

NEEDED: PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE FOR VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

by

Harriet H. Naylor

The concept of a generic profession for volunteer administration may seem esoteric, but my experience as volunteer, as staff member and in giving leadership to volunteer programming has convinced me it is imperative to consider the possibility of staff development to levels of competence and influence which are unquestionably at the professional level. The NCVA encourages the development of local Voluntary Action Centers to insure the health of voluntarism in our democracy, but without people able to give continuous and creative paid leadership the goals are hollow.

Most of the people now employed in many fields to administer volunteer programs work quite alone or with very few associates who understand what conflicting pressures can build up. To survive, volunteer administrators (usually called directors or coordinators) must tread a fine line between administrative pressures to pick up a miscellany of tasks with community relations aspects and community pressures to serve the purposes of individuals or groups. Clarity about values and great skill are required to bring all goals into congruence with the ideal of service to meet the real needs of persons for whom the services are intended. An organized profession could back up lonely practitioners when pressures mount from either their organization setting or community.

A profession could be developed which would bridge between fields of practice and transcend the demands of daily practice with a focus on human needs, open options for mobility for its members on a career lattice, rather than limit them to a one-track ladder, and support them when besieged in struggles which obscure the persons who may be probationer, patient, client, committee member or advocate as consumers of their services.

The creation of a profession is a complex process involving grandfathering in many persons from a variety of disciplines and life experiences. Each individual should have appropriate opportunities for filling his gaps in the knowledge and skills required for effective practice. This profession has unique personal qualifications required which loom even more essential than academic credentials. As an adult educator I have faith that people can change attitudes and develop competencies at all ages or levels. Appropriate learning constantly to combat obsolescence of past learnings for widely different persons requires a complex curriculum development process.

Analysis of the theoretical and philosophical basis must come at an early stage. Otherwise training is likely to be limited to meeting urgent but recurring needs for operational demands. I believe if we give people at every educational level understanding of the "why's", the how'to's" come more easily. Without a value system of "why's" administrative decisions are subject to whim and personal

idiosyncrasy to a devastating degree, even while technical knowledge is improved.

We need professionals, not mere technicians, people with wide and forward vision, to coordinate otherwise unrelated factors into a functioning administration whole.

Without "why's" administrative decisions as to procedures and budgets may be whimsical and thus difficult to interpret. Granting the urgent need for practical techniques by people now in the jobs, my plea for curriculum development is to provide a variety of appropriate learning opportunities for persons of widely varying backgrounds on a continuing education basis. No education today is complete: our ideas are often soon obsolete with the changing matrix in which we carry complex responsibilities. We all need renewal and inspiration as well as technical know-how for doing the basic "housekeeping" so we can live comfortably in our jobs. Curriculum for specific fields is very important, too. But there are basic human values and administrative principles which are always needed.

I see the National Center for Voluntary Action as a catalyst in curriculum development for cross fertilization between fields of volunteer administration practice. Just as the neutral volunteer influences an interdisciplinary team, NCVA can help organizations

remain person-centered. The NCVA would not necessarily administer learning opportunities needed, but could carry on some innovative activities as demonstrations and provide some basic education for the new VAC leadership, both staff and volunteer.

Transcendent neutrality could stimulate interest in universal need for a generic profession, and influence academic and informal adult education agencies to provide opportunities for credit and non-credit, short-term and full credentialing academic programs.

The attached Recommendations formulated by a discussion group at the recent Boulder conference on curriculum require supplementary information, keyed to the outline attached:

I. A. Leadership is now being exerted by at least four national organizations, the National Information Center on Volunteers in Courts, the American Association of Volunteer Services Coordinators, the Association of Volunteer Bureaus of America, and the American Society of Directors of Volunteer Services. The latter membership organizations, all are related to specific fields with associate memberships for persons in other fields. It seems unlikely or unnecessary that any one would become an "umbrella", but the strengths and experience of each should be maintained and tapped. The impetus generated by the Court Volunteer movement for a guild for volunteers is likely to be necessary unless the volunteer administrator profession builds up ways for volunteers to participate in the determination of program service objectives and delivery patterns. The consumer revolution could mean adversaries, but volunteers within the system could mean allies, if volunteers have good staff partnership experiences. To me, this is an essential function of the Voluntary Action Center at national and especially at local levels, where individual advocates are powerless or need to find allies.

B. & C. The AVBA and the AAVSC have done nationwide surveys of learning needs which should be used in identifying the basic learning needed, and the SDVS has the great resources of the American Hospital Association studies on tap, and all three have active, interested education committees, all of whom contributed to the

Boulder conference. The NCVA Clearinghouse has a listing of reported events.

- D. All three have newsletters and could expand their use for personnel exchange.
- E. To my knowledge only one of the organizations, the AAVSC, has evolved a code of ethics and has a certification procedure. The AVBA has defined such a process for Volunteer Bureaus, but not for individual professional workers.
- F. Each newsletter carries some information about theory and practice.

VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION published by Northeastern University has potential for becoming a professional journal.

II. The NCVA through the Clearinghouse and Communications activities is already taking a lead communicating to many audiences and could expand as needed. There are special informational and attitude changes needed by the allied professions for persons trained before volunteering changed its scope and depth, or threatened by myths and misunderstandings of the volunteer potential.

III. The Clearinghouse is already recognized as the logical central

repository for information on program ideas, resources, references and consultation possibilities.

- IV. Funding, an ever present problem, might be handled nationally by a scholarship committee on a project basis by the NCVA for individuals or by constituent groups, since many national agencies already have scholarship programs.

As the National Center with full staff and committees swings into gear, I hope serious thought will be given by all to the need for qualified, inspired and inspiring staff leadership for all fields where volunteers serve. The proposed regional events to follow up the Atlanta meeting offer an opportunity to consult local people as a normative model, which I would hope local Voluntary Action Centers will replicate when the delegate gets back home.