

[News and Hot Topics](#) » Real Professions Have Strong Associations

Real Professions Have Strong Associations

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

February

2011

Ever since I've been in volunteerism, and that's almost four decades now, periodically someone raises the question: "Is volunteer management a profession or a skilled job?" In fact, I've frequently contributed to the debate, generally concluding that we are an "*emerging* profession," developing many of the elements required to meet the definition of a profession, yet still having a way to go. But how long can something be emerging before we must conclude that it is *stuck in place*?

I propose that one of the major weaknesses of our field is the sorry state of too many of our professional associations, whether national, regional, or local. Quickly I note that there are some gems out there, valiantly working effectively on behalf of their members. But most are struggling. Energize is in the midst of trying to update our [international list of professional associations](#) for volunteer program managers and are finding too many have simply disappeared (whether that means they have closed down or simply are invisible, we don't know). Again, it is true that new associations have also emerged, but the trend is to lose ground.

Can anyone find your profession association?

1. Go to <https://www.energizeinc.com/directory>. Select your geographic region under "Professional Societies" to see whether your group is listed at all and, if so, if the information shown is correct.
2. Send an e-mail to info@energizeinc.com, with the following:
 - Copy and paste the URL of the page on which your association is shown, or should be shown.
 - Give us all the information or tell us what needs to be updated. If your association maintains a Web site, please be sure to include the correct URL.
 - If the information posted already is correct, it would be very helpful to confirm that it can remain as is – we will then change the date to reflect 2011, which is helpful to anyone seeking the most recent data.

Please add the responsibility for keeping this (and similar postings elsewhere) up-to-date annually to the role of your association secretary or another officer.

Thank you so much!

The Web has been a saving grace to volunteerism as it offers the only forum in which people committed to advancing the profession can find one another, anywhere in the world, and voice their opinions. Ironically, right now the field's infrastructure at the national level is in disarray in several countries (budget cuts, unclear missions, uncertain leadership). This means that an individual leader of volunteers who wants to contribute to our profession must act locally *and* globally. Whether we work on a world-wide level or via one community at a time, virtually or face-to-face, we will make progress only if we perceive *associating as power*.

Most people join associations for what they can *get*, not for what they can *contribute*. For example, prospective members constantly ask, "What are the benefits of membership?" (even though the dues charged by our associations are generally quite low). Here are some examples of what I mean by joining an association to gain power:

- The point of professional associations is to *find like-minded colleagues* so we can take collective action on the issues that concern us (having good educational opportunities is a legitimate one of those issues).
- One of the powerful things about professional associations is that they provide a legitimate umbrella under which individuals can work on even controversial issues in *the name of the association*, not as representatives of their employing organizations. Rather than passively wait for officers to plan workshops, invite speakers, and propose projects, any member can identify an important topic and seek colleagues to do research, produce a report, contact funders and legislators, propose a course to a university, or anything else. This creates a voice for what volunteer management needs, with more clout than many individuals going it alone. Working together is a form of personal professional development and using the results moves the field forward.
- People in a profession have a vested interest in maintaining the standards of their work and in raising up generations of new practitioners to follow them. Until our associations recognize the need to train novices while still allowing experienced folks to grow, membership will be a revolving door, with an ever-lowering of the common denominator.

In 2004, I wrote the Hot Topic essay, [Chicken or Egg: Why Are Our Professional Associations Weak?](#) Unfortunately the issues I identified then have not changed. Further, here are some observations of issues at play in 2011:

- Very few of our associations practice the principles of effective volunteer recruitment in growing their membership. These days, associations may have a Web site as well as a printed

brochure. But is there any reason for anyone to go to either one? Is the information long outdated? Is “membership development” mainly passive collecting of dues? If we want to increase membership, we need to *invite* colleagues to join us – actively, continually, intentionally. We need to reach out to any organization that involves volunteers, identify the person in charge, and call them with a personal invitation to the next meeting. We should define “volunteer” broadly and invite emergency responders, student internship coordinators, clergy, and others who really do manage volunteers, even if they use different language. And we can’t forget the presidents of major service clubs and community associations, which are all-volunteer groups. We need to *publicize* association meetings and events; post notices to community calendars and boards (online and onsite); distribute flyers at related events; send press releases. We are giving a party without sending invitations to any guests!

