



Association for Volunteer Administration

**Visioning and
Transformational Change Process**

Focus Groups Report

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Special Notes

The focus group interviews were conducted by Dr. John R. Throop, president of The Summit Planning Group, Peoria Heights, Illinois as part of a large scale Visioning and Transformational Change process undertaken by the AVA Board of Directors. The board retained Dr. Throop to facilitate this process. All work in this process, including focus group interviews, has been supported by a grant from the UPS Foundation. The board and Dr. Throop are most grateful to the UPS Foundation for its generosity.

Dr. Throop conducted and facilitated all interviews. All logistical arrangements from the AVA office were made by Paige Tucker, manager of membership and marketing. All focus groups were conducted in person in specific cities or at ICVA 2003, except for the groups including persons in remote areas and persons who are trainers and consultants, who were included in teleconferences.

We have listed specific attendance among U.S. member focus groups, but we have chosen not to list specific attendance information for those in groups including internationals, Canadians, affiliated networks/senior managers, and trainers and consultants.

Member Focus Groups

As part of its Visioning and Transformational Change process, and with the advice and direction of Dr. John Throop, president of The Summit Planning Group, the process consultant, the Association of Volunteer Administration conducted nine member focus groups in different regions of the country:

- Richmond, VA (December 17, 2003)*
- New York, NY (January 8, 2004)*
- Fort Worth, TX (January 15, 2004)
- St. Paul, MN (January 23, 2004)
- St. Petersburg, FL (January 27, 2004)*
- Chicago, IL (January 28, 2004)
- Pasadena, CA (January 29, 2004)
- Portland, OR (January 30, 2004)*
- Remote areas teleconference (February 3, 2004)

*Also included at least one non-member.

Paige Tucker, AVA's membership manager, recruited a member host in each of these locations, and invited members in these regions to participate in the focus group. Each group met for two hours, and Dr. Throop facilitated participant discussion to gain input on five main questions, and to test certain changes in AVA's mission, services, products, and the ICVA design.

Below are the focus group questions:

1. Introduce yourself, and indicate the agency you represent. (For members) How long have you been a member of AVA? (For all) **What is the primary challenge you find yourself facing in your work as a volunteer resources manager?**
2. **What is the value to you of your AVA membership?**
3. **What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?**
4. **What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including certification, written materials, training, and ICVA?**
5. **What are some emerging issues and needs that AVA will need to address?**

In most cases, Dr. Throop raised all questions, though each group had different dynamics and, to some extent, determined the topical areas for discussion that interested or concerned them.

As certain participant themes and consultant conclusions began to emerge in focus group input, these questions gained greater shape and certain ideas were tested to determine the extent of need or appeal.

General Input

Despite clear differences in regional attitudes, perspectives, and needs assessments, certain common points of view were expressed about each of the questions.

Trends

Participants identified four trends that challenge them as volunteer leaders and managers.

- **Changing Nature of Volunteers.** The volunteer who comes into an office or program on a regular basis, or who carries some of the administrative load on a regular basis, is gone. The newer groups of volunteers are project-oriented. They want to move into their volunteer experience quickly. They do not last long in any one volunteer responsibility. They represent many types of people: early retirees, people on mid-life sabbaticals, people who are unemployed or in career shift, interns, those in government service, or those fulfilling community service hours (students complying with school policy, people in governmental or corporate programs, or adults working off a criminal sentence). No one training program fits them.
- **Shift in Organizational Expectation of Volunteers.** As some types of organizations downsize (hospitals, schools, grant-funded childcare), previously paid positions are filled with volunteers. So the work gets done even if it is not traditional volunteer work. Healthcare volunteers are expected to adhere to HIPAA protocols. Those who work with youth are subject to extensive background checks.
- **Wider Scope of Volunteerism.** The development of AmeriCorps, national service volunteers, and the growth in Homeland Security Department programs all bring about expectations of national service. Increasingly, volunteers are led by volunteers.
- **Multi-Cultural Volunteerism.** In many parts of the country, organizations are having to adapt to ethnically diverse populations that may have different expectations about volunteering—but there are few programs or training protocols that are available to support volunteer training in such populations (lack of materials in a native language/lack of cultural sensitivity or awareness).

Value of the AVA Membership

Four elements of value were identified consistently by focus group members around the country:

- **Professional Positioning.** Members consistently identified the professional positioning of volunteer management as a key value of belonging to AVA. AVA is the one place where people can gather with peers and find themselves supported, and where they can gain visibility, mentoring, and encouragement. Frequently, members cited *Positioning the Profession* as a valuable tool to hand to executive directors and CEOs to help establish the importance of professionalism in volunteer administration.
- **Networking Opportunities.** Members can connect to others in their direct service field or sector, which gives them countless opportunities to find their peers in their field/sector and seek advice, counsel and friendship. They also value the availability of volunteer managers outside of their immediate field who can give them a larger perspective of the work of volunteer management and administration.
- **International Scope.** Members understand that they often are dealing with a significant international expansion in their volunteer base, especially in metropolitan areas. Associating with international colleagues at ICVA and other places helps them to understand how to work with similar populations in their own communities.
- **ICVA.** Members find many of the items listed above to be available at the annual conference. They like the tracks that are offered. They value the balance of professionals (consultants, trainers, keynoters) and practitioners in the field who provide the workshop content. ICVA also functions for many as a "mini-sabbatical" from their work in the field and provides an opportunity to re-charge.

Devaluing Elements of AVA Membership

Participants had a variety of problems with their AVA memberships, but they can be reduced to four common problems:

- **Lack of depth in products and services.** Members could identify the main products, such as *Positioning the Profession* or the ethics publication. Beyond that, they were unhappy with the lack of useable products, services, or materials to use in their work, or to educate their supervisors. They noted that they often went to other sources, such as Energize, Inc., various DOVIAs, or sector-specific associations to which they also belonged to find a greater range of materials.

- **Lack of efficient and effective communication with members.** They like the CyberVPM listserv and they can identify the fact that they receive the electronic newsletter. Rarely can they find material to “clip” and e-mail to key volunteer leaders or their supervisors. If they use the Web site, it is broad in scope, but not deep. They usually do not find *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* very useful, though some appreciate its attention to trends and developments in the field. There is little they feel they can share from the journal with those outside of the field, including their supervisors. They also find that, since there is no regional structure in any form, there is a disconnect between COVAs, DOVIAs or other area or statewide organizations that also pull volunteer managers together for conferences and events. AVA rarely is mentioned, unless a member surfaces with some news at one of these events. Learning about AVA locally is a hit-or-miss proposition.
- **Unevenness of ICVA.** We will cover this issue in greater depth in the section dedicated to ICVA. Generally, though, the focus group members who did go—which rarely was more than half of those in a group and often much less—noted that some presentations were good, and others were superficial and time-consuming for the amount of money due at registration. Many focus group members had a “value-for-dollar” issue.
- **Lack of clarity about who can be a member.** People in faith-based ministries, those involved in grassroots organizing or community organizing, or those managing all-volunteer organizations (and they are volunteers themselves) were quite confused and wondered whether there are resources and services available for them—everything seems to be geared rather high (a few even said, AVA is “elitist”). Also, people in part-time positions, or shared positions, wondered if they could be members in good standing.

Training Materials, Products, and Services

This section was partly needs assessment and partly a field test of some new concepts and “curb appeal” of specific ideas for products and services.

- **Professional development possibilities.** Members responded positively to the idea of specific professional development events and the use of technology—to a point. They liked the idea of teleconferences, especially when integrated with a Web-based presentation that they could access on their desktops and laptops. Some noted, however, that the technological capacity in their areas—especially in rural areas—was lacking, especially in Webcasting. Some also liked the idea of satellite downlinks, especially when these can be facilitated locally, or integrated into statewide

conferences. They also hoped that such professional development events could count for CEUs, academic credit, or CVA credit.

- **Changes in professional credentialing.** Those members who did know about credentialing (a small majority), or who were credentialed (a small minority) thought that it needed to go through some major changes to be more appealing—especially since the money for the credentialing has to come from their personal pockets because the employer is not sold on the value of earning a professional credential. When tied in with an academic program, so that both course credits and credentialing credit could be obtained simultaneously, members became most enthusiastic. Some also suggested that another, lower tier be added so that a person can “work the way up” to a CVA. Others thought that it was important to have something distinctive in volunteer management credentialing for those who are in a coordinator position without much supervisory authority. Others suggested that perhaps AVA is going about credentialing the wrong way by working with individuals and training them to “sell” the value to executive directors. Instead, perhaps AVA ought to offer organizational credentialing for volunteer excellence, with one of the best practices or prerequisites being the use of a volunteer manager who is a CVA, and that this organizational credential could be tied into foundation or federal-level funding opportunities.
- **Changes in membership categories.** Members did not like the fact that AVA offers only one type of membership: individual. They saw great value in offering student memberships for college or graduate students, linked memberships with other associations (whether in their specific profession or with other more general nonprofit associations), or organizational memberships that might entitle two or three additional staff people to join at a lower cost (who would be looking for more material in their area of interest—e.g., development, CEO, board president).
- **Changes in ICVA.** Members very much liked the idea of a national coordinator for ICVA, with a strong local support team in the host city to develop programs and activities to highlight their city and its volunteer management work. They thought that a national coordinator would bring consistency to program offerings and raise the level of the keynote speakers. They also are very open to the idea of alternating conferences with an international AVA event in North America one year and a series of identical regional conferences the next year. They thought that, in either case attendance would increase because the international event could have its own power with significant international political figures speaking and very high-quality, cutting-edge workshops. The regional event could deal effectively with general knowledge but also some of the specific regional challenges nonprofits might be facing.

Emerging Issues and Needs

Participants have a variety of perspectives about trends and “waves” in the field of volunteer management. They coalesced around three primary emerging issues that AVA would do well to address proactively.

- **Mentoring for rising volunteer leadership.** Where are the young people in AVA? Many of those who had attended ICVAs believe that participants had a median age of 45 to 50. In the meantime, young people are learning about volunteering from community service hours in school, internships in college, or the opportunity to volunteer with Americorps. It is important to develop mentorship programs to train and develop younger volunteer managers so that they are prepared to assume the same leadership role that their predecessors had.
- **Increasing multi-culturalism.** Where are the people of color in AVA? Where are the Spanish-speaking volunteer leaders? Where are East Asian or African immigrants? It is essential that AVA build rapport with people of color to train and develop their leadership competencies and skills in a culturally appropriate way. AVA should develop strong outreach and leadership recruitment efforts in marginalized communities, since they are struggling with integration into American society.
- **Agitation for financial resources to carry out the work.** AVA must be at the table with policy-makers and foundation leaders to find more money for capacity-building, infrastructure development, and management support for volunteer resources managers. Most nonprofits and public agencies, even if they did have the funds available to promote the training and development of volunteer managers, may not see much importance in sharing these funds to strengthen volunteer supervision and management. We need to develop better political capital to achieve greater financial capital in the work.

