volunteers, but it is also about culture change - recognising, resourcing and supporting the vital work done by these skilled people within our organisations.

In actual fact, the work we're doing in NZ reflects several of the factors you suggest we should be considering in our attempts at credentialing:

- One of the real successes of the Project thus far is that it has engaged with volunteer-involving organisations across the spectrum. At our meetings, reps from volunteer-involving government organisations sit next to reps from sport organisations sit next to reps from health organisations
- We are becoming accustomed to referring to what we do as 'leadership': of organisations, teams, communities
- We are aware of, and seeking to reflect in the work we are doing, that Managers and Leaders of Volunteers work with volunteers in a wide variety of roles, including Board Trustees

We believe that a 'qualification' is important, and I personally do agree with you that we need to critically examine where we are setting the bar in respect to this. However, the best qualification in the world counts for nothing if the culture that exists within our society and organisations remains unchanged. That is why the NZ Project is viewing its Learning and Development Pathway (entry-level

to Masters and beyond, we're calling it!) as part of a PACKAGE for increasing recognition of Managers and Leaders of Volunteers, not the silver bullet. To us, it is about seeking to:

- Support Leaders and Managers to advocate for their importance from within their organisations
- Encouraging the development of support/mentoring networks for Leaders and Managers
- Work with CEO's / Board Chairs / other 'power-brokers' within organisations so that we're all going on this education journey together
- Develop best practice guidelines for organisations around the need for volunteers and their leadership to have a central role in the organisation

Maybe we're being optimistic, but so far we're seeing a picture develop that has us as a volunteer-involving sector getting into the same canoe and learning how to paddle in the same direction. Qualifications are going to be a key part of that...but 'part' is the operative word in that sentence.

Submitted on 09 July 2011 by Wendy Moore, Volunteer Coordinator, Brisbane, Australia

Thank you Susan for a brilliant article. You have so succinctly presented a frank narrative on the realities of our profession. I had the opportunity last year to gain a part scholarship for a Certificate IV in Volunteer Coordination. While a death in the family meant postponing the course, I have since given it very careful consideration and have decided against doing the course for the following reasons. The course covered basic volunteer coordination skills. The course was structured to provide a Certificate IV for recognition of prior learning based on evidence of skills gained on the job. While the assumption was made by the course providers that I had no qualifications, I actually have two qualifications, a Bachelor's Degree and an Associate Diploma in related business fields. To invest money in obtaining a lower level qualification where I would learn no new skills or advanced concepts would be a complete waste of money, time and effort. I incorporate the knowledge gained from my current qualifications into my career and many other aspects of my life. I believe that study pursued at a diploma or degree level broadens the mind to think beyond basic concepts and evolves creative, innovative thought processes.

I do not fit the mould. I never have and never will. Some say I am a free spirit or a free thinker, a label that I am happy to wear. Generally, I do not believe in pigeon holing, labelling or stereotyping for to do so gives a one size fits all approach. We are all different. How we learn and the speed at which we learn is different. Our perceptions, belief systems, attitudes, values and the way in which we think determine how we will utilize information and evolve.

I would encourage volunteer managers to gain a Diploma or Degree in Business incorporating a major in Volunteer Management. Many business qualifications provide a broad range of skills including, human resources, accounting, group dynamics and psychology, marketing, information technology and systems, statistics and more. I do not believe that volunteer management is currently offered as a major of a business qualification but I think that it should be.

My preference for courses for myself would be one to three day courses in leadership, strategic planning, advocacy and ethics to name just a few. I am interested in advanced concepts which challenge and encourage intellectual discussion. I believe that to bring about certification of our profession we need to have a collective, positive, proactive, voice to make the changes necessary to make our sector a recognised and valued profession.

Submitted on 08 July 2011 by Sharon, Volunteer Engagement Coordinator, Canada

I also read your last newsletter regarding the accreditations on the profession. I really like how you see the future of this profession and I feel there is no stronger advocate than you in this arena..thank you. My view however is that the organizations, Executive Directors and the culture in which we work in have to recognize the strength of our accreditations. We could have harder questions, longer essays and require more workshops in attendance but until the not for profit sector see us as vital, our letters mean nothing to them. Unless of course we are only pleasing ourselves.