- The universal excuse for not doing these things is: “I don’t have the time.” Of course. No one does. Isn’t that exactly what people say to us when we try to recruit them as volunteers in our organizations? But mostly the statement means, “I am very busy, and what you just asked me to do is not of sufficient interest to me to *make* time.” If association meetings are bor-r-r-ring or there’s no way for a long-time member to do something fresh, why should someone bother to participate? Offer the right topic, speaker, or opportunity, and members will be there. We need to go beyond multi-hour gatherings and try other options: hold conference calls which can take less time; start an online discussion forum; buddy members up in twos or threes and encourage them to eat lunch together once a month and talk about a set topic. Go wild!

I feel that I am tilting at the same windmills over and over. No one will anoint us with the identity of a profession. We cannot be defined by people in other professions. Will the opportunities of IYV+10 (see the [December Hot Topic](#)), or the media’s limelight on the value of volunteering, or the desperation of nonprofit and government budget cutting finally propel us into visibility? Leaders of volunteers UNITE! We owe it not only to ourselves in our work, but also to the volunteers who deserve the very best support in contributing their services.

Here are my questions to readers:

- Is there a local or regional association for volunteer resource managers that you *could* join?
- If yes, have you? Are you active? If not, why not? Would you commit to doing one thing, no matter how small, to strengthen the group? Please share.
- If no, would you commit to finding 3-5 other volunteer resource managers in your community, invite them to lunch, and discuss forming a local association (which could, please note, “meet” virtually)?
- If you disagree that strong professional associations form the backbone of a profession, what do you feel we need instead for leaders of volunteers?

Related Topics: [Collaboration](#) | [Volunteer Resources Manager, Role of](#) | [Philosophy](#) | [Profession of Volunteer Management](#)

Submitted on 02 March 2011 by Anonymous, Volunteer Coordinator, Arkansas, United States

I think a large factor in the difficulties facing Volunteer Administration Associations is getting volunteer administrators to realize that we are a part of a large field. Did you apply for your first volunteer management job because you were attracted to that organization or just to volunteerism? Personally, I knew I wanted to work at this particular museum, by any means possible. The whole idea of a volunteerism career was completely unknown to me. I would be willing to bet that many in our field do not see their career paths as volunteer administrators.

We need to reach out to all those who work with volunteers, especially the ones who don't label themselves as "volunteer coordinators" or something similar. We need to educate our local communities about who we are and what we do. I challenge every Volunteer Administrator to contact your local school and participate in "Career Day" to introduce the next generation to our field. Only by making our own colleagues appreciate the field as a whole can we ever hope to form a strong alliance.

Submitted on 23 February 2011 by Gerald (Jerry) Pannozzo, CVA, Program/Grant Coordinator and Consultant, Mount Sinai Hospital Queens, New York, NY, U.S.

I'm a member of [NYAVA](#) and volunteered ten years for their board. I then felt it was time for the next generation. I continued to serve as a mentor. This year I'm mentoring a colleague via Skype. My GNYADVS membership includes a state membership with NYSADVS; however, not a national membership with AHVRP.

Healthcare isn't my sole interest and impacts my involvement with GNYADVS. However, for their kick-off members' meeting this past fall, I facilitated a workshop. This interactive workshop takes a snapshot of members' needs/interests, gets members interacting, has members identify individual goals, and this year members were partnered with a colleague (informal mentor) after the goal setting exercise and agreed to check in with each other at 2, 4, 6 and 8 weeks. This past June at the AVMI (NYC) I made the decision to volunteer with an ALIVE committee. If I want something to happen, I need to make an investment in the outcome.

I'm currently enrolled in a therapeutic recreation program and it reinforces that professionals invest in an education. This is something that challenges us within volunteer resource management. How many have fallen into it? How many organizations know what skill set is needed to do the job? In my TR classes, it is clear that it's a profession with a history, a set of ethics, best practices, and a TR specialist is "personally responsible for maintaining and improving knowledge, involved with research, and has an obligation to colleagues and the profession." When and how are volunteer resource managers introduced to these issues? I think the following quote makes a case for the importance of volunteer resource management professional associations. "One characteristic of a profession is that practitioners establish professional organizations that provide leadership on a

number of professional issues and concerns.” Both quotes are from: *Therapeutic Recreation Leadership and Programming*.

Those, whose shoulders I stand on, have done noble work building professional associations, creating certification, etc. However, the job is not done. What TR professional associations have in common are codes of ethics, standards of practice, etc. We have some of this in place. As a profession we benefit from the publication of, Volunteer Administration Professional Practice, (Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration), because it is another building block. Same as us, TR specialists have had to struggle with “image” and “credibility”. They moved forward and I believe we can. We need the best and the brightest in our field involved – RECRUIT!