Regional Input

Here are summaries of the two-hour conversations that took place in each city below. It is interesting to note the similarities and the differences among participants in each region. The participants came from highly diverse backgrounds and from different sectors: arts and culture, AIDS support groups, senior services, health care, community development, local governmental units, zoos, faith-based units, and consulting in the field.

Richmond, Virginia

In Richmond, there were two focus groups, one of non-members (five participants) and one of members. Each group was asked a different set of questions about the value and role of AVA, and why they are or are not members.

Richmond, Virginia; December 17, 2003

Non-AVA Members

Name	Organization	E-mail
Linda Barnhart	Senior Connections, CAAA	clbarnhart@youraaa.org
Sudeshna Das-Menezes	Maymont Foundation	spaul@maymont.org
DeDe Helquist	Children's Hospital	dhelquist@chva.org
Sara Miller	Sacred Heart Center	shcvolunteer@hotmail.com

Richmond, Virginia; December 17, 2003

AVA Members

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Ursula Ardy	MCV-VCU Hospitals	uardy@hsc.vcu.edu
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Jeannie Edwards	American Red Cross	edwardsj@usa.redcross.org
Reenie Marshcall, CVA	VA Commission on Natl/Comm Serv.	reeniepm@comcast.net
Crystal McClintock	CASA Program, Hanover Co.	csmcclintock@co.hanover.va.us
Gerry O'Neill	Virginia Supportive Housing	VSHGerry@aol.com
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Pamela Williams-Holmes	Richmond Dept. of Juvenile Just. Serv	holmespw@ci.richmond.va.us

Non-Members

1. What are some of the critical issues or problems in your work as a volunteer resources manager?

Lack of acknowledgement, awareness, and recognition of the volunteer resources management position. Participants noted that it was difficult to get staff and senior managers to recognize the importance of the volunteer resources manager's work. They do not realize that, without coordination of volunteers, the work of the particular nonprofit would be impossible. When positions are created, there was little or no knowledge of budgetary requirements, space needs, or adequate financial support. In addition, the volunteer resources manager's position often is combined with many other responsibilities, which creates many challenges for prioritization. Some positions mix managing volunteer programs with handling the department's phones.

Lack of financial resources and time. Participants indicated that they have trouble finding financial resources to grow and develop the volunteer office. Some are funded for much less actual time than they put into the work. With so many varied responsibilities, some part of the work inevitably takes the lead—which in some cases may be on developing volunteers for special events (which raises money) rather than training them for delivering direct services.

2. What are some of the training and development opportunities you have utilized in your work?

Through academic institutions and conferences. Some participants cited classes and programs on nonprofit management offered through Virginia Commonwealth University. Two classes at VCU proved very helpful, one on strategies for volunteer coordination/managing volunteers, and the other on starting mentoring programs. Programs offer CEUs and/or professional development credit.

Through affiliates. Participants cited the work of GRAVA (Greater Richmond Association for Volunteer Administration), especially workshops and regular meetings. One participant said that, of all conferences in Virginia she attended, only GRAVA focused on volunteer administration. Other groups, such as the Virginia Society of Volunteer Directors, or the Capital Area VSVD, can provide good information.

Through AVA. Even though AVA is headquartered in Richmond, non-members accessed AVA through the Web site and found some good resources there, both virtually and in print.

3. What are some specific resources that you have found useful and helpful?

The Internet. Five sites were identified, including Energize.com, Charity Channel.org, Mentoring.org, Savenet.org, and Museums on the Boulevard.org. Regarding Charity Channel, one person remarked that it was focused, targeted, and had a variety of topics applicable to volunteer management.

Other organizations. One participant noted that the State of Virginia Department of Social Services offers several books free of charge on volunteer management.

4. How can the Association for Volunteer Administration help you?

Provide ideas for volunteer management. An association like AVA is most helpful when providing ideas and information that are precise, seasonally sensitive, and in tune with some of the budget challenges and budget cuts some

participants face. Also, associations can provide conferences and professional development opportunities.

Promote the profession. Associations are helpful in promoting the profession to supervisors so that they can acknowledge the value of volunteer resources managers' work. AVA in particular is good at promoting the profession.

Provide network opportunities. It's always helpful to be able to connect with colleagues, and to be able to learn or see first hand what is happening in specific situations.

5. What are some materials that you would find useful?

Participants noted that **training materials** on volunteer leadership and service delivery can be helpful—but that such materials need to be fast-paced and highly interactive to keep people engaged—both professional volunteer managers and volunteer leadership. **Computer-based materials** can be helpful, too, especially in presenting standardized material and assessments. Subjects that could be very helpful include diversity training and mentoring assistance.

A **magazine** could be helpful depending on what it contained—especially if it had content that could be shown to board members and managers. Others thought that **e-mail content** that could be pasted into their newsletters would be a great resource. Still others look to new methods of recognition as valuable, such as bulk-buying for grocery store certificates (which could be passed on to social service clients).

6. What is valuable and not so valuable about AVA?

Value. AVA provides networking opportunities and a diversity of backgrounds to help professionals get outside of their customary approaches. In addition, national associations like AVA can open resources in volunteer coordination. A **drawback**, however, is the expense and the time commitment involved with the conference, which is the main product or service AVA offers. There also could be a better sense of partnership. One participant said that she utilizes an AARP program on volunteer recruitment, and she wondered why AVA does not co-market with some of the efforts in which she is involved.

Membership. The value of membership is that it brings recognition to people working in volunteer coordination. The participants strongly endorsed adding an organizational membership component, especially because it would heighten recognition of the work of volunteer coordination while opening up new management development opportunities for other nonprofit managers and leaders.

7. How do you work with the local affiliate?

The role of an affiliate, according to participants, is that it provides a gateway to affordability. People can pick and choose membership levels based on what they can afford and what meets their needs. It would be worth joining an affiliate at a reduced rate if a member of AVA, and the reverse also would be true. It would be good to have a more active option available.

8. What do you think about the CVA program and credentialing in general?

There were mixed reviews about the value of credentialing and the CVA designation. Some found the idea of credentialing attractive, and said that it would give them an increased sense of competence. All were clear that they did not think it would make much difference in terms of their organizational standing or the valuation of their management position.

Additional problems in credentialing include the fact that at least 50 percent of the candidate's time must be devoted to volunteer resources management, but many people in volunteer management have multiple responsibilities and cannot qualify. Others mentioned the time commitment versus the benefits to having the credential.

One clearly articulated suggestion was to have levels of credentialing or graduated credentials. If there are stepping stones, credentialing would not be such a daunting task. People could make choices appropriate to their needs.

9. What are some emerging issues in volunteer management to which AVA must pay attention?

Three key issues emerged in the view of these non-members in the Richmond region:

- **Time constraints.** People want to give of themselves, but after working long hours they think that even four hours in a year can be a challenging. How can we change perceptions of volunteer time in the midst of complex and busy lives? Also, younger people have a different take on time commitments and value and are harder to retain.
- **External requirements.** Volunteers have trouble understanding all of the documentation and training that now is required by external agencies. As one participant said, "The requirements to document to the Nth degree really muddies the freshness of potential volunteers. They become impatient going into gridlock when volunteering." How can the spirit of volunteers be reconciled with strict documentation and training requirements?

- **Perception of poor working conditions.** What can organizations do if their location hampers volunteering during off-hours, especially in the evening? In some places, security is becoming a key issue, and a perception of poor working conditions for volunteering.

AVA Members

There were seven participants who manage or oversee over 4,400 volunteers regionally and statewide.

1. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

Participants cited the following five benefits to membership in AVA:

- **Networking opportunities.** AVA offers a “conspicuous affiliation” as a professional membership organization. One person said, “I sort of followed the pack and joined to be with them.”
- **Professionalism.** The association helps to advocate for the profession and provide clout with the employer and to reinforce the importance of the management position.
- **Good resources.** The compensation survey is helpful, as are free materials, and the Web site.
- **Knowledge sharing.** One participant said, “I fell into volunteer administration and thought it was simple. But there are many layers, and AVA shows me how to do the job well.”

2. What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?

Affiliate relationship is lacking or unclear. Participants said that AVA is supposed to be doing something for the local affiliate. But AVA has not really had a role in local affiliate re GRAVA. They need to re-read the affiliate agreement to determine who is responsible for what. As the local affiliate in Richmond, the location of AVA’s headquarters, what can we find when we come here to the office beyond access to the executive director?

Need for better advocacy. Participants think that an effort should be made to “embolden” AVA and make it more assertive. There are two issues where AVA could carry a lot of weight: the valuation amount for the volunteer hour, and, as the organization that represents this field, definition of volunteer management best practices.

3. What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?

Improvement in products and services. Participants like the idea of “packaging” products and services. For example, one individual thought that AVA could negotiate buying power for background checks so the organization does not have to pay \$36 per query. Another suggested a book service providing discounts to members.

Others want ICVA materials bundled for use afterwards. One participant noted that, after the last ICVA conference, the materials were available in text form only, which was inconvenient. Diskette information was not helpful, either. There were no handouts, and it does not matter to the members that trainers and consultants may not provide them for distribution. They want them for purchase at or after the conference. ICVA also can package workshops separately and bundle the information.

Web site improvements. Participants want the AVA Web site to have a provision for self-updating of a member record. They also want the Web site to enable a knowledge exchange system for networking.

They also want better links—or links at all—to additional resources tracking tools and training options, as well as review of commercially available product. Currently, according to participants, some of the information is not easy to extract from the site. The keywords used did not match the resources provided, which is confusing and frustrating.

Learning and Knowledge Products

Newsletter. There were mixed reviews regarding the usefulness of the electronic newsletter in its current format. Members scan through it to find what is relevant. They like the newsletter available electronically on a 24/7 basis. Paper, on the other hand, is easier to peruse for content and to scan for relevance. With the electronic version it is better that, on first page, there is a content review or synopsis without having to scroll down.

Training video products. The usefulness of a training video for volunteer managers, or for volunteer orientation, depends on what issues would be offered for training. Local issues could not be covered, so the general issues would have to be vital and necessary. It would be helpful for the video to emphasize the job of the volunteer coordinator. Pricing also would be important to consider.