It's like the book 'tipping point', which is about when something goes from obscure to awesome. Essentially I think it's the attachment that others give the item or issue. We have a mob mentality after all and we love to follow the 'in' crowd. If we wear our letters with pride, flaunt them, cover them in glitter and take a deep breath before uttering their existence at the end of our name...then others will stop and think 'wow, ya they are something special'. I think making it harder to get will come after we make them all the rage to get!

Well, that's my two cents. Probably not that impressive after your amazing article but I honestly feel passionate about this profession and hopefully one day I have as much passion, drive and excellence as you do about this very topic...until then I will keep trying.

Submitted on 08 July 2011 by Susie Kapelovitz, Volunteer Coordinator, St. Benedict's Health Center, Dickinson, ND, USA

The Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration has a very good certification program. In a twelve hour course participants cover Volunteer Motivation & Conducting Effective Interviews, Planning for Retention, Recruiting Volunteers, Supervising Volunteers, Recognizing Volunteers, Managing Risk, Positioning Your Volunteers Program for Success, and Singing Your Praises...Measuring Your Impact.

Health Care Auxiliary of Minnesota worked with MAVA to present this valuable lesson to anyone who could attend. I live in ND but belong to HCAM for the great resources they provide to those of volunteer leaders in health care.

You should contact [MAVA](#) - they are leaders in this field!

Submitted on 08 July 2011 by Christine Kocken, Manager of Volunteer Services, St. Vincent Hospital, Green Bay, Wisconsin, USA

What a great article! I have been a Manager of Volunteer Services for 11 years and I am certified by AHVRP (CAVS). I believe this certification has given me the tools to better understand the challenges presented to us and how to cope with them. I have done committee work for WADVS(WI Assoc. of Directors of Volunteer Services) such as re-writing the Policy & Procedures and the By-Laws. Becoming involved and working with my peers has been a great experience and resource for me. I am all for national certification but would like to see an inclusion of standards of measurement/benchmarking that would be beneficial to us as Managers.

Again, thank you for such a wonderful article and your efforts to promote and bring value to our profession.

Submitted on 07 July 2011 by Nancy Libbey, Volunteer, Volunteer Opportunities In Community Endeavors, Lewisburg, PA, USA

As a sitting member of the CCVA Exam Writing Committee, I have particular interest in this issue's Hot Topic. The CCVA credential is specifically designed for a candidate with three years of experience in the field....essentially a relative novice when you consider the length of time many of us have been active. I believe the credential accurately assesses the skills and abilities of a competent coordinator/manager/director with that tenure in the field.

In continuing to work with my committee colleagues to refine the exam process to target the specific skills and knowledge that demonstrate the "three-year-old" level of competence, I am proud to say the CCVA credential has made great strides. The new text is one more recently written resource used to "back up" the Exam process, but other accepted best practices espoused by experts in the field who are not represented in the text are also used to validate a candidate's competence. In addition, the certification portfolio requires an analytic essay which is a more active demonstration of active competence, and there is also a component which assesses awareness of ethical strength, an essential building block in our profession.

Having said that, I agree that there ought to be ways to assess a higher level of experience and competence based on longer time in the field, greater breadth of experience and more challenging work assignments. Credentialing also needs to take into account cultural differences which occur not only across different countries but also within the US, such as urban vs. rural areas.

There is no one solution, but all of us in the field should strive to present ourselves professionally and to act in an ethical, responsible and culturally sensitive manner to best serve our volunteer base, our organizations and our society. Ultimately it would be a ideal if we could all be "recognized" as professionals by our managers and CEO's, but I strongly believe that each individual carries some responsibility for the way he/she is perceived in the workplace and in the community.

Submitted on 07 July 2011 by Tanya Hutchison, Director of Volunteer Resources, Central Valley Network, California, USA

I found your article very informative. I have been a director of volunteer services for exactly 6 months and I realize that is a short time compared to most of the individuals that are reading this article. I believe certification is essential to be recognized as a leader in any field. I came to this position with many years of health care management experience, in my former role I earned a CHAM certification which is a Certified Health Access Manager and believe that the nationally recognized certification has been extremely beneficial.