Submitted on 18 February 2011 by Colleen Kelly, Executive Director, Vantage Point, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Because it has been about an emerging profession for years (and years and years...), when is the time to think maybe there is a different way? A new way? Maybe we have to rethink people engagement?

We believe it isn't about continuing to try to renovate the old house - it is much more critical (and challenging) to build a new one!

Submitted on 11 February 2011 by Karla Weber, Ad Hoc Membership & Promotion Committee Member, KAAAV, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

When taking stock of my local professional association (KAAAV) [Kingston and Area Association of Administrators of Volunteers](#), I can say with certainty that we are a strong and active association. For starters we have developed a strategic plan that does include promoting and attracting new members. We provide monthly education and information to members on topics of relevance to volunteer management. We also encourage active membership and provide challenging ways for individuals to become involved. We have also allocated 50% of our membership fees and workshop revenues towards an educational bursary for our members to access and we have set up a formal mentoring exchange between members. We rotate our meeting venues amongst our members to lighten the burden and we access professionals within our organization to help with presentations. One of the keys to our success is that we “share”. There is no need to reinvent the wheel-if you need a resource- ask a member.

Having said that, I do agree that Volunteer Management is an emerging profession, and yes it does seem that it has been emerging for some time and admittedly much work is needed before we universally heighten volunteer management as a profession. What each and every one of us can do is become active at a local and provincial level. We all have a role to play in advocating for the profession!

Submitted on 10 February Laura Dilts, Director of Volunteers, Harrington Hospital, Southbridge MA, USA

I feel we do have a strong profession; however, the problem is there are many specialized associations within the profession. For Example: The Association of Girl Scout Executive Staff (AGSES) and The Association for Healthcare Volunteer Resource Professionals (AHVRP). Both organizations are excellent and deal with volunteer management specific to their related fields. Both have a long history, certifications programs and experts in volunteer and non-profit management.

Submitted on 11 February 2011 by Frederik Christiansen, Director, Ingerfair Consulting, Frederiksberg, Denmark

My point exactly! I believe that there is a value in creating room for volunteer managers across different sectors to exchange knowledge.

We can learn from each other successes and failures if we get the opportunity!

Submitted on 10 February 2011 by Frederik Christiansen, Director, Ingerfair Consulting, Frederiksberg, Denmark

Thank you Susan for rearticulating this subject!

For some time I also wondered why associations of volunteer managers were so weak in Denmark -- both in my former profession as a volunteer manager and in my present work as a consultant in the voluntary sector.

Here is what I figured out:

I think there is a genuine interest in discussing volunteer management among peers, but - and as you write - they don't prioritize it due to a lack of time. What we did was to give these discussions a new format - we call them volunteerLAB. The point is that we create loose-connected networks among volunteer managers from various volunteer organisations. People meet up for a LAB; we've prepared the topics and facilitate the discussions.

So we try to make a new room for knowledge sharing, but instead of using the association as a format we use training rooms where we facilitate discussion and create networks among the practitioners. Every LAB has different topics and different practitioners show up to share their knowledge.

So my point is that we might need to look beyond traditional associations...

Submitted on 9 February 2011 by Erin Spink, Vice President, PAVR-O, Ontario, Canada

Thank you Susan, for yet another thought provoking and insightful article.

As Volunteer Engagement professionals, we are all responsible for the successes and short comings of our professional associations. Without a doubt, we're all still waiting for that tipping point that will push us into mainstream consciousness.

I especially love your line about not letting others define us- which is one of the major points in the [e-Volunteerism presentation on 'defining the future of the profession'](#) that I argue.

I also echo DJ and Jayne's comments regarding breaking free of antiquated, outdated and ineffective practices and mindsets.

There is so much talent and drive displayed by Volunteer Engagement professionals around the world. In my own little corner, I am amazed by the work of groups like [PAVR-O](#) (Ontario, Canada, www.pavro.on.ca) and the partnership we've formed with local associations.

Over the years, PAVR-O has faced ups and downs. But I know the brightest days lay ahead for PAVR-O, and I'm proud to be a part of it.

We can't rest on our laurels or moan 'that's the way things are'. We must constantly push ahead and embrace bold new visions of how to move the value of what we do front and centre in the hearts and minds of everyone.