AVA might do better to build a video resource library with several different titles. Some community service volunteers might find this a valuable resource, and some material could be relevant for health care providers and volunteers. There are challenges for video production with boundary issues, service provider issues, and different communication styles.

New print products. Several participants use *Positioning the Profession* and have used pages from the publication to get a change in title, and the

publication justifies what volunteer managers do. The publication can educate newcomers to field. Participants like the research backed up in it. One noted that she works with an HR manager, and this publication carries a lot of weight.

Another useful publication could be on starting a statewide volunteer council. Others want more on ethical dilemmas (though they know there is a booklet on this). Another suggested a publication linking volunteer coordination with HR in nonprofits and how to deal with discontented staff.

In the end, participants want easier access to materials. By being able to access materials, AVA membership would be more meaningful and tangible, and more applicable to one's current situation

ICVA changes. Three people out of the group of seven attended ICVA 2003. Those that did not attend had three reasons for nonattendance: location away from the area, conflict in dates, or lack of persuasive reasons to attend. One said, "I knew that there was a conference, but I did not get a sense of anticipation, like, "I want to be a part of this!"

Those attending liked the division into tracks, the ease of registration, and the relatively inexpensive cost of registration. One thing they did not like was to have to sit for long periods of time. "Most volunteer coordinators aren't desk type of people," said one. "We need to move around, maybe breaking up the groups by affinity or interest for tours."

One suggestion: AVA needs to think about how to break the ICVA into national and regional conferences, perhaps in alternate years, or by a same-year national professional conference and then one for the statewide directors and groups. That way, regional identities might be re-established. On another track, perhaps the ICVA could be simulcast, connected to the annual local mini-conference or to the GRAVA conference.

Professional Development

Credentialing. Several participants stressed the importance of a layered credentialing process. They think CVA requires a major time commitment and offers an all-or-nothing approach. If there were a layered credentialing process, AVA could make a big deal about moving to the next step.

Credentialing definitely is a personal accomplishment, but the professional accomplishment is not well-understood because it is not known much outside of volunteer management circles. Some participants ask themselves, "Should I take the time to pursue credentialing if it won't make a difference when I have other tasks that take more time on the job?"

In credentialing, the process should fit into an AVA public education goal. It is important, therefore, to be in communication with agency HR officers and executives. When AVA sends a credentialing letter to a volunteer manager, copy the letter to the employer, too.

Membership structure. Should there be membership levels other than individual? For some, AVA is a professional *and* personal affiliation, like AMA is to the doctor, and ABA is to the attorney. If we lost an individual category, would AVA and its members lose some of their "conspicuous affiliation"? Would organizational membership penalize the smaller agencies? Would there be recognition in organizations and agencies that deal with volunteer management could apply to anyone outside of that immediate field?

Another question surrounds the membership arrangement between the international association and the local affiliate. Many like the current arrangement, where local membership will get you a discount from the international association. Participants typically thought of GRAVA first, and then AVA. It would be nice to coordinate renewals.

New York, New York

New York City, New York; January 8, 2004
AVA Members

Name	Organization	E-mail
Hillary Ganton	Lenox Hill Hospital	hganton@lenoxhill.net
Elana Gartner	Center for Independence of the Disabled in NY	egartner@cidny.org
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David Meacham	Planned Parenthood Fed. of America	david_meacham@ppfa.org
Aileen Moore	Grand Street Settlement	amoore@grandstreet.org
Jerry Panno		gpjerrykl@earthlink.net
Sheri Wilensky*	American Lung Association	swilensky@lungusa.org

* Sheri Wilensky organized local logistics.

1. What is the primary challenge you find yourself facing in your work as a volunteer resource manager?

Participants discussed three related trends that have an impact on volunteering and volunteer management, and thus on AVA itself. AVA could provide guidance or training to deal with these trends.

Downsizing of employee base and increase in requests for volunteers. Especially in health care, volunteers are in positions formerly held by compensated staff. So the volunteers are functioning as employees in many respects, but are not being paid. The turnover rate is significant in health care in particular because of the number of student interns and younger, underemployed workers seeking resume-building opportunities.

Union-management tensions over volunteer "replacement workers." In some locales, union members and leaders are raising objections to the use of volunteers in positions formerly held by union members. Volunteer managers often are caught in the middle of this tension. They did not initiate the change but have to deal with the results.

Time-challenged volunteer managers can't devote time to training. Often volunteer managers are juggling three or four responsibilities simultaneously. They know they need training, but if they are going to devote any time to training, they will choose a degree program first and a credentialing program later.

2. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

Several participants indicated that networking is a primary value to membership in AVA—although a number of participants indicated that they were members of the New York affiliate, but not of the national organization.

3. What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?

For those who are members, lack of materials, products and services that are relevant to the work that they do. They look to other associations and organizations to fill in the information gap regarding volunteer management, or trends in the voluntary sector.

Participants who are not international AVA members (but part of the New York affiliate) do not find much value in an international membership when the affiliate can offer more than the association does. International members and non-members alike hope very much that the AVA Web site can provide levels of services and an array of products for members and non-members alike (with the price differential for a member).

4. What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?

The participants said that it is important for AVA to advocate, not only for the profession, but for volunteerism generally. They wonder how effective it is to advocate for volunteer management in organizations if the CEOs and the board members do not understand the value of volunteering, or the importance of managing the volunteers that do advance the organizations. They think that AVA should broaden its scope by addressing the larger environment of volunteering in an organization or agency.

Sell the CEO and train those who hire volunteer coordinators/managers on what to look for in their candidates. Provide tools to board members to understand the importance of volunteers and those who manage them. After all, board members are volunteers, and they can become the best advocates for volunteering. Also, provide information and relevant tools to auxiliary members and leaders (volunteers themselves) so they can advocate for effective management of volunteer resources.

AVA may not be able to do all of the advocacy work by itself, especially where there are specific sectors or disciplines involved. AVA should seek to partner with sector-specific groups and programs to offer a more comprehensive approach to training. Also, in view of the time demands on volunteer leaders, AVA should work more diligently to tie the CVA credentialing to a university degree program.

5. What does AVA need to do to become more effective?

In a more dynamic advocacy role, AVA needs to identify the key policy-makers who need to be informed and influenced on volunteer management issues. AVA should find visible and credible spokespeople (not only political pundits) to help in the advocacy efforts. As many other sectors, organizations, and associations do, AVA should have a national policy-making initiative, such as an annual lobbying day in Washington, D.C. and prepare an agenda for members to bring to their political representatives. AVA could plug in more effectively to the experts in the field of volunteer management and deploy them or their findings into the larger political arena.

AVA also would do well to advocate, educate, and work closely with funders regarding the importance of building volunteer infrastructure. A couple of participants pointed positively to the UPS Foundation support of AVA and hoped that such funding could be replicated.

6. What products/services/activities should AVA offer?

Participants identified several needed products and discussed techniques to deliver them efficiently. Referring again to the credentialing process, in addition to tying credentialing into a university-based degree program, the participants think that different credentialing tracks or levels may be helpful to those in a real time crunch.

Participants also thought that the conference call method for seminars is more likely to secure their participation rather than having just one opportunity—an annual conference—to attend. One specific conference call topic might be a new volunteer resources manager conference call, describing VRM responsibilities in general terms and providing an orientation to the industry.

A topic that AVA can address in some format is how a volunteer resource manager can respond effectively to an inquiry from a potential volunteer.

7. What are some emerging issues and needs that AVA will need to address?

The participants answered this question in the first section of this regional focus group summary.

Fort Worth, Texas

Fort Worth, Texas; January 15, 2004
AVA Members

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Stephanie Books	Arlington Police Dept.	books@ci.arlington.tx.us
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Marilyn Hughes	Carter BloodCare	mhughes@carterbloodcare.org
Jackie Long	JPS Health Network	jlong@jpshealthnetwork.org

*Nedra Cutler organized local logistics.

1. What is the primary challenge you find yourself facing in your work as a volunteer resources manager?

Participants indicated that three issues recur in working as a volunteer resources manager now.

- **Reliability and availability of volunteers is variable.** People do not have the same sense of responsibility to volunteer commitments as they did in previous decades. It is hard to manage a variable volunteer force.
- **Professional recognition is a real problem in many organizations.** Boards and senior staff of organizations want many volunteers to carry out programs, but they do not ask for input from volunteer managers too often regarding strategies to attract these volunteers.
- **Time management is an issue.** There is so much to do to attract and retain volunteers, manage and oversee their work, and keep appropriate records, that self-organization can be a real challenge.

2. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

The group members listed many positive elements to AVA membership, including training, especially through ICVA and related conferences. Participants value the credentialing process for personal study and professional designation. They also appreciate the ability to network nationally, not just locally, for more ideas and examples of best practices. The CyperVPM is a valuable benefit as a listserv between members.

Participants also like *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* and find the research helpful, especially to those who are connected with educational systems. There are great ideas and noteworthy resources in each issue.

Participants appreciate leadership opportunities, both at the association

level, and regionally. They really liked the opportunity to host an ICVA in Dallas a few years ago. That effort helped to build a local network.

In terms of positioning the profession, participants think that AVA is especially helpful to new directors. They also value the opportunity to present membership renewal to a supervisor, offering a chance to familiarize that person with the value of the volunteer management position.

3. **What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?**

Participants identified several shortcomings:

- **Lack of regional structure.** The lack of a regional structure makes learning experiences hard to access sometimes due to lack of funds to attend ICVA.
- **Gap in communication.** There is little information shared from AVA internationally to the membership regarding funding trends and opportunities, and national activity, especially in the area of advocacy.
- **Recognition for credentialing.** There is no link currently between the credentialing process and a higher-end terminal degree program.

4. **What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?**

- **Better distribution of materials.** The participants would like all managers and members of their boards of directors to get newsletters especially targeted to them regarding volunteer management issues.
- **More diverse training.** The participants would like to see more training for board members on the role of volunteers and volunteer management, and in video formats. Recognize, too, that, at least in Dallas-Fort Worth, the Volunteer Center of North Texas provides training materials for volunteer management. How can AVA connect with the center?
- **Change credentialing methods.** Participants want to see more options in volunteer management credentialing. "If I were younger," one participant said, "I'd go after a degree, not a credential. It's more useful in the job search." Perhaps there could be different levels of credentialing, such as at entry-level, at the managerial level, and in the academic level. Also, credentialing could be sector-specific and linked with other credentialing or certification activity (such as in the medical field).
- **Conference at a regional level, too.** Some members cannot travel outside of the state of Texas because of departmental travel restrictions for staff, and often international travel (even to Canada) is not permitted. Participants who worked on the Dallas ICVA conference enjoyed the experience, learned a lot, and were proud of their accomplishment—and would never do it again because of the work load that they had to bear.

