

Administrators of Volunteer Services: Their Needs for Training and Research

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Despite the importance of volunteer administrators to nonprofit and many government organizations, little systematic research has been focused on these officials. Using a large national survey of volunteer practitioners conducted in 1989-1990, this article examines empirically several hypotheses concerning organizational support to meet administrator needs for continuing education. Using the survey responses, the article also elaborates the subjects recommended by the administrators for treatment in a basic seminar in volunteer management, in an advanced seminar, and in further research.

THE INVOLVEMENT of volunteers in nonprofit organizations is one of the distinguishing features of the independent sector and a growing phenomenon in the public sector. Most nonprofit organizations and many government agencies are vitally dependent on volunteer labor for their internal functioning and for the provision of important goods and services to clients. In many of these organizations, in turn, the quality and effectiveness of volunteer performance, as well as the overall direction and coordination of this component of the agency, rests with a key official: the administrator of volunteer services.

Despite the pivotal nature of this position, relatively few studies have examined empirically the support of host organizations for the volunteer administrator, especially in relation to the needs of this official for training and research. This article analyzes the results of a national survey of volunteer practitioners completed in 1990 and intended, in part, to address these issues. The article explores the degree of organizational support forthcoming for continuing education

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in volunteer administration; the interest of volunteer services managers in enhancing their professional background; and the subjects they consider most important for further training and research in volunteerism.

Prior Research and Current Hypotheses

As opposed to the burgeoning study of nonprofit organization and management, an area that has seen journals and academic programs multiply over the past decade, relatively little scholarly attention has been directed to administrators of volunteer services. Three recent and highly useful compendia of literature on the voluntary, nonprofit sector offer testimony to this conclusion. While citations to studies in volunteer administration appear in *Voluntary Associations: An Annotated Bibliography* (Pugliese, 1986), *Philanthropy and Voluntarism: An Annotated Bibliography* (Layton, 1987), and *The Literature of the Nonprofit Sector: A Bibliography with Abstracts* (Derrickson, 1989), research on the topic is evidently not sufficiently voluminous or noteworthy to warrant a distinct chapter, subject heading, or review.

Of the research that has been conducted, three themes with special relevance for an assessment of the training and research needs of volunteer services administrators emerge. The most striking is that, in general, organizations do not seem to provide great support to these officials or the programs they lead. Noted volunteerism authority Ivan H. Scheier makes the point most forcefully. In a series of three articles published in the *Journal of Volunteer Administration* in 1988-1989, Scheier (1988a, 1988b, 1988-89) argues that organizations often fail to appreciate the range of important tasks performed by volunteer administrators and tend to trivialize their accomplishments. He calls for empowerment of these individuals and the profession as a whole—that is, enhanced status and respect for the volunteer administrator and the volunteer program from the host organization, as well as more generous resource allocation in support of this endeavor.

Empirical research lends credence to Scheier's observations. Appel, Jimmerson, Macduff, and Long (1988) surveyed 269 volunteer managers in five northwestern states and two Canadian provinces. Results of the survey suggest that the volunteer administrators are stretched among various organizational functions. For example, job titles notwithstanding, just one third of the officials devote all their work time to managing the volunteer program. Due to other work responsibilities, nearly four in ten (38 percent) spend less than half their time on this obligation. Scheier (1988a) reports very similar findings based on a smaller sample of volunteer administrators, as do the authors of a study based on volunteer practitioners in Rhode Island (Ostrowski and Sehl, 1990).

A survey on employer recognition endorsed by the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) observed an "air of second-class

citizens, which the volunteers frequently display" (Patterson, 1988). Their own professionalism, respectability, and sharing that appraisal. The volunteers, in their work, are committed to the field of volunteer administration. The necessary supports [are] in place. "supports," a survey of 46 volunteer programs by Stulman (1988) shed some light into this issue. Approximately 75 percent of the respondents surveyed believed that their agency's policies, their salary levels, their job security, and other factors contribute to the perception of the agency as a professional organization.