I have been on the search for volunteer management certifications as well as standard measures for this field and have found little information. I believe it would be meaningful to the future of our profession to establish not only a certification but also standards of measurements for benchmarking. From what I understand so far (so early in my new role) that the recent changes in technology and volunteer requirements especially in health care based volunteerism have lead a paradigm shift in volunteer management responsibilities. A nationally or worldwide certification of volunteer management will only help us to meet the challenge of a consistently changing environment that we experience as managers, directors and coordinators of volunteer services. Again thank you for your article.

Submitted on 07 July 2011 by Priscilla Gamb, Director, Volunteer & Customer Services, Huntington Hospital, Pasadena, CA, USA

This article is long overdue. Fortunately I am a Volunteer Director in a large community non-profit hospital where the position is highly regarded by the President/CEO, Vice presidents and my fellow Directors. My involvement occurs at every level of decision making as the 1400+ volunteers in this organization are highly respected and valued. I couldn't agree more with Susan Ellis' statement: "One result of this range of attitudes in the field is that our professional associations struggle to accommodate both those who want to pursue the work as a career and those who want to leave it as soon as possible. This also means the basics need to be taught repeatedly to keep up with turnover in volunteer management jobs. This next spills over into workshops, conferences, academic courses, and writing for the field. In order to get participants, registrants, students, and readers, sponsoring groups must appeal to a common denominator, often the lowest one."

We are our own worst enemy in professionalizing our work. I totally agree that we must push for and reward an updated career ladder in volunteer management, identify today's credentials as entry-level and work together to define the promotional possibilities. Thank you for this excellent, stimulating and deadly accurate article.

Submitted on 07 July 2011 by C, Volunteer Program Coordinator, Canada

This is a great article and certainly one that needed to be out there for a long while. I am caught in between a rock and a hard place and your article speaks volumes to me.

On the one hand, I advocate for standards and qualifications to denote some basic knowledge and practice base for administering volunteer programs. On the other, I agree that this puts all of us who may be working in environments that don't support this profession in awkward situations - what good does certification do an individual who is paid a low wage or is not given the due respect for their current job?

I am currently certified with the Canadian Administrators of Volunteer Resources and know that they are re-visiting their certification criteria. This article is very timely.

To me, certification would mean a lot more if employers/boards/directors etc. understood the magnitude of the work we do and the expertise that each individual brings to a position.

What makes a person who is certified in Human Resources more "valuable" than those that aren't? How did that area of expertise grow?

Submitted on 07 July 2011 by Samantha Andrews, Volunteer Services Manager, Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, TN, USA

Our field is universally undefined. It is not one recognized by academia, and there is no basic degree in volunteer management. Instead, we embark by learning, by doing and by seeking out any and all opportunities for enrichment. Volunteer Administration gurus to model ourselves after aren't found easily via Google search! Along our career path we find the titles of Volunteer Coordinator, Volunteer Manager, and Volunteer Director interchangeable regardless of experience or responsibility.

We seek validation within circles and professional groups of our own design and formation, and the CVA continues to be the only badge of honor offered in our field. I'm hoping the next forty years provides time for extensive research and evaluation in order to establish and codify our value as professionals. Until we have clear definitions of what our career ladder looks like, what is appropriate compensation for each level of responsibility, and accurate measurements achievable through respectable accreditations and certificates, we will continue to have to prove ourselves.

TERRIFIC article!

Submitted on 07 July 2011 by Angela Williamson, Volunteer Coordinator, Hagley Museum & Library, Wilmington, DE, USA

A one time, one test, one qualifier, one certificate will most likely never emerge to solve the issues.

I do think that something is needed to assist in giving some kind of recognition and "professionalism" to the Volunteer Coordinator/Manager/Leader role. There are certainly philosophical topics to discuss and work to resolve in the field. However, we need something in the meantime to help people who are in the profession (for whatever reason they are there) become better at what they do. I have

the CVA and see it as a step not a destination. It was helpful to clarify my own thoughts and experiences. If everyone passes the test/portfolio it would make me wonder about the validity of the certification. I do not believe that a certain # or % should fail to prove a point, but I would imagine not 100% of applicants are all at the same level.