- **Sector-specific information.** Conferences, networks, and publications/ materials could be helpful in specific sectors of work. At the same time, the general nature of the conference and publications gives a perspective beyond a specific sector to help members think differently about their own work and sector. It may be helpful also to establish linkages with those in the human resources professional area since HR professionals and volunteer managers deal with many of the same issues.
- **Magazine concept.** Participants like this idea a lot and could find it of great use to give to key volunteer leaders. They think it should be on the model of *USA Today*—current and interesting. They think the journal should remain focused on research and trend analysis.

5. What are some emerging issues and needs that AVA will need to address?

- **Broaden mission statement.** Participants want to see the mission statement broadened reflecting the varieties and sorts of volunteers that volunteer managers serve. For example, blood donors may not see themselves as volunteers, and board members often do not understand that they are in a volunteer role.
- **Regional structure.** Participants believe that AVA will do very well if it can help people connect regionally—without losing the strength of national activity. They do not want to re-create the former regional arrangement, but develop a looser connection so that it is easier to have a regional conference with AVA's blessing, for example.
- **Partnership arrangements.** How can AVA help develop partnerships and linkages with other associations at a regional or national level (e.g., human resource professionals)?
- **International involvement.** The participants understand the importance of being available to international organizations and participants. "We could mentor international volunteer managers, if that's what they are looking for," one participant said.

St. Paul, Minnesota

St. Paul, Minnesota; January 23, 2004

Members and Non-members

Name	Organization	E-mail
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Bonnie Esposito	No info	
Kristine Poelzer	Vol/Comm. Partnership Prog.	Kristine.poelzer@co.hennepin.mn.us
Jackie Sinykin	Interweave	jackiesinykin@mn.rr.com
Terry Straub	Volunteers of America	tstraub@voamn.org
Jean Nierenhausen	MN Historical Society	Jean.nierenhausen
Judie Russell*	Children's Home Soc. of MN	
Carol Thompson	No info	

* Judie Russell coordinated local logistics.

1. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

The participants identified four key values to AVA membership:

National and international perspective. AVA provides a national perspective in volunteerism and volunteer management. Local organizations look to AVA to help identify trends that are developing in the field of volunteerism.

Other national aspects include *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. The research contained in the issues is very helpful. ICVA provides an excellent national opportunity to collaborate with other organizations that are active in volunteerism and volunteer management.

Another benefit is that the international association helps to set professional standards. The international association also provides credibility to the profession precisely because it is an international association. Members truly believe that they are in a profession. Therefore, they feel the need to belong to a professional association to communicate with those who are not in the profession and to advocate and to express concerns regarding volunteer resources.

AVA provides an international perspective as well. It is important for those in the U.S. to hear about what volunteer managers in other countries are doing. In addition, U.S.-based organizations are recruiting more volunteers from other cultures. The international AVA members validate what local volunteer managers in the United States have developed to reach immigrant populations. American volunteer resources managers can go to international members for assistance and perspective. Some participants recalled that ICVA has grown from including one person from England to the very next conference that had

representation from 22 countries. One participant, Judie, also attended the first Asian-Pacific Conference as a U.S. member of AVA.

AVA positions the profession. AVA's work in positioning the profession helps to establish a volunteer manager's credibility in concrete ways. For example, there is the matter of ethics and positioning the profession. In volunteer management, there is a risk management responsibility. CEOs and administrators do not have these standards. Using the AVA ethics document provides confidence to give direction to the organization's administration. After all, the ethics stance is not simply an individual volunteer management opinion, it is that of the profession. Thus, there no longer is one little program in Minneapolis, but it is following the right ethical path of the profession. The document is well-planned, well-thought out, well-written and could describe clearly the language and wording needed in policies of individual organizations.

Excellent Networking Opportunities. Participants agree that networking is a valuable aspect to AVA, especially for those just starting in the profession. Additionally, AVA's network provides a larger scope of people because a specific sector can be limiting. To move from one field or sector to another would not be too likely unless the AVA network is there to give opportunities to members to learn from people in the same profession in other sectors. There is great benefit to AVA's very broad scope. Finally, the Web site, ICVA, the local gatherings, and the range of publications via e-mail and regular mail are tools to encourage networking.

National support for local work. Participants also find value in being part of a national organization supporting local *and* national work. Members also have a responsibility to support professional association so that they can have respective clout nationally and locally when it comes to volunteer policies. In that vein, the concepts of best practices are very helpful, too.

2. What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?

Lack of advocacy role. Participants observed that AVA does not have much engagement with grassroots leaders who are not volunteer coordinators or managers. Even when people are engaged in volunteer management, many do not connect with the idea of "volunteer administration" and that limits the number of people attracted to membership. It is a matter of better definition and outreach. Additionally, at the statewide and national level, volunteer managers are up against perceptions of the profession that differ from our own definition.

There is a lack of advocacy for the profession, participants said. It is the role of the international association to promote and represent a national agenda. Part of the issue is marketing, almost like a campaign so that people think of volunteer management as a profession and raise public awareness. Political advocacy, too, needs to be stronger. Members could use help on the statewide

level as well. "We are never acknowledged, either as the AVA or the state volunteer management organization," one observed.

It is essential to focus on role of volunteers *being managed* by volunteer resources managers—the reason volunteers are successful and effective. AVA needs to do a better job and be proactive when a new administration is in place in Washington after an election.

AVA needs to take a professional position with others related to human service or the arts or health care to discuss what it is about. AVA needs to promote its expertise and volunteer management standards. Another participant observed with sadness that "we are never asked to be at the table. The White House Council on Youth hosted 30 people from Minnesota, but the local AVA affiliate was not asked in part because organizers were not aware of AVA locally or nationally.

Lack of marketing—of AVA and the profession. Participants noted that there is little marketing of the profession nationally. In their view, AVA should get the Ad Council to assist the profession. This connection can increase our credibility.

AVA can offer leadership in another area—the cost and value of volunteer management. With how many volunteers can full-time staff work effectively? What is the value of this investment? There must be a formula that exists that we can take back to our administrators to promote the value of volunteer management.

AVA also needs to promote volunteer management in the academic world in volunteer administration/human resource degree programs. Young people do not think of volunteer management as a profession until they get into a nonprofit. AVA can stress the career possibilities of volunteer managers in the nonprofit sector.

Lack of international strategy on compensation levels. Participants urge AVA to address salary levels of volunteer management positions. There needs to be some sort of comparative compensation analysis. Often, there is no "upward mobility" in organizations, and young people do not want to serve as volunteer managers for the rest of their lives, especially with low pay. There is a tremendous amount of turnover in the field. So local managers are up and out if there is work available in a national or statewide organization.

International leadership has kept AVA "stuck." Some participants observed that, at the ICVA, "people are whining at the annual meeting, and that is not an organization I want to be part of. I come to get pumped up, but this experience is not very fun." Heads nodded in agreement. The ICVA is perceived as not welcoming, and it does not encourage members to be a stronger part of AVA itself.

Others observed that "some of the international leadership has kept AVA stuck," and there is strong ownership by the founding group who will not let go. The pace of the leader sets the pace of the crowd, and people will follow the

leader. The negativity is not just at the international level. At the same time, volunteer management is a new profession. It would be interesting to find out more about the tendencies as a profession grows, and what happened in other kinds of organizations. It is important to focus on advancing the field—and the side benefit is the advancement of the association.

3. What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?

Improve the ICVA experience. AVA must strengthen the ICVA and make it much more consistent. Further, honoraria need to be somewhat more substantial. Participants said that the vast majority of workshops and other presentations addressed entry-level or mid-level experience only—a disincentive to attend as an experienced manager. “We go to learn and to get concrete information, and it’s limited for those with experience,” one participant observed. Additionally, the international participation at AVA is important, but other than Toronto that participation never has been sufficient.

Some suggested that ICVA could become an international event every other year with regional conferences in the “off years.” Another possibility: talk with other professional organizations in various sectors regarding how AVA can provide presenters and material for their conferences, and perhaps co-host regional conferences. In any case, AVA must avoid focusing workshops and events by sector or region. It is important to move away from a silo mentality.

Workshops need to look not only at the volunteer management process, but even more with content on what volunteers actually do. For example, apply knowledge about youth development, and the volunteer contribution to it, and then how to manage that process better. This process-application approach is part of establishing credibility.

Develop a international awards system not restricted to AVA but overseen by AVA. Participants suggested that AVA should have an awards system that is nationally recognized and not restricted only to the AVA world. One participant noted the award process in the museum sector. “At a museum national conference, there are all sorts of awards setting national standards for museums in their educational programs and exhibits.” It is important to determine that for which we can strive programmatically, and that members who are awarded can bring home to their organizations and say that they have received it. This process could spin off in the marketing arena.

Educational materials for others in organizational management. Participants think that, at present, AVA is focused on its internal audience only and needs to broaden. They suggest that AVA could package a learning tool and go to conferences in related fields such as hospital administration or National Association of Social Workers. Volunteer managers could be represented at their workshops and tools could be offered to their members. AVA could have a

presence with Congress, Points of Light Foundation, and National Mentoring Partnership. Perhaps a video could be developed regarding executive level and service learning. AVA members could use this video to promote what we do.

Changes are needed in the credentialing process. Participants were emphatic that certification has to change. Given a choice in the three year process, several would rather work towards an advanced academic degree. They believe that certification has no value and makes little difference to the employer, whereas the degree carries credibility and value without question. Even with degree, there may not be employment in the volunteer management field. At the same time, credentials can increase compensation.

St. Petersburg, FL

St. Petersburg, Florida; January 27, 2004

Members and Non-members

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George Vasilion		george@211tampabay.org

* Pat Hofstader organized local logistics.

1. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

Recognition of the profession. Members in the group see membership in AVA as the affirmation of the profession of volunteer resources management. There is recognition that this profession deals with complex issues, and that recognition is conveyed in *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* and the ethics materials.

Professional Development Opportunities. The ICVA reaffirms that we are in a profession. The presenters are very professional, and authors appear at the conference and are accessible. On a local basis, members say, it is good to have a peer group reflecting on the profession. Working with volunteers is like leading employees, except more difficult. So the body of knowledge locally and nationally is very useful. Members say that ICVA sessions are "fantastic." They added that planners "see to it that sessions are at the level where you are in your experience."

Sharing knowledge. The participants singled out the Dining With Experts session and appreciated the one-on-one conversations with the leaders. The members like meeting their peers from other parts of the United States and learning from them as well as sharing. In Florida, particularly, there are many seniors volunteering in their 80s and 90s and doing an excellent job. People in other parts of the country are "amazed" at the number of seniors at work. Sharing and getting new ideas about topics of interest can be valuable.