Research based on the survey data suggests that in a national survey of local government agencies, it was found that only about one fifth of the respondents were involved with volunteer programs in some capacity. This effort. In many of the agencies, the responsibility for existing job descriptions was assigned to the analyst, public services analyst, or the individual's supervisor. The implication of this finding is that organizations do not routinely place a high priority on volunteer programs. As intimated by Scheier, the responsibility for assigning the position and supervising the participant will continue with the supervisor. Writes Wilson (1976, p. 10):

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A second, related consideration is that the volunteer program deserves more attention than it receives in the literature, Brudney (1988) notes. More often than government agencies, they are receptive to volunteerism. The tradition of working with volunteers is strong, and their involvement; increased participation; closeness to the community; greater capacity to focus services to them, rather than to fewer unionized employees; and the content of services and the way they are provided. To the extent that organizations possess these characteristics, they are likely to receive greater support to administer the level of agency support.

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citizens, which the volunteer administrators from the nonprofit sector frequently display" (Patton, 1990, p. 7). Although confident of their own professionalism, respondents voiced concerns about employers sharing that appraisal. The study concluded that these officials like their work, are committed to working with volunteers, and would stay in the field of volunteer administration as a career—so long as "all necessary supports [are] in place." While the study did not define "supports," a survey of 463 full-time and salaried administrators of volunteer programs by Stubblefield and Miles (1986) provides insight into this issue. Approximately one third of the volunteer administrators surveyed believed that they did not have great influence on staff-related policies, their salary was lower than officials in comparable positions in the agency, other administrators in the agency enjoyed more job security, and other staff members did not regard their position as a professional occupation.

Research based on the public sector offers analogous findings. In a national survey of local governments, Duncombe (1985) discovered that only about one fifth (21.9 percent) of a sample of 534 cities with volunteer programs even had an official designated as head of this effort. In many of these cities, moreover, the agency had simply appended the responsibilities for volunteer management onto the existing job description of an administrative assistant, personnel analyst, public services assistant, or like position—for the chief qualification for leadership of the volunteer contingent appeared to be the individual's willingness to take on additional duties.

The implication of this research is that host organizations do not routinely place a high value on the position of volunteer administrator. As intimated by the results of Duncombe's survey, they may assign the position and its new duties while assuming that the occupant will continue with the present job, with no adjustment to salary. Writes Wilson (1976, p. 16), "It is frequently difficult to ascertain if this assignment should be regarded as a promotion or demotion."

A second, related theme derived from research on volunteer programs deserves mention. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, Brudney (1990) determined that nonprofit agencies, more often than governments, possess attributes that may make them receptive to volunteer efforts. These characteristics include a tradition of working with volunteers and a recognized need for their involvement; increased flexibility and less fragmentation in approach; closeness to the field and smaller scale of operations; greater capacity to focus on the full range of client needs and tailor services to them, rather than concentrate on isolated problems; fewer unionized employees; and significant diversity in both the content of services and the institutional framework within which they are provided. To the degree that nonprofit rather than public organizations possess these characteristics, they are likely to extend greater support to administrators of volunteer services. Even though the level of agency support for these officials as a group may not be

high (as indicated by the research reviewed above), this factor may vary systematically by organizational auspices.

A lack of support for the position of volunteer administrator presents an anomaly: according to survey research, these managers commonly have relatively high levels of formal education, which should command respect in employment. In the study of volunteer practitioners in the northwest United States and Canada, for example, virtually the entire sample (96 percent) had completed at least some college, two thirds (66 percent) held a bachelor's degree, and nearly one quarter (23 percent) had a graduate degree (Appel, Jimmerson, Macduff, and Long, 1988).

In the survey of full-time and salaried volunteer program administrators, two thirds (67.4 percent) had completed at least a bachelor's degree, and more than one quarter (28.4 percent) had attained a master's degree or doctorate; another one fifth (21.2 percent) were working on a higher academic degree than the one currently held (Stubblefield and Miles, 1986). In the Rhode Island study, nearly three fourths of the volunteer administrators (74.2 percent) had at least a bachelor's degree, and more than one in ten (12.4 percent) had a graduate degree (Ostrowski and Sehl, 1990). While none of these studies can boast a random sample, a final theme evident from the literature is that there is a pronounced trend toward higher education among volunteer practitioners.

In sum, this review of prior research suggests three hypotheses for further investigation. First, host organizations will not usually invest substantial resources in the position of administrator of volunteer services. Second, the support that is forthcoming for the position will likely be higher in nonprofit agencies than in government. Third, because volunteer administrators appear to be well educated, they should express a solid commitment to furthering their professional background. These hypotheses are examined empirically below.

Data Collection and Sample

In October 1989, the AVA Board of Directors called for the dissemination of a survey to elicit opinions on the status of continuing education programs in volunteer management and to provide direction to future initiatives. Endorsed by both AVA and the National VOLUNTEER Center, the resulting survey on educational needs in volunteer administration was conducted in late 1989 and early 1990. Responses to the survey form the empirical basis for this study.

Although no comprehensive enumeration of volunteer administrators exists, the mail survey embraced a very broad constituency. Groups receiving the questionnaire included the AVA membership, which numbers approximately 1,750; directors of voluntary action centers, about 320 in all; and another 1,200 practitioners, assembled from mailing lists provided by educators and directors in volunteer administration. The possibility of overlap across the various lists

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Of this number, 765 rate of 25 percent. This quite acceptable for a mailed envelope for the postage for return mail. In sampling frame, the survey takings ever in the field.

The sample of volunteers is not only substantial but a representative. First, the questionnaire and from most Canadian students are involved in non-institutional institutions; the remaining programs. This distribution national surveys indicate in nonprofit organization public agencies. Third, if administrators named as ent substantive areas, br sored projects to religious similar to those obtained, example, Hodgkinson at

The Educational Needs Survey. In examination of the hypotheses administrators of volunteers in the survey, the items inquired whether respondents management prior to be the administrators who attend a major training agency, they themselves.

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gests three hypotheses: First, the chances of being appointed as administrator of voluntary health insurance will not usually be proportional to the number of years spent in government. Second, the more well educated, the more likely they are to be appointed, all else equal. Third, the chances of being appointed as administrator of voluntary health insurance are empirically below.

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precludes a firm estimate of total sample size, but the survey probably reached some 3,000 professionals and leaders in volunteer administration.

Of this number, 765 returned the questionnaire, for a response rate of 25 percent. This figure is not especially high, but it is still quite acceptable for a mailed survey that included neither a preaddressed envelope for the completed instrument nor the necessary postage for return mail. Regardless of the exact parameters of the sampling frame, the survey qualifies as one of the largest such undertakings ever in the field of volunteer administration.

The sample of volunteer administrators yielded by the survey is not only substantial but also, several indicators suggest, broadly representative. First, the questionnaires received come from every state and from most Canadian provinces. Second, 73 percent of the respondents are involved in nonprofit organizations and 7 percent in "other" institutions; the remaining 20 percent work in government volunteer programs. This distribution is consistent with findings from major national surveys indicating that the great bulk of volunteering occurs in nonprofit organizations, with about one in five volunteers assisting public agencies. Third, in response to an open-ended question, the administrators named as the focus of their program thirty-four different substantive areas, bridging the spectrum from corporate-sponsored projects to religious institutions. These results, too, are quite similar to those obtained in national surveys on volunteerism (for example, Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1990).

Findings

The Educational Needs Survey contained two items that allow examination of the hypothesis pertaining to organizational support for administrators of volunteer programs. Given the overall purpose of the survey, the items are rooted in educational issues. The first inquired whether respondents had received any training in volunteer management prior to beginning work in the field. The second asked the administrators who would pay the training costs if they were to attend a major training program on volunteer management—their agency, they themselves, or a combination of both.

The results of the survey show that just one fourth of the sample (24.5 percent) had undergone training in volunteer administration before beginning work in the field. As expected, host organizations do not appear to be very concerned about the preparation of individuals to lead the volunteer program—at least not initially. This finding offers evidence for the first hypothesis of a general lack of support for the volunteer manager position.

The administrators' responses concerning possible organizational backing for continuing education opportunities seem to place agencies in a more positive light. More than half the practitioners (57 percent) anticipated that if they were to attend major training,

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their agency would underwrite the full cost; another 34.9 percent expected that the organization would share the expense. Only 8.4 percent of the sample said that training costs would fall to them alone. Because the item asked respondents to speculate on how the costs of future training would be paid, one must exercise caution in interpreting the results. Nevertheless, over 90 percent of the volunteer administrators anticipated that the institution would bear at least a portion of the training expense.

The second hypothesis proposed that nonprofit agencies would give stronger backing to the volunteer administrator position than would government. Based on the items examined above, the hypothesis garners limited support. Managers working in nonprofit organizations more often than their counterparts in government agencies had accumulated training in volunteer administration before beginning work in the field, 26.2 percent versus 20.4 percent. In addition, the nonprofit organizations appeared more willing than government to underwrite the costs of continuing education for the managers. Of the volunteer administrators involved in the nonprofit sector, 58.4 percent said that their organization would assume the full expense of training, compared to 53.2 percent of the public sector managers.

The results are consistent and suggestive of the expected linkage between nonprofit auspices and support for these officials. Yet they are not sufficiently robust to infer that a definite relationship exists in the population of volunteer administrators. The chi-square test indicates that the associations between nonprofit status and prior training in volunteer administration ($p < .1674$) and anticipated agency sponsorship for continuing education ($p < .2147$) approach statistical significance but do not warrant rejection of the null hypothesis at conventional levels. More detailed statistical analysis of the first two hypotheses would have been desirable to specify and elaborate the findings. However, because the authors of the Educational Needs Survey did not ascertain demographic information from the volunteer administrators or background information regarding their organizations, further statistical breakdowns are not possible.

Finally, as proposed by the third hypothesis, the survey leaves little doubt regarding the commitment of the administrators to enhancing their preparation in volunteer management. Fully 91 percent of the sample said that they would have appreciated the chance to attend relevant training before or soon after they had entered the field (as opposed to the 24.5 percent who had actually received prior training). Four out of five of the administrators (83 percent) indicated that they would now appreciate the chance to attend an advanced course on volunteer management. Virtually the same number (82.1 percent) expressed interest in an in-depth seminar on specific topics in the field, such as volunteer involvement in local government or innovative program design. These officials profess keen interest in augmenting their professional background.

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Areas for Coverage

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To facilitate analysis have been aggregated across administration and management here to the ten areas on each of the managers. The top ten areas made regarding a basic segment of the comments for the preferences expressed by the results.

As might have been expected, the essentials of volunteer management are basic course. The area in which volunteers (17.2 percent) receive training are motivation (13.7 percent); interviewing organizational positions (8 percent); placement of volunteers (8 percent); and management of volunteers (8 percent). The second group of five areas are embracing such areas as communication, conflict resolution, networking, and second group of five areas at the volunteer program (8 percent); working in conjunction with volunteers assigned to them (5.7 percent); maintaining records (5 percent); and publicizing the volunteer program and the media (3.2 percent).

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majority of the volunteer administrators—and the apparent willingness of most of their employers to assist with the training expense—the next section elaborates the areas that the managers feel ought to be covered. It also explores the subjects they consider most in need of further research.

Areas for Coverage in Training and Research

The Educational Needs Survey asked the sample of administrators to list subjects they thought should be addressed in a basic seminar on volunteer management and in an advanced seminar, and to name areas in volunteer management where they recommended that further research be conducted. All three questions were presented in an open-ended format, so that the managers were able to give their views without constraint. As many as four possible responses were coded on each question. In all, the administrators offered a total of 2,180 comments concerning the basic seminar, 1,826 comments on the advanced seminar, and 597 suggestions for further research. Detailed perusal of this great wealth of information led to the creation of an original coding scheme consisting of approximately 100 distinct subject areas.

To facilitate analysis and interpretation, the specific categories have been aggregated according to general topics in volunteer administration and management. Limitations of space restrict discussion here to the ten areas on each question mentioned most frequently by the managers. The top ten account for 82.4 percent of all comments made regarding a basic seminar in volunteer management, 74.4 percent of the comments for an advanced seminar, and 68.1 percent of the preferences expressed for further research. Table 1 presents the results.

As might have been anticipated, respondents identified the essentials of volunteer management as most vital for coverage in the basic course. The area mentioned most frequently is recruitment of volunteers (17.2 percent of comments). The next three priorities for training are motivation, recognition, and retention of volunteers (13.7 percent); interviewing, screening, and placing volunteers in organizational positions (10.1 percent); and supervision and management of volunteers (8.2 percent). Professional skills (7.7 percent), embracing such areas as time management, leadership, ethics, communication, conflict resolution, counseling and coaching, team building, and networking, round out the top five subject areas. The second group of five areas consists of planning and evaluation of the volunteer program (7.1 percent); training employees for collaboration with volunteers and volunteers for the responsibilities assigned to them (5.7 percent); designing jobs for volunteers (5.0 percent); maintaining records for the volunteer program (4.5 percent), and publicizing the program through marketing, advertising, and the media (3.2 percent).

Table 1. Top Ten Preferences of Volunteer Administrators for Subjects to Be Addressed in a Basic Seminar, an Advanced Seminar, and Further Research in Volunteer Administration

Subject Area	Basic Seminar		Advanced Seminar		Further Research	
	%	(Rank)	%	(Rank)	%	(Rank)
Volunteer recruitment	17.2	(1)	4.2	(9)	7.9	(3)
Motivation, recognition, retention	13.7	(2)	6.2	(5)	10.9	(1)
Screening and placing volunteers	10.1	(3)				
Supervising and managing volunteers	8.2	(4)	10.2	(2)	5.5	(7)
Professional skills	7.7	(5)	15.1	(1)	6.9	(5)
Planning and evaluation	7.1	(6)	8.8	(3)	6.9	(5)
Training employees and volunteers	5.7	(7)				
Job design for volunteers	5.0	(8)				
Record keeping	4.5	(9)				
Marketing and publicity	3.2	(10)	5.0	(7)		
Organizational change and development			6.6	(4)	3.4	(10)
Fund or resource raising			5.5	(6)		
Directing volunteer services			4.4	(8)	7.0	(4)
Budgeting and accounting			4.2	(9)		
Empowerment and political factors			4.2	(9)	10.2	(2)
Nontraditional volunteers					5.5	(7)
Substantive areas					3.9	(9)
Percentage of all comments	82.4		74.4		68.1	
Total comments	2,180		1,826		597	

Note: Table presents percentage of administrators' comments made in each area and the ranking of the areas according to the frequency of comments received.

While the topics identified most often for a basic course focus primarily on building the volunteer program, the administrators felt that developing the skills and position of the volunteer manager should receive greater emphasis in an advanced seminar. They gave top priority to the acquisition of professional skills, recommended in 15.1 percent of their comments. Issues pertaining to the director of volunteer services, including training, organizational status, compensation, and board of director relations, command 4.4 percent of the suggestions. Another 4.2 percent of comments center on empowerment and political factors, such as involving volunteers in program management, building organizational support for volunteers, and honing the political skills and savvy of the volunteer administrator. The sample also endorses treatment of several of the fundamental skills

selected for the basic course advanced seminar move change and development and development, new personnel (6.6 percent of commercial and budgeting and accounting responses, a substantial number devoted to enhancing the administrator.

Finally, the volunteers conducted research on frequency of their community volunteer motivation and well as recruitment (7.9 percent)—surely among unteerism. But they also volunteers, for example, to such as in the schools or place relatively great importance resolution will challenge session and host organization (10.2 percent) a services position (7.0 percent) present analysis.

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Selected Seminar	Further Research	(Rank)
(Rank)	%	(Rank)
(9)	7.9	(3)
(5)	10.9	(1)
(2)	5.5	(7)
(1)	6.9	(5)
(3)	6.9	(5)
(7)		
(4)	3.4	(10)
(6)		
(8)	7.0	(4)
(9)		
(9)	10.2	(2)
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selected for the basic course, but the subject areas preferred for the advanced seminar move beyond them to encompass organizational change and development, including organizational needs assessment and development, new programs and innovation, and future trends (6.6 percent of comments), fund or resource raising (5.5 percent), and budgeting and accounting (4.2 percent). According to these responses, a substantial portion of advanced training should be devoted to enhancing professional competencies of the volunteer administrator.

Finally, the volunteer managers call on the academic community to conduct research on questions both enduring and novel. By the frequency of their comments, they would most appreciate studies of volunteer motivation and retention (10.9 percent of suggestions), as well as recruitment (7.9 percent) and management of volunteers (5.5 percent)—surely among the most fundamental topics in all of volunteerism. But they also recommend research on nontraditional volunteers, for example, those who are handicapped or court referred (5.5 percent), and on volunteering in particular substantive domains, such as in the schools or hospitals (3.9 percent). The administrators place relatively great importance on research to address issues whose resolution will challenge the resources and commitment of their profession and host organizations well into the future: volunteer empowerment (10.2 percent) and the status of the director of volunteer services position (7.0 percent). These issues have been central to the present analysis.

Discussion

The results of the Educational Needs Survey raise several questions. First, while only one fourth of the sample had undergone training in volunteer administration before beginning work in the field, nine out of ten of these practitioners believe that their organization would subsidize the cost of continuing education. While the two items are not directly parallel (the former solicits factual information, and the latter asks for a projection), the differences in response invite explanation. What might account for the apparently marked increase in the percentage of organizations interested in training for the administrator of volunteer services between the entry of these officials into the field and their occupying the present position?

The Educational Needs Survey did not probe this issue, but at least two factors may be at work. First, since many of these individuals entered volunteer administration, the field has become more recognized and professionalized. Nearly one third of the sample (31.3 percent) have been involved in volunteer management for ten years or more and another 25.4 percent for six to ten years. Over the past decade not only have opportunities for training in volunteer administration greatly expanded but organizations have become more aware of them.

Second, these data intimate that managers of volunteers may be able to act as effective advocates of their position and program. Organizations are most likely to learn about continuing education in volunteerism—indeed, about the entire field—from these officials. With the burden on them to convince the agency, the volunteer administrators express remarkable confidence that host organizations will appreciate the merits of further training and, thus, support it financially. Similarly, the AVA Survey on Employer Recognition found that when volunteer managers took the initiative, organizations were often forthcoming in endorsing and subsidizing training. When they neglected to do so, however, a more likely outcome was frustration (Patton, 1990). If the degree of organizational support for volunteer administration lamented in the literature is to improve, these results suggest that the volunteer manager must play a key role.

Another question prompted by the survey findings is the correspondence between the subjects that the sample of volunteer administrators believe should be addressed in continuing education courses and the competencies specified for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CVA), a professional program sponsored by the Association for Volunteer Administration. As discussed above, the AVA membership was the largest group included in the Educational Needs Survey. The CVA requires demonstration of competency in five functional areas: program planning and organization; staffing and directing; controlling; individual, group, and organizational behavior; and grounding in the profession. The breadth of these domains encompasses virtually all of the subjects recommended for coverage in training seminars by the volunteer administrators (see Table 1), although survey respondents seem to place greater emphasis on fund and resource raising and empowerment and political skills of the director of volunteer services.

A final question raised by the present analysis is the possible effects of organizational auspices on volunteers and volunteer programs. Research has started to appear with an explicit focus on contrasts (and similarities) between public and nonprofit organizations (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1990; Sundeen, 1990). As in the present study, findings are not conclusive, but they do suggest the importance of organizational auspices for volunteer involvement. Given the likely influence of organizational context factors on such crucial processes as volunteer recruitment and retention, the nature and extent of citizen participation, and the scope and quality of services to clients, institutional differences merit increased attention from scholars and practitioners in volunteerism.

Conclusion

This article proposed three hypotheses relating to administrators of volunteer services and examined them empirically based on a broad sample of 765 practitioners in the United States and Canada surveyed

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in 1989-1990. The analysis revealed an abiding commitment on the part of these officials to continuing education in volunteer management. According to the views expressed by the administrators, most host organizations appeared willing to subsidize such training. As expected, nonprofit organizations seemed somewhat more supportive of the position of administrator of volunteer services than did government agencies, but these results did not attain statistical significance. The findings suggest that volunteer administrators can act effectively as advocates to increase organizational awareness and support of their position and program, at least in matters pertaining to continuing education.

The sample provided useful guidance for the design of basic and advanced seminars in the field. Responses to open-ended questions indicate that the essentials of volunteer program management should dominate the former, while the latter should concentrate more on building the skills and desired competencies of the volunteer administrator. The results also point to an appropriate role for the academic community in enriching training opportunities through the conduct and dissemination of research on traditional as well as emerging issues in volunteerism that are of interest to practitioners.

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