I strive to continue learning and see life and my journey in the volunteer coordinating field as an opportunity to grow as a person and to influence others as well.

A multi-pronged approach is needed as with anything.

Submitted on 06 July 2011 by Brenda J. Greenberg, Director of Volunteer Services, Northern Services Group, Monsey, NY, USA

I found your article very interesting and a formulation in print of what I have believed for a long time. I have been a Volunteer Manager for 35 years in 4 different venues and, in each, had to learn about the milieu in which I was expected to function. At one time or another, I have had to deal with all of the things you cited. I was involved in the field long before the formalized certificate was produced and by now have no wish to seek it.

The volunteer administrator needs to be basically a "people person". He/she needs to have the flexibility to keep on learning as times and the world around us continues to change. The needs of any agency or organization continually change as well. I have learned that it is so important to have the staff with which you work buy into the idea that volunteers are there to assist and not to steal a job.

I could go on and on, but shall close by again saying that the insights in your article are especially cogent.

Submitted on 06 July 2011 by Marji Trachtman, Volunteer Coordinator, Bellevue Police Department, Bellevue, WA, USA

I'm proud to have earned the CVA during this most recent cycle. I see it as the first step in raising the professional bar for those of us who do this for a living, and would like to see it expanded to perhaps encompass different levels of certification in order to distinguish basic proficiency from higher-level performance. I've been at this job for 17 years and I'm taking the same test and ending up with the same credential as someone who's only done it for 3 years. That doesn't seem quite right given what the differences would be in our experiences and abilities.

I work for a municipal government and our City leadership puts great stock in professional certification/credentials of any kind and that was one reason I pursued this, although it will not gain me a promotion or reclassification. In my organization at least, the author is correct in that "Volunteer Coordinator" (or whatever title is used) is considered a basic clerical/administrative job. It's not considered a management job because (so they claim) it does not involve management of paid staff and consequently there is less risk and less responsibility involved. I don't agree with that at all

however changing their minds won't happen overnight. I see the CVA as one teensy step in the direction of helping them see that there are in fact serious management skills and abilities associated with running a volunteer program.

I whole-heartedly agree with the author's concerns about the textbook used and its almost exclusive focus on traditional nonprofits. I found it frustrating that there was virtually no acknowledgement of the vast array of organizations in which volunteers can be found and the issues and challenges that each must deal with. There are commonalities of course but there also are significant differences and none of those were even mentioned.

Having said all this, though, I believe the CVA is a good start towards professional credibility and I feel it was absolutely worth the time and effort to achieve.

Submitted on 06 July 2011 by Lee Rose, Communications Manager, HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, Ottawa, Canada

The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector is a national organization that takes action on nonprofit labour force issues in Canada. We are currently undertaking a joint project with CAVR (Canadian Administrators of Volunteer Resources) to develop an occupational standard for people who manage the efforts of volunteers.

The Occupational Standard will, for the first time, establish criteria and identify essential skills required for the position of an administrator of volunteers. The standard will also allow people pursuing this career track with benchmarks and concrete examples of career progression within the field.

For more information about this initiative, please visit www.hrcouncil.ca.

Submitted on 06 July 2011 by Donna Lockhart, Consultant - Volunteer Engagement, The RETHINK Group, Peterborough, Canada

Thanks as usual Susan for causing us to think again and more about this challenge. Just to let you know in Canada, CAVR (Canadian Assoc for Volunteer Resources) and the HR Council for Non Profits are currently conducting research/work to develop Occupational Standards for the position Administrator of Volunteers. I am currently a member of the Advisory Committee. Our feeling has been that 'status' is or has been tied to a base level of occupational standards - and that volunteer management has not had such an 'approved' base...and if occupational standards were set it would be one more step towards the 'professionalizing' of this field.