I'm not holding my breath, but I am also not losing hope that it can and will happen. How can it not with people like all of you fighting for it? :)

Submitted on 9 February 2011 by Julie Chrysler, Volunteer Coordinator, Rome Memorial Hospital, Rome, NY, USA

Love your column and this latest topic is Hot in NY too! As Volunteer Directors, we are a unique breed yet have so many facets we cover. Whether we are based in Emergency Management, healthcare, the corporate world or non-profit arena, we all share common goals. Customer service, health and educational topics and just caring for others in general all fit under volunteerism. Of course, I am preaching to the choir but am looking for those voices to be a little brighter and louder so that we become stronger together. So often times, we wear many different hats and the information from our associations fit into those "other hats too! Like Wendy, I too am passionate about my Association, New York State Association of Directors of Volunteer Services (NYSADVS). There are so many strong members and I agree that it must be a two way street as we not only learn so much from each other and give in return. I truly believe what goes around comes around!! Keep up the great work as we grow together as an INTERNATIONAL organization!!

Submitted on 5 February 2011 by Wendy Moore, Volunteer Coordinator, Health, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Thanks for the great article Susan. What you say in your post certainly resonates with me too. I find it very frustrating when visiting a website of a professional association to find that the information is out of date and posts are infrequent and are not topical, visionary or inspirational. Members of these associations should be keeping their finger on the pulse of volunteer management trends. Google Alerts is a brilliant tool for keeping up with what is going on around the globe in our industry.

I believe that membership of a professional association should be a two way street where members receive benefits but also actively participate in or for the association. I have in the past been a passionate advocate for the Australasian Association of Volunteer Administrators. Unfortunately they seem to have lost their way somehow. Their website is out of date, I seem to have slipped off their email list for their newsletter despite current membership and I no longer have access to [e-Volunteerism](#) through their website which was of great benefit. Communication with them after sending several emails seems to have drawn a blank.

On a positive note may I say congratulations to you Jay for your response to this topic. The fact that you are visiting this website and responding to topics speaks volumes for you and your association's passion to grow and support the Volunteer Management sector. From what you describe, your organisation shows a strong commitment to your members. Thank you for your response and good luck with your blockbuster conference. 500 attendees - very exciting. Would love to hear more about it in the future.

Submitted on 4 February 2011 by Jay Haapala, President, Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration, St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.

Great hot topic Susan, and very interesting discussion. I believe leadership is the most important issue in our field, and it has been for a long time whether we realize it or not.

As current president of the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration and having spent 2 years as the membership committee chair, I have learned first-hand what you wrote about actively recruiting members. Like volunteering, the #1 reason people join associations is because they were asked!

For the first time our 800 members responded to our annual survey that "advocacy for the field of volunteerism" was the most important reason they choose to be a member of MAVA. Deeper questions about what "advocacy" means to them reveal that they're looking for the field of volunteer management to become more professionalized as well as assistance advocating for their programs within their organizations. We're working on it. MAVA offers more than 50 workshops across the state each year, and our newest one is about "Leading Change in Turbulent Times.

<http://www.mavanetwork.org/events>

Our association is so strong because it was formed by local and regional associations to create a statewide presence for the field. Again, like volunteerism we can accomplish a lot more when the responsibility is shared by leaders of these sub-groups. The same model can work across state lines. We're putting on a blockbuster of a conference this May 18-20 with an excellent program, expecting over 500 attendees. Come to the conference and we can further this conversation.

<http://www.mavanetwork.org/>

Finally, here's a great resource: MAVA's Toolkit for Building a Peer Professional Network.

<http://www.mavanetwork.org/page-227106?>

Submitted on 4 February 2011 by Debra Conner, Manager, Volunteer & Donor Relations, Bancroft, Haddonfield, NJ, USA

Most of us are the only Volunteer Manager/Director in our organizations. To whom then do you go for support, encouragement, peer review, best practices in the field and resources? So glad we have our DOVIA group that has been of great value to me personally and professionally. The greatest benefit received was when I got involved in leadership. It is work and a time investment, but it can pay off in gaining resources, connections, a voice on local and state issues and in professional development. Thanks for an article that so well articulated the value of professional associations!! Word of encouragement...find one and get involved!!

