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Volunteer Engagement

Revisiting Credentials and Certifications in Volunteer Engagement

By [Cara Thenot](#)

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On September 18, 2019, the [Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement \(AL!VE\)](#) (U.S.) will be hosting a webinar about the ins and outs of earning a certification or credentials in the field of volunteer leadership, volunteer engagement, volunteering (depending on your terminology preference). Free for members of AL!VE and \$25 for non-members, the webinar offers an easy and affordable way for practitioners to explore the “differences between personal professional development opportunities like volunteer engagement certificates and CVA credentialing, programmatic resources like standards and best practices guides, and organizational certification.”

Energize takes this opportunity to revisit the many perspectives expressed about credentialing over the years. And, for those who can’t attend or work outside of the U.S., this hot topic is a way to do your own research on whether credentialing is right for you.

International Perspectives

Start with this [2011 article from e-Volunteerism](#). A discussion between individuals from several different countries that goes beyond the immediate benefits to the individual professional. What does certification mean for the field of volunteer engagement? Is there a “dark side” to creating preferred practices? Feel free to comment on this page below if you’d like to continue the discussion!

A Call for Vision First

Susan J. Ellis, in her [2011 Energize Hot Topic](#), didn’t hold back on her vision for what type of credentialing is needed for the profession. Don’t forget to read the comments at the bottom of the page for even more ideas from others.

First-Hand Perspective

A certified practitioner shared [her reflections](#) on what holding the [Certification in Volunteer Administration](#) has meant for her career and daily work.

Programs Available

Several organizations worldwide have shared with us [programs or courses leading to certification](#). Be sure to select the appropriate region; there may be one closer to home. Some programs are available no matter your location. Please don't hesitate to let us know about any that are missing.

Please share your perspectives about credentialing and certification through the comment form below.

- *Have you completed a certification program, and has it helped your career?*
- *What are your thoughts about being credentialed in volunteer engagement? A necessity? Harmful to the profession? Needs improvement?*

Related Topics: [Profession of Volunteer Management](#)

Comments from Readers

Submitted on September 4th, 2019

Anonymous, Stillwater, United States

I have been leading the volunteer workforce for twenty-five years, with outstanding personal reviews every year. I attend classes and read to always provide the best experience for volunteers as possible. I took a lead role in our agency becoming a SERVICE ENTERPRISE agency this year.

I do believe in the CVA certification but was very disappointed in the whole process after going through it twice. The changing staff and leadership made communication very difficult and the process/testing does not seem upfront and in the open. There is no feedback as to how one might improve their results. I know they have new leadership this year 2019 and I am hoping things improve because I do feel that it adds value to our work and the field. of volunteer management.

Submitted on September 20th, 2019

Kayla, Alberta, Canada

I took an excellent college course from Humber College in Toronto in 2013 titled "Fundamentals of Volunteer Management" that was mostly based on Linda Graff's work. While I had worked with volunteers hands-on at a past nonprofit organization, taking the course was such a fantastic experience to learn about a lot of core important concepts both in

advocating for volunteers time to be used in a way that is respectful to the amazing talents they offer and as a way to ensure great relationships between staff, volunteers, bringing out the best in the program through good training/ orientation/ support.

The last 5 years I've worked within healthcare managing volunteer programs at two sites and have found the course invaluable. I've also been able to attend some continuing education events in person as well as online and would like to take the CVA certification in the future. The only thing currently holding me back is the price, and as I already work in the field and love what I am doing I don't feel rushed to get it.

My goal is to never stop learning. Knowledge benefits everyone, whether or not you pursue a credential. There are a million ways to study best practices and learn from others. Having taken the Humber College course, it was very easy to be hired within my current role as I was the only qualified person who applied.

Submitted on November 9th, 2019

Nick Levinson, New York, NY, U.S.A.

The only dark side to best practices in general is making a strait jacket out of them. Particular allegedly-best practices are often of dubious value.

I suppose credentialling has one disadvantage: most nonprofits I've known prefer to assign volunteer oversight to a bottom-level staffer who is told by midlevel staff that volunteers can't do much, or anything, and is told by the head to find work for the volunteers by asking midlevel staff, so the volunteer management has to settle for the least work for volunteers, often nothing. Such organizations won't hire someone with the credential, because the credentialled one may revolt against the myth of inefficacy. If one does get hired, paid colleagues may sabotage their work out of economic self-interest. The credentialled one or uncredentialled equivalent may have to engage in office battles and, if a revolution is needed, will need the highest leader's support, which effectively says the other hires are not doing their jobs, and the leader probably disagrees or would have fired them already, and so the support won't be forthcoming, thus no revolution, thus office battles will likely be futile, thus the credential's value is limited to those organizations that must have many volunteers and require credentials for all paid positions.

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