I designed and teach the College level Certificate in Volunteer Management and have always had to use my experience and best research/practices to design training/education. The Occupational Standards will help all of us define an entry level that will be approved and accepted by powers that

be. Once in place it is hoped that communication to many will move the position up the ladder in nonprofits so the senior staff 'get the fact' that training is required, even at this level.

Our Fundraisers and HR people faced the same dilemma years ago and once Occupational Standards were set, training institutions could then go ahead and align or design curriculum to meet this base level and ultimately those fields of work did become professions...we feel we came at it backwards here: we designed curriculum without a base standard and expected 'professionalism' to be automatic. If you don't have an entry level defined and encourage all who enter the field to have this, it is harder and harder to encourage association certification as the next piece. To my mind your CVA credential and certification in associations is where the next level of expertise is provided and the opportunity to maintain one's status in the field. If one believes it is important to be certified and there is impact on career movement, then it will have true value.

Like you, I have waited forever for the profession to emerge. If we don't build it ourselves, the CEO is not going to...but if we build a base and convince those that hire the importance of qualified staff to do the work, I think this is a first step. Once the base is defined I am hopeful that people will ask "what's next?" and will continue to seek other forms of training/certification that keeps them both relevant and informed on new changes and research in the field.

Submitted on 06 July 2011 by Shannon Horsley, Volunteer Manager, First Light, Inc., Birmingham, AL, USA

I have taken and passed the CVA exam and am currently working on my portfolio. Even though I have been a Volunteer Manager for 6.5 years now, I wanted this credential to officially show that I know what I'm doing and have the basics covered. I really see my CVA as the first step of professionalization for myself. The concepts ARE basic and helpful to know, even though I don't utilize all of them in my current position. Furthermore, writing the portfolio has been eye-opening. Doing so forces you to pinpoint and communicate your philosophy of volunteerism as well as detail an ethical dilemma you've faced in your job. The process of completing Professional Development Units each year to maintain my CVA status will be where I learn advanced principles and further my development as a professional VM.

While a multi-level approach to credentialing would be fabulous for all the reasons you mentioned, I have found this credentialing process to be great and affordable. Of course there's room for improvement in every area of every profession, but the CCVA credentialing process has been a learning and growing experience thus far for me. Even if it's just one step toward professionalization, at least it's a step forward!

Great, great article- thank you for always bringing light to issues for us all to discuss!

Submitted on 06 July 2011 by Greg Baldwin, Chair, Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration, USA

Thanks for the thoughtful essay on credentialing. While as the Chair of the CCVA and President of VolunteerMatch I hold a more positive view of the CVA as a mark of excellence in our field, I appreciate your perspective and welcome the discussion on how to continue to invest in the future.

Today the CVA certification process includes both an 80 question multiple choice exam and a peer-reviewed portfolio.

Individuals pursuing the CVA credential are expected to demonstrate successfully their knowledge and ability to apply skills required for competent volunteer management, based on their actual performance in the role.

Five core competencies have been identified that serve as a foundation for this profession, regardless of the setting or type of organization where volunteers are at work.

These core competencies include:

- **Ethics:** The ability to act in accordance with professional principles.
- **Organizational Management:** The ability to design and implement policies, processes and structures to align volunteer involvement with the mission and vision of the organization.
- **Human Resource Management:** The ability to successfully engage, train and support volunteers in a systematic and intentional way.
- **Accountability:** The ability to collect relevant data and to engage in meaningful monitoring, evaluation and reporting to stakeholders.
- **Leadership and Advocacy:** The ability to advance individual, organizational and community goals through effective volunteer involvement.

We invite your readers to learn more about the program and join the conversation.

For more information visit:

www.cvacert.org

Submitted on 01 July 2011 by H. Roberts, President, PLNJ Inc., Keyport/NJ, USA

Before discussing a new approach to the current CVA credential could we hear from the folks at CCVA <http://cvacert.org/about-ccva/> and from "graduates" who completed the CCVA course.

What type of follow up (professional outcomes study) as a result of completing CCVA credentialing do VRM's experience and how members of CCVA would approach the idea of a multi level approach today.

Thank you.

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