Submitted on 4 February 2011 by Bob Horton, CEO, Sustainable Opportunities and Solutions, Fort Worth, Texas, USA

It would be my observation that formal VA/VM education has followed as much as it has driven the professionalizing of our field. Being fundamentally conservative cultures, campuses are most often tardy adopters. Briefly, it is up to volunteer coordinators more than any other group to be professional and promote the professionalism of their profession. Just IMHO, you understand. ;-)

Submitted on 3 February 2011 by Lisa Coble, Director of Volunteers, Newport Hospital, Newport, RI, USA

[NEADHVS](#) is a very strong and active professional organization that has been a leader in supporting volunteer administrators from New England states. We have a dynamic list serve, conferences and spirit of sharing that serves us all very well.

I believe that if there were formal education devoted to volunteer administration as a career it would be looked at as more of a profession.

Submitted on 3 February 2011 by DJ Cronin, Speaking out on Volunteer Management! Blog, Australia

Here's a litmus test.

Associations of volunteer management should respond. Effective associations should already be aware that this article is out there. Because effective associations are keeping their eye on the ball in regards to any issues that are being discussed about volunteer management and Volunteering for that matter. Right now there should be emails flying amongst board members of professional associations. "We need to articulate a responses to this Hot topic people"

Will that happen? Are international associations for volunteer management keeping their fingers on the pulse. Do they have someone who is watching Google Alert? Have they set up Google Alert? Do they have someone watching the dialogue and keeping an eye on the narrative in volunteer management?

Will we see the response here?

Jayne Cravens in her response states "I would love a strong, MODERN, dynamic professional association of volunteer resources managers. I would love to be surprised - would love to write a blog a year from now raving about how much things have changed. But I'm not holding my breath."

Please don't hold your breath Jayne.

Is it time we made the people who purport to represent our sector accountable?

Our reluctance to do so is indicative of the "nice factor" where we are too "nice" to question such matters and all we want to do is be non political in looking after our jobs and the "villies"

We need to take charge of our own story. From within needs to come the questioning voice. From within needs to come the people that have the courage to say "is that it"? And from within needs to come the query "are we not capable of much more?" We need to forge ahead knowing that there is a silent group who are cheering for us despite the flat earthers who hold on to the old way of thinking because it doesn't threaten them.

We need to reach the tipping point where Susan's views reflect over 50% of our sectors views.

Don't suffer an ineffective association. Speak up.

The reality is that some are bypassing their associations and trying to help the sector in their own way by participation in their own networks or asking the big questions or by forming their own consultancies and by writing their own blogs.

I.E some important stuff is happening that should be the domain and lifeblood of our associations.

Unseen. Unheard. Ineffective.

We need to change that.

And this needs to be said.

Submitted on 2 February by Rob Jackson, Grantham England

A great and thought provoking hot topic on one of the big issues our field has to get to grips with. Thank you.

I thought you and those visiting the site might also be interested in a speech given by the author Philip Pullman that has relevance to the issues you raise Susan.

The text of the speech can be found at <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/blog/save-oxfordshire-libraries-speech-philip...>

This was given in the context of the cuts being made to public expenditure here in England and the resulting debate about how volunteers and the policy agenda of the Big Society might help ameliorate the effect of the cuts.

Submitted on 2 February 2011 by Jayne Cravens, Consultant, , Portland, Oregon, USA

I was on the board of a local association once, in charge of communications. They didn't like the large increase in attendance and the much more diverse -- and demanding -- audiences my outreach efforts garnered. They were very happy to see me go, so they could get back to smaller audiences made up of people that all looked and thought the same.

It was an experience that was representative of all my experiences with volunteer management associations, locally and nationally. I finally gave up on associations of volunteer resource managers in 2006. I got tired of online discussions about volunteer recognition that focused on great ideas for the table centerpieces. I got tired of the aversion to debate. I got tired of hearing again and again "We don't have time" in reply to everything from using the Internet to support and involve volunteers to keeping a web site up-to-date to exploring recruitment methods to reach more diverse audiences. I got tired of conferences that focused on exactly the same topics year after year.

I want to grow professionally. I want to have discussions beyond "What's the best volunteer management software?" I want to be challenged. I want "ah ha!" moments. So I've sought knowledge in non-volunteer-management groups. And as a result, I've learned much, much more from other professional associations to use in my work in volunteer engagement than I've learned from any volunteer management association.

I would love a strong, MODERN, dynamic professional association of volunteer resources managers. I would love to be surprised - would love to write a blog a year from now raving about how much things have changed. But I'm not holding my breath.

PRIVACY STATEMENT

Energize, a program of Adisa <https://adisagroup.com/>

Follow us   

Copyright © 1997-2025