2. What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?

Limitations of membership. Some members have made the assumption that organizations are members, like the Florida Association of Volunteer Centers. In this state, organizational membership does not cost as much, and then there is room for people to go as a team. As individuals, they added, "it can be a tough sell financially, because it's viewed as benefiting the person." With institutions, by contrast, the view is different. "It would be a tough sell to join if

people could participate, but only in same role, such as volunteer resources managers. "But in three different positions in the organization, the results will be better." There also are three different pay levels, too, in the staff positions. Board members have resources of their own and can pay for part of a membership fee, so there's a lesser burden on an organization when membership can reflect that status, and varieties of membership offer more flexibility.

Conferences limit participation. Participants noted that many associations do not simply hold conferences anymore, but "educational seminars." They noted that a planning team picks topics that are of interest to members. "The planning team has to go beyond Volunteerism 101, but hold more at the Volunteerism 600 level."

Local events are important. Participants said that anything offered locally that is educational is valuable. They noted the value of a teleconference, especially if CVA professional development units or professional CEUs are involved. If the event is local or regional, there can be "meat" in the offerings for those serving locally. "The major national events can be aimed at senior managers and executives.

Use affiliated organization opportunities. Participants noted that some organizations such as hospice have statewide and national meetings in volunteer management for those working in the hospice program. They did not understand why AVA could not link with other associations and organization.. "Then there would be more of a connection with AVA at a national level in many circumstances," they added.

3. What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?

Participants noted several improvements that AVA can make.

Offer some free opportunities. AVA should offer scholarships or other forms of assistance, or a trade-out for volunteer service at the conference that can result in a free registration. "This is not only a financial issue," they said, "but a time issue that will appeal to an executive director who may not want the volunteer resources manager to leave the office for a three day conference."

Change credentialing protocols. Participants were unanimous: if the certification can be linked with a degree, it would be very popular. Organizations might be more open to this option because there is more of a tie to the paying organization. "We have to anticipate what an executive director might say," added one member, "Will the credential look good on a resume and then the person leaves?" If the organization funds the credential but cannot fund increased compensation, then the new CVA might leave. Also, with regard to credentialing, could existing CVAs be used as trainers? This could be an incentive, especially if there were some fee or honorarium attached.

Organizational as well as individual credentialing? Several participants asked whether there can be credentialing for organizations such as a museum association. There would be certain steps and procedures. Some said, "This would put onus on CEOs and board members. As we get more competitive in the nonprofit sector, the organizational credential may attract people." They also see the organizational credential as a revenue builder for AVA. "And you could train other agencies to adhere to certain standards and practices," one added, "and that would be compatible with holding an individual CVA. Some noted that, in some cases, that demonstration of best practices or adherence to standards exists as a condition for state agency funding for volunteer programs, or even a federal connection (like Medicaid).

Several non-members were invited and were present for this focus group, and spoke about their non-membership. The non-members reflected on why they had not been part of AVA.

Non-membership based on cost. One participant noted, "I thought it was a luxury that my agency could not afford—and I built the volunteer organization from scratch. I just didn't think the program merited membership." Another reflected on the work through the volunteer center for the county. "Money is the issue, and we are part of the Points of Light Foundation. The Volunteer Center folded into the Points of Light Foundation, and we have to be a member of POLF." This non-member went on to say that the executive director made this decision, and the decision was in a certain timeframe. "We were a member in the past," the person added.

Non-membership and lack of knowledge about AVA. One said that he is fairly new to this profession. "So I would not have known much about it," he added. Another knew about the association and the credentialing process, and indicated an interest in becoming involved in AVA. "Some feel that we would be under some pressure to be credentialed. I knew about credentialing, but not about the process."

Proximity and attractiveness of ICVA. Regarding the ICVA, if it were closer to Florida, some would be able to afford it and attend. "But there's another factor," another added. "AVA has to talk about what people specialize in so that they can identify more closely with what the conference offers." They believe that specialization would be a much better sell, and make it easier to get to the executive director to fund participation in a conference for a period of time. "There are many budget choices," one said. "It's just like when I went through service learning training at POLF—that was an easy sell."

Chicago, IL

Chicago, Illinois; January 28, 2004

Members and Non-members

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* Cheryle Yallen organized local logistics.

1. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

Support and validation for the profession. Participants strongly agreed that AVA provides support and validation. "We are in a profession or business that is not well understood or widely known," one said. "We as a large group of professionals can gather and have a voice together regarding our needs. We can grow up as a profession."

Sharing information. Participants use the Web site and the links provided there. They indicated that *Member Briefing* and other tools help to point out what's new, even if they cannot attend meetings because of difficult schedules.

One participant said, "You don't need to be an AVA member to access the listserv. The listserv is a valuable tool where we can ask questions and receive responses." Others appreciate the access to professionals and trainers within the field such as Steve McCurley and Mary Merrill. Another participant noted that many trainers and consultants are jealous of the areas they serve, but trainers such as these are helping change and mature the profession.

Several participants said that AVA allows them to have a place and an occasion to think through their standing as professionals and to have access points such as an international conference. "My manager realizes that there should be discussion about the role of volunteer management," one participant

observed. "The association presents new ideas and additional information to consider and put into practice." Several participants cited in particular the AVA resource, *Positioning the Profession*.

Networking. The networking opportunities through ICVA and the listserv are helpful. Of particular value is the opportunity to cross sectors, so that people from nonprofits to governmental units to hospitals and other health care providers can inform and share with one another. Local connections are valuable, too. Several observed that attendance at local and regional meetings help participants not to feel so alone, especially since quite often volunteer resources managers have unique jobs in organizations.

ICVA. Participants said that the conference is an excellent place for networking and connecting with experts and others in the volunteer management profession. More specifically, one participant said that ICVA is nice because it offers the same price for double rooms and single rooms.

2. What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?

ICVA design. Several participants who have been in the field for a while noted that the conference is filled with basic, how-to workshops, but little content for those with experience or needing more depth in the content. Some said that they had gone to an ICVA with the anticipation of hearing a specific topic or speaker, only to learn that workshops were cancelled or that the presenter did not come. There needs to be a backup plan and accountability for speakers. Finally, a Salvation Army worker said that the October and/or November dates of the conference were a bad time for people in The Salvation Army.

Lack of backup for local events. Participants said that they need support from the international office to assist the local group with workshop ideas, speakers, and presenters that are available. The affiliate needs help with marketing and ideas can be generated by the international staff for an AVA affiliate.

Local membership in AVA Metro Chicago is going down, and it is hard to attract people into the workshops. There need to be evening or weekend meetings, especially for those who are indeed in *all-volunteer* organizations. It is hard to get a day off for a seminar out in the field. AVA needs to do more in clarifying and marketing its unique work. It is also important, participants said, to make different types of connections with local networks and provide very specific leadership development tools.

AVA is not adapting to a changing volunteer management Environment. There are changing sources of and roles for volunteers. People in the past volunteered for traditional administrative work, but now people are coming with an interest in career development—or they bring something powerful from their careers. Baby-boomers and others are involved at very high levels

with tremendous skills and talents. AVA is not helping the profession adapt to these changes, participants say.

Some said that AVA needs to be more focused on volunteer management. Volunteer managers in specific fields can get sector knowledge in other ways, through museums or hospitals. "I want AVA to be the Bible of volunteer management for me," one said. "The association role of AVA is what I'll refer to, and AVA will provide us with guidelines and knowledge of new realities. I am not looking for specific things like trainers."

Another participant said, "AVA may not serve my needs as an association volunteer coordinator. Associations like mine don't often have a full-fledged volunteer program, yet we're run by volunteers." AVA more clearly addresses the traditional nonprofit role.

Still another participant noted that, among her volunteers, half of the membership is young, between ages 13 and 21. In her case, it is important to have the association help to train adults to work with kids. "We need volunteer management topics such as how to get around hazing or how to mentor."

Others noted that AVA needs to deal with developing younger people in volunteer leadership. One noted that today younger people join organizations and associations and do not expect to be members for 10 years before being in leadership. In addition, these younger volunteer leaders want to obtain training in a variety of ways. They need more responsibility and support and more methods to receive it.

Image v. reality in employment. One participant said, "My main concern is with the layoffs of all kinds of community relations people and development people. Now volunteer coordinators are doing dozens of other things which they have never been trained to do. "AVA should be more of a career resource," this person noted. "How do I market myself in this field?"

Lack of focus in critical topics. Some participants noted that the union issue is important, specifically how union requirements have an impact on volunteer recruitment and development. "AVA could help to educate us on this topic, but not much has been done at AVA on the topic," one noted.

Others said that there needs to be more learning in risk management and HR management. Specific information needs to be provided in how to deal with a changing volunteer base and with fewer volunteers. There needs to be more assistance with volunteer processing requirements, especially a conduit to share this sort of information. Additionally, AVA can provide guidance in how volunteer managers can deal with corporate sources.

Lack of relevance of CVA credentialing. Some said that the CVA designation has no value in the salary issues of a job locally. "It's a great idea," one said, "but at this time it has no value." Specifically regarding the CVA, one person said that a mentor reported that interns are not volunteers. Is this really true? Perhaps that question can be part of the credentialing process.

3. What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?

CVA credentialing. Participants observed that, if one of the ideas behind credentialing is to be able to get a promotion, then AVA should pay more attention to compensation and survey salary increases. This information would enable the employee to inform the employer about promotion and salary increases. Some wondered about the connection between credentialing and educational institutions, such as through the Harper College non-degree program.

Others said that credentialing really is meant to demonstrate that one is prepared to be in the field and serves as “field identification,” and a norm in the field. “I don’t look at it as a way to get a raise,” one said.

Now that recertification is occurring, there ought to be clarification about requirements and various ways to earn credits towards recertification.

Some participants said that AVA should consider organizational credentialing, with professionally qualified people who would certify organizations.

ICVA changes. Some participants expressed concern that they do not see increasing diversity in participation at ICVA. If organizations as well as individuals are credentialed, that can narrow diversity, some said. The reason cited: focus on specific types of groups or specific sectors. The conference also can have seminars in how to deal with smaller, grassroots, niche organizations and how they can utilize volunteers.

AVA might consider regional ICVAs. In some cases, budgets will not cover out-of-state conferences and will not pay for travel. Others are concerned that regional conferences might not be able to function at the same level as international conferences. So there may be a tradeoff.

Some participants believe that international coordination of workshops is a good idea, especially with a template of various workshop levels. In any case, participants agreed, professional development may involve a commitment to being present at such conferences, since this is the opportunity to receive continuing education and to train.

Pasadena, CA

Pasadena, California; January 29, 2004

AVA Members

Margaret Brewer	Aquarium of the Pacific	mbrewer@lbaop.org
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AVA board member Sandy DeMarco, CVA organized local logistics.

1. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

Validation. The sense of professional validation was important to participants. One summed up the attitude well: "We work, work, work and do, do, do, and we never stop and think and brainstorm. AVA helps me to think about the profession and presents new ways of thinking about what I do." Attending ICVA helps to focus that sense of validation even when participants cannot make local or regional DOVIA meetings. They use conference resources, and pull at least one article out of each *Member Briefing* that they can use. "AVA provides validation of what I believe the field is all about," one participant said.

Professional development opportunities and networking. A participant said, "It's great to walk into room with 700+ people and everyone knows who you are and why you are there." A real benefit is that AVA can promote diversity and pluralism but, as one said, "We could do more along those lines, since we're missing grassroots organizations and neighborhood and community gatherings."

AVA also offers a broader professional perspective. Those who may be focused narrowly in a sector (such as hospitals) find that their sector professional group may have blinders on and may cause burnout. "Being with people in other sectors can help broaden my scope," one participant said. Others noted that they may not have been oriented to volunteer management when they came into the position, and AVA gives them a framework for understanding the dynamics of the profession.

Others noted that there is an "insurmountable amount of information" on volunteerism and nonprofit management. AVA provides methods to digest information and to share it with colleagues.

2. What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?

Perception of elitism. While professional development and networking offers many benefits, there also are missing people and missing voices in AVA. One said, "I'm thirsting to meet other volunteer coordinators in the area of poverty intervention. But there is no coordination in AVA to help me meet them and to do networking." Others added that *Member Briefing* does not represent them, even though there are many such coordinators in the field. Still others said that they have worked with at-risk people, and in those positions they did not know about AVA. "AVA doesn't look down," one noted. "It looks across and up. Down is where people are working. People work in volunteer programs and don't think they really are volunteer coordinators."

Lack of good PR. Participants said that AVA needs to do better PR to reach unserved or underserved groups, such as volunteer center managers and AIDS volunteer coordinators. Others noted that the AVA Academy is not well publicized and is not well-focused for those coming out of faith-based sectors. AVA also needs to do more publishing and awareness-raising with managers, administrators, and CEOs, since they are not aware of nor do they necessarily value volunteer resources managers.

3. What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?

ICVA improvements. ICVA needs to be publicized more effectively, both to attract more participants as well as to raise media awareness. AVA also might consider regional conferences within ICVA to attract people to new groupings, such as geographic lunches, and learning tracks that specialize in interest areas (with cross-tracking allowed). Others noted that they find it hard to carve out four days from a schedule, and to manage the expense, especially travel. One other participant said, "Meal speakers have not been of great value to me."

Professional development enhancements. AVA needs to develop teleconferences that can be run in connection with DOVIA meetings, or to include people in an organization from other departments. The teleconferencing can be through a satellite downlink, or through a Web conferencing service. In all situations, accommodations must be made for those organizations that do not have high-speed computer access.

Materials for others in an organization. Two ideas were suggested by participants. One is a track of relevant volunteer management publications and learning opportunities for CEOs. The second is a sliding scale of membership and professional development expenses, affecting ICVA costs, membership levels, and credentialing.

4. What are some emerging issues and needs that AVA will need to address?

Participants noted that AVA needs to plug into college and university students who are volunteering—and who can be the future of the profession. The same is true for those in public and private grade and high schools. It is important to inspire and enlist youth into the volunteer management field.

Portland, OR

Portland, Oregon; January 30, 2003
Members and Non-members

Name	Organization	E-mail
Claudia Dalton	Foster Grandparent Program	claudia.dalton@esd112.org
Holly Denniston, CVA	Oregon Public Broadcasting	holly_denniston@opb.org
Kate Janczyk	Children's Cancer Assoc.	kjanczyk@e-cca.org
Andy Nelson*	Hands On Portland	andy@handsonportland.org
Jennifer Payne	Doernbecher Children's Hospital	payneje@oshu.edu
Steven Pixley	Portland Parks & Recreation	pkpixley@ci.portland.or.us
Anne Turner	Human Services Council	Anne@dshs.wa.gov

* Andy Nelson hosted the meeting. Nancy Gaston organized local logistics.

1. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

Networking opportunities. Participants appreciate the opportunity to connect with their colleagues. They like the connectivity in two specific ways: crossing sectors and gaining an international perspective. They like being a part of different study groups and the networking that can come with credentialing. They like the fact that, through connections with other colleagues, they can go to their executive directors and say, "This is how other people manage their volunteer programs." They want the backup and the fact that people can support one another in their work. They appreciate informal and formal mentoring opportunities from volunteer professionals to new as well as longtime managers.

Professional validation. Several participants said that being a volunteer manager is "like being the lone ranger a lot of the time." They said that AVA validates them as a professional, which is not always how their employers understood them. The professional ethics tools are valuable, several said.

Information and resources. Some noted that recent tools from the UPS Foundation on funder approaches, and an increase in the visibility of the ethics statement and *Positioning the Profession* make it easier to talk to an organizational CEO, using their language and concepts.

2. What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?

ICVA shortcomings. Some participants said that they really liked the opportunity to connect with other volunteer administrators. But they were disappointed that the workshop content, in their words, "panders to the lowest possible denominator." They ended up concluding that it was not worth their

money or time to go, even though they gained some great insights. The conference also has a real lack of affordability, and there are no regional conferences to attend.

Lack of cutting edge insights. Participants noted that West Coast organizations hire people at a younger age to manage volunteer programs. There also are more nonprofits in Portland per capita than in any other area outside of Washington, D.C. There does not seem to be a way to foster newer ideas or to welcome agencies using "cutting edge stuff." They also need help to deal with a lot of turnover in the field.

In a related issue, organizations have perceived internal cultures that may guide their thinking that people fit certain "slots." AVA has welcomed people in mainstream organizations, but now "midstream groups" have started to join (i.e., those providing AIDS care). There are problems in dealing with those who are in the field for a short time and need training for the short term—almost like "just-in-time training."

There also is a lack of forums or other methods to promote information sharing in an intergenerational fashion. As one participant said, "What are the legacy contributions that longtime workers have to offer?"

Lack of member orientation. Participants say that they will receive the membership card in the mail, but may not be given orientation to the many resources that are available. "I don't feel like I am a member," one said. "I need a local contact, or even some sort of e-mail welcome." Others wondered whether there could be a regional membership or connection with other members in a region on the AVA web site. They also would like electronic networking by different organization types.

3. What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?

ICVA changes. While there may be suggestions that the ICVA should become "virtual," many people may not have interest in receiving information via a satellite downlink. They look at a conference as a junket. A more attractive alternative is a regional/international event. There could be three years of regional or national conferences and one year as a truly international conference. International conferences are important because people want to network personally. The AVA Academy is an essential part of ICVA and provides a perfect opportunity for basic "how-tos" and for new people to find their roles and to be assigned mentors.

Regional conferences could help by providing a training ground for newer speakers. New speaker recruitment could be a focus for AVA—to find more and newer people, not only "the leading source since 1986." While the regional or affinity group is critical, participants want opportunities to connect with colleagues locally, while retaining broad-based exposure.

It is important, according to these participants, to have a national conference coordinator. It is difficult to get communication and direction, and it is hard to obtain items from the prior year's organizing committee. The quality of speakers can vary. Keynoter quality can vary. It also is important to offer a complete roster not only for basic workshops, but advanced workshops as well.

The availability of post-conference material is important, such as videotapes or DVDs of presentations for a local network to develop local people. That could enhance the quality of local training, and from AVA's perspective, that would be a cheap perk. They do not work as Web downlinks, since these tools are not accessed often. "Our profession is not appropriate for the downlink," one participant observed. "The financial people like downlinks; we're people people. We need that face time with people."

Members and non-members need to be able to go to conferences to absorb learning more fully. One key component that is missing at ICVA is why one should continue to be a member after conference. There needs to be a built-in component to describe the benefits of continuing as a member after the first year, such as, "If you join a second year, you'll get a discount." It might be helpful to pre-sell tapes and regional information. Need to bridge gap between young people and AVA membership.

Use of sector groups and membership categories. Participants believe that there is a large spectrum of sectors and categories in AVA. That has an impact on how AVA can present services and professional development opportunities to members. If teleconferences are offered, they may succeed by being placed in clear tracks. Another possibility: sector-specific listservs.

Tools needed for multiple audiences, not only volunteer resources managers. The executive director and the board member could find much of interest in AVA. Participants observed that it is critical to have well-planned and well-organized tracks and events for CEOs and other officers in an organization. It is akin to the movement of development officers (National Society of Fund Raising Executives) to the development function (Association of Fund Raising Professionals). The involvement of a broader range of people in an organization could raise number of members and participants—such as the executive director who really is the volunteer manager. Another part of the spectrum can be seen in all volunteer organizations and civic association groups. There are transferable skills to develop. Such moves would open the profession and could provide wonderful tracks for a regional meeting. We could plug into the international workshops of other associations in specific sectors.

If an organizational membership is developed, the cost factor and breakdown of benefits must be defined. A smaller nonprofit might not find that valuable initially but might join if the leadership perceived added value. There could be a baseline membership, and more "valuable" membership tiers with more services and products. Another "sell" to an organizational membership: the potential of organizational credentialing, which participants agreed was a very welcome idea. This accreditation could make individual CVA credentialing very appealing, and not only to the volunteer resources manager.

Remote Teleconference

Remote Location (telephone focus group)

February 3, 2004

AVA Members

Shirley Conger	(no org. listed) Idaho	volvisn@mindspring.com
Kathy Halstead	City of O'Fallon, Missouri	khalstead@ofallon.mo.us
Renee Johnson	Missouri	Rbj2040@aol.com
Jeanne Meggison	United Way of York County, Maine	jmeeggison@uwycme.org
Becky Troop	Naples Players, Florida	btroop@naplesplayers.org
Barb Wentworth	United Way of York County, Maine	bwentworth@uwycme.org
Mary Lee Wood	Consultant/Trainer, Idaho	mlwood@velocitus.net

People in this particular focus group were invited on the basis of their distance from a major metropolitan area, or their work in a metropolitan area without a significant AVA presence.

1. What is the value to you of your AVA membership?

Professional recognition. Participants like the professional aspect of AVA and its work. The association provides credibility, networking, and people who look at resources and how to maximizing them. AVA pushes in every direction to make volunteer management a recognized professional activity. One participant said of AVA, "Three things that drew me into and keep me part of AVA are *credibility* (it's good to say I am part of an international professional association); *camaraderie* (people who get it); and *the big picture* (there's more out there in the wider world since St. Louis is a place with limited vision).

Networking opportunities. The membership directory is good for connecting people in remote places, participants agreed. "In one community," a participant said, "there is no one like me in a specific position, so I was able to connect with a similar person in Arkansas, far away from me."

Remote participants said that, when people meet colleagues in AVA, that helps them to understand how to be credible in their own organization. "It's a real self-esteem builder," one participant said. Additionally, as a result of networking, other local or regional people want more information on volunteer management.

Educational opportunities. Participants like the AVA publications and information that they might not get through other means. They also indicated appreciation for receiving them quickly and not on a delayed basis. They cited, in particular, material on volunteers and HR policies, and material about volunteer confidentiality policies.

Those in more remote areas really appreciate ICVA and attend as often as possible. They assert that the quality of education at ICVA has been excellent.

Some professional associations are strictly sector-oriented, but through ICVA they can get the full picture of volunteerism. "When you live in the West," one participant said, "distances are great, and we need a place to meet at a national meeting." A Missouri participant noted that there is a DOVIA in her metropolitan area, but she does not like to drive 30 to 40 miles. In remote areas, volunteer management managers need to know about national trends so that they can be aware of them. AVA offers them that information.

2. What are some shortcomings in your AVA membership?

Lack of visibility. A lot of people in the volunteer management profession are completely unaware of AVA. Participants do not see AVA targeting specific people or types of groups. Awareness comes only by word of mouth with no active promotion by AVA, according to participants.

Participants said that AVA should connect with organizations that have volunteer services and not rely only on word of mouth. Another opportunity: to utilize local volunteer director networks. Many do not know that AVA exists.

"I have felt a little out of step from ICVA and even this conversation," one participant observed. "My organization is an arts organization, and I think that this work is very different than others." She continued, "I did go to a focus group on the arts at the Denver ICVA, but I was only one there. There may not be a realization of what community theatres are about. Arts are in a different category." There is a strong need for a steady affinity group, but there does not seem to be the organizing capacity to make that happen.

Lack of regional work. Participants in remote locations agree that a local affiliate of some sort—a DOVIA or similar network—is helpful to membership in AVA. Yet, as one participant observed, "that's a hard sell to us in the West in small communities. Even a statewide association can be difficult."

There also can be a certain amount of confusion in and with national service organizations that they are a "mecca" of volunteer management. If these constituents are part of that type of group, they may not think they should belong with AVA. Volunteer centers also are a gateway and there has been competition with Points of Light Foundation.

Interestingly, as one participant observed, "You've got three people in Florida cities—one in Ocala, one in Tampa and one in Naples that I know about. There are not enough local connections for us to feel that we make any progress. Part of the struggle is that we're feeling like we're doing volunteer management alone." The disconnect may not be based locally in smaller towns or in large localities, but with AVA itself.

Lack of a way to communicate value. Participants believe that AVA needs to market its uniqueness as a professional development organization, rather than a collection of program models. AVA does not make it easy for people to understand benefits, and often they are intangible. As one participant said, "I can't show information to my boss and say, "See what I have!" Tangibles such as booklets and guides can be a doorway into the intangibles. Participants wonder how to communicate the importance of membership.

Participants also asserted that there is an apparent lack of understanding among AVA board and AVA planning groups about the real challenges that do exist in remote places where they are trying to provide professional programs, but with very few people.

3. What are some changes that could improve the way AVA delivers products and services to members—including credentialing, written materials, training, and ICVA?

Improve ICVA. Participants appreciate the conference offered by AVA as contrasted with Points of Light Foundation. They like the fact that AVA is structured and one can pick workshops in advance and meet with affinity groups (i.e., groups in a government setting). Affinities offer a kind of mini-conference with people in similar settings.

Much of the conference quality depends on the presenters. One ICVA plus that should not be changed is the consultant/expert level and the ability for practitioners to present information. The quality can be outstanding, participants said. "I'd like to see a system where the practitioners who have good results and excellent evaluations can be asked to come again and present another year so that people who missed them the first time can hear them."

Others observed that, while they do like the "name people" and those who return year by year, it can be tiring to see the same people over and over again when they repeat the same programs. It can be difficult to pick new content after six or seven years of attendance. As one participant said, "We need to grow more gurus." Participants also noted the dilemma of choosing between two programs based on a description, wishing they could be in two places.

ICVA needs to be able to deal with those who have a low sense of self-esteem who think that the conference is elitist, too sophisticated and not affordable. AVA has to deal with conference attendees who think that they are "just volunteer coordinators."

Participants like the idea of an AVA national conference coordinator. They said that there is a level of efficiency of time and money that cannot be achieved by a volunteer host group. A national coordinator can work five years out as well as one year out. With such a position, there can be continuity and progressive kinds of program, and be of enormous help to a local committee. In their view, it is important that this person is deeply connected to the field and can be in touch with member issues. When it comes to working with a local committee, those

people can inform the international coordinator of local highlights of national trends and issues.

Develop a regional conference. According to these participants, AVA should not only have a large international conference, but move also to a regional system. The national conference coordinator could carry through on this work, too, and lessen the "nitty-gritty" of planning.

Alternating between a regional and an international conference can be a good idea. For those in remote areas, the hesitation regarding long distances remains, and it will be important to think about regions very carefully. It will be important to promote a regional conference to the entire membership, not just the people closest to a location.

Incorporate presentations into state events. One participant said, "I already attend the Missouri volunteer management convention every year. Perhaps AVA training can be made at different state conventions and provide seminars or educational opportunities at those conferences." Another alternative may be a separate day or a course offering, and AVA could be more visible state by state. There could be courses specific to attaining the CVA. "It's cheaper for me to go to some places, but not others in a region."

Professional development improvements. Interestingly, remote participants are hesitant about using conference technology. As one said, "I already spend enough time on the phone." There is a value to the networking and to getting out of the office. Others said, however, that there is a value to having calls with multiple participants. Leadership volunteers who have control of certain areas can join in such teleconferences.

It is important to find something that is relevant or of current concern. But topics people really enjoy and benefit from at a face-to-face conference will not work because part of the success is being there in person. Web-based offerings work especially well in high turnover situations and with new volunteer coordinators training in a web-based or video format. Participants think it is important not to send people across country for basic training. It is possible to train people remotely with AVA materials and to AVA standards. The teleconference approach can be good for networking. It also is important to have individual customized courses for new people on their time and with 24/7 access.

Trainers appreciate resources such as the trainer's toolkit on volunteer management ethics. "This material has helped me to take AVA membership to others and to press for AVA's viewpoint," one participant said. "The ethics document helps reinforce the point that professional ethics are based on more than my opinion." Additionally, the trainer kits work well and are not technological.

It will be to AVA's benefit to do targeted educational pieces to school districts and to any CEO who places value on the volunteer coordinator and the volunteer administrator. Videos may be very helpful, together with research and discussion questions. "So often I feel that I am having to train my bosses rather

than manage my programs," one participant said. AVA truly may be the entity with the last word on volunteering.

Credentialing improvements. Participants thought that new and younger volunteer managers may value the academic degree above the CVA credential. People may come into an organization and apply for a position as the development director or the HR manager with academic degrees specific to those roles. There are few degrees available in volunteer management, and the CVA not as revered as the diploma.

A CVA credential along with an academic degree really can be a specialty. Once credentialing is achieved, it is important to specify how continuing education programs can keep credentialing current with trends. One significant complaint was the inability to complete the credentialing process in the time allotted. The participant said that the credentialing protocols are tedious, with pages of essays regarding the philosophy of volunteer management but with no clear assessment of promotion/PR skills, human resources skills and other linked practices. Since the credentialing process values behavioral expertise, a set of classes, or more structure, would help. It may also be important to link the credential with mentorship through volunteer management development.

4. What are some emerging issues and needs that AVA will need to address?

Continuing with the discussion about credentialing, it may be valuable to offer a MVA (mentorship in volunteer administration) over the Internet. The mentoring process can be an excellent extension of the CVA efforts.

AVA also needs to respond quickly to the changing volunteer environment. "This will keep the organization alive," one participant said. There must be a stronger linkage between city members, suburban members, and rural members. Additionally, AVA should do a better job connecting with people of color. AVA is doing a good job attracting internationals, participants said, and AVA can use that model to connect more proactively with people of color.

Internationals Focus Group IVCA 2003

The international focus group met as a part of the ICVA 2003 in Cincinnati. The questions were specific to this focus group and therefore do not mirror the questions asked to United States-based focus groups.

AVA: Value on International Level

This focus group consisted of participants from Japan, Nepal, Nigeria, Jamaica, and the Republic of Georgia. Participants said that AVA does provide value to them as international members attending ICVA. There also is value as internationals meet together at the conference. International members share experiences and practices in their settings as well as gain knowledge and networking from being part of a primarily North American event.

Cost v Benefit on International Level

Regarding the \$50 US membership fee, it may be important to base the cost for international members in a manner proportionate to the economy of the country of origin. If AVA provided a fact sheet describing specific membership benefits for international members, then members in specific countries will have information and materials to distribute when soliciting for money to join, especially from a specific government.

The value of the \$50 membership fee, which may or may not be a significant amount of money in a particular national currency or economy, can be offset if AVA would provide materials available in a native language. AVA could license such translations, not only in language, but also in cultural values. International members would find benefits also in specific training, consulting and/or technical assistance, and management development.

Skill-Specific, Not Sector-Specific Training

While international members indicated a desire for training to be skill-specific, not sector-specific (that is, principles and techniques could cross sector lines), there could be specific AVA benefits (products, services, networks) for those in faith-based organizations, government units, businesses, or NGO/civil society organizations.

The Value of ICVA

International members see a great value in conferences. AVA could develop affiliate relationships with equivalent national organizations in many countries. National or regional conferences then can relate to the AVA international conference. Perhaps AVA can strengthen a tie with IAVE, with AVA

providing training for volunteer resources managers and IAVE gathering leaders at another level. In any case, it is important to think globally, and to tie AVA activities to those of partner organizations to facilitate full participation in the international setting.

AVA will do well to provide ways to receive multiple registrations from the same country, or from an organization in the same country, or through a national affiliate. This registration method will enable international participants in greater numbers from national partnership. With funding from their governments, or with a group sponsorship, these national participants can receive training and assistance to come to AVA conference as a team and return to their country and organization of origin. Perhaps AVA also can assist with team training locally or regionally in volunteers resource management.

Materials/Products/Training

Dealing With Language Barriers

Some participants are attending their first ICVA and are unfamiliar with the organization. One participant has not seen AVA materials yet, but came based on the Web site. Internationals may struggle with dialogue because there is a problem translating quickly from English to a native language. There are no interpreters at the conference. The conference has many handouts, and those without ease and fluency in English find them very helpful.

Make Good Materials Available With Less Expense

Internationals who have been part of AVA for a longer period say that the newsletter has a good content balance of skills, knowledge, and practical content. Participants were positive about *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, though again the extra cost is a problem in a country with poverty or economic problems. It may be helpful to send the journal electronically, or in some manner free of charge.

The Japanese participant indicated that she attended a DOVIA training session in Washington, D.C. and participated in specific skills training. She said that each element of skill/knowledge is very useful, and the tools are helpful—since volunteer resources management is very demanding for workers in Japan.

How AVA Can Strengthen Service to International Members

Make the ICVA Part of a Larger Study Opportunity

Participants emphasized that internationals make a major investment of time and money to come to ICVA. AVA can provide ways to make the length of stay even more valuable and helpful. For example, a fellowship or internship program can immerse internationals in a society where volunteerism is

developed. They can learn how the host culture secures involvement and help them evaluate why their strategies may not be working in their countries.

They also endorsed the idea of some type of immersion in the United States or Canada to engage with the practical work of organizations with volunteer resources managers and strong volunteer programs. Another helpful element: a stay with a host family rather than dealing with the cost of a hotel. The cross-cultural experience will be valuable. In addition, international members can coordinate an exchange program to bring North American volunteer resources managers into their countries to share and to learn and to help AVA become truly global.

Transferable Knowledge and Skills

International participants want information on how to organize this kind of group in their countries and to host this kind of conference. When they are part of ICVA, they come with the hope of establishing long-term relationships and to network with others doing the same thing in their settings

Needed Materials/Products/Services

Regarding future materials and products, internationals said that they would find it helpful to have a manual with policies and guidelines to establish a volunteer center. They said that the booklet they receive is useful (*Positioning the Profession*). They also want to receive some kind of skill training to improve the jobs that they are doing, short of full-scale credentialing, which they see as a process filled with obstacles for them.

On a national level, they want some help with tips and hints on how to organize and develop volunteer management and to package materials to work with volunteer coordinators. They want more information of a general nature on voluntarism, whether from AVA or like-minded organizations who might work with them in their countries.

Value of Direct Link to AVA in On-Line Searches

They hope it will be easier to find out about AVA on an international level. Several indicated that they had to work hard to learn about what AVA is and whether they can join. Participants indicated several methods for locating AVA: one did an Internet search, got to the Energize, Inc. Web site, and through that site to conferences and educational opportunities. That page told about ICVA. Another said that their group invited Susan Ellis from Energize to help organize the national group, and she told them about AVA. Another accessed information through a member of CyberVolunteers who also was part of AVA, and learned about ICVA that way. For another, a friend went to the 1999 ICVA and urged that he come to an ICVA. One downloaded information from CyberCafe about voluntary organizations and found out about AVA.

Canadian Member Focus Group ICVA 2003

The Canadian focus group met at ICVA and the number of participants increased during the course of the meeting. The members had questions in advance, but developed their own comments and expressed their own points of view, which are reflected in this report.

AVA Direction

The participants believe very strongly that AVA needs to be truly an international organization with a broad perspective. That international perspective includes Canada and Canadians. One participant noted that he had attended a pre-conference workshop on volunteer management in the health care field and that the presenters referenced HIPAA guidelines quite specifically, without any awareness that there were Canadians in the room and that HIPAA has no application in that context.

The participants believe that AVA now must be a world-class organization with a clear international aspect. People from Canada come and participate in ICVA and other AVA activities because they want to know what is being done in the field of volunteer management in the U.S. *and* on the international scene.

Some participants regret the loss of a regional focus in AVA, though they are happy that the regional focus seems to be separated from the board. They believe the board members must have an international scope, and that they need to have a governance role, not an operational role. Also, they wonder how many board members have the CVA designation since that is pushed so hard, especially in the U.S.

Value of AVA

Canadian participants like AVA because it helps them to move outside of the Canadian volunteer management scene, where "everyone is trying to deal with a professional association in a local setting," according to one participant. They observed that, in Canada, the effort has been to create an umbrella of professional associations related to the field. Volunteer Canada is a clear example of a national approach, and they want to have more evidence that AVA is, in fact, actively partnering in an affiliate relationship with Volunteer Canada.

Important Products and Services

AVA offers an excellent opportunity to create unifying themes and practices in professional volunteer management. They want more deliberate attention paid to the statement of ethics in volunteer management. "The statement is getting a lot of lip service," one said, "and there are lots of documents." The participants want to see the ethics statement more clearly

embodied in the board, such as in a board member focused on ethics in the profession. "We hide it in AVA," one said.

They like *Positioning the Profession*. They would like to see more broad-based, international approaches in the credentialing process—one that clearly is "translatable" into the local setting in Canada, or elsewhere for that matter. They also want to be more closely networked to AVA through Volunteer Canada, with even clearer and more deliberate connections between the two conferences. They appreciate the research into volunteer management and voluntary service in general but, again, they want a clearer international focus in the research and writing, especially in the journal.

Affiliated Networks/Senior Managers Focus Group ICVA 2003

This group of national organization volunteer service managers who were part of an affinity group meeting at the 2004 ICVA provided input for the transformational change and strategic planning process.

1. What are some of the critical issues currently facing volunteerism and volunteer management in your organization? What does AVA currently offer that helps your affiliated networks with these issues and meet your needs?

Participants viewed three issues as most critical at the present time:

- **Funding of volunteer management positions.** There is a general consensus that shrinking budgets at every level are leading to the elimination of volunteer management positions or combination with a number of additional responsibilities. There also is tremendous turnover in the profession.
- **Utilization of volunteer managers.** With budget cuts, volunteer managers find themselves with full plates (special events coordination, Web development). Where volunteer management positions have been maintained, there is significant unemployment or under-employment of volunteer managers.
- **Stressing professional nature of volunteer management.** There is a lack of training and a lack of printed materials and examples of best practices upon which to draw. There sometimes is a disconnect between the work of an agency and its volunteer management.

Participants look to AVA to help deal with issues in two primary ways:

- **ICVA**, with opportunities for networking, contact with vendors, and learning and leadership opportunities.
- **Products and services**, such as *Positioning the Profession*, CyberVPM, the AVA Academy, and professional credentialing.

2. What are the five critical issues facing volunteerism and volunteer management in the next 10 years? How will AVA have to adapt or change its focus or direction?

Four key critical issues for volunteering in the immediate future include:

- **Changing volunteer demographics.** There will be more aging of boomers, the changing dynamic of family volunteering and people working longer in life, and an increase in episodic volunteers.
- **Changing professional environment.** There will be greater educational opportunities and requirements for volunteer managers, a career ladder that develops, competitive salaries even in the midst of a loss of funding, succession planning, and a choice of volunteer management over other temporary jobs.
- **Technology.** Volunteer managers will have to be much more savvy about technology and e-volunteering.
- **Broader scope of volunteer management support mechanisms.** There will be more corporate volunteer partners and increasing internationalism.

AVA will have to adapt and change focus and direction to meet the emerging scene in the following ways:

- **Better affiliate relationships.** AVA must be more in tune with affiliates (through an affiliate or DOVIA system), and how better to run them—including standards and protocols. There will need to be someone who can work directly with and provide support to regional work.
- **Stronger collaborative efforts.** In a global setting, AVA will have to have better collaboration with UN volunteers for training and support. In addition, AVA will have to provide better collaboration with corporate volunteer groups within the Fortune 500 companies—perhaps working alongside the Points of Light Foundation.
- **Improved knowledge exchange and development.** AVA will have to be much more proactive in promoting volunteer management as a profession in the university environment, perhaps linking credential and different degree programs. *Positioning the Profession* outreach and train-the-trainer activities will need to be offered on a more local level. There also will have to be some mechanism for knowledge exchange and expanded partnerships with consultants and trainers. Current salary surveys will be useful. A better job needs to be done to welcome and mentor newcomers to the profession.
- **Stronger media ties.** AVA will have to be much more proactive in working with the media to advocate for the profession.

3. How effectively does AVA present its products and services? How relevant are those products and services? In what ways, if any, should the international conference change its format, timing, or methodology?

The consensus clearly was that AVA does not present products or services effectively. Some said that products had quality, but there were not enough of them, and that AVA definitely needs more services, and a greater range of services.

Regarding the ICVA event, participants said that changes needed to occur as follows:

Better participant recruitment overall. There needs to be more marketing materials to sell ICVA to affiliates and more information about scholarships. Affiliates need to know what is available from office so that they can sell AVA more locally. There needs to be a stronger development of the international participation.

Better mix of activities and technologies. There needs to be a better practitioner-to-consultant mix in presentations. There need to be more evening workshops to maximize the use of time. Exhibits could be more local to promote the profession locally. Newer technologies could really develop the conference, including use of PowerPoint and distance-learning technologies, since a small percentage of members actually attend. The CD-ROM material offered at the Denver ICVA was a great idea. AVA generally could offer more teleconference training.

Stronger use of affinity groups. There need to be various additional affinity groups—for example, one of college educators and high school guidance counselors, a business groups affinity group, and a Make a Difference Day group.

4. How relevant is the credentialing process? In what ways, if any, will the certification process need to change? What is missing in the process that will need to be added for a more comprehensive approach?

Relevance of the credential. AVA needs to do a better job stressing the value of the credential. It will not be relevant until we see job postings requiring it, or, like doctors, it is required for licensing. To make credentialing more attractive and beneficial, AVA needs to track the success of CVAs. In any event, achieving credentialing can result in personal satisfaction.

Improvements in the credential. It will be helpful to put everything into one kit. A preparation session or prep book would be helpful. Those taking the credentialing test did not feel prepared, and did not feel that the test related to assigned readings. Also, for some, it was simple even if the participant did not study.

5. What changes, if any, should occur in AVA membership categories or member benefits?

Develop organizational options. AVA could offer organizational members, which could help with costs depending on an organization's size or

budget. In any case, AVA needs to explain categories of membership and the benefits of being a member for both individual and affiliates.

Relation of national to affiliate membership. There needs to be some clarification whether there is a rule regarding what number or percentage of any affiliate should be AVA members. AVA needs to be seen locally and regionally, as well as nationally. At a local conference, half the members may be new. An affiliate newsletter person needs to connect to AVA for a greater mix of marketing and publicity.

International membership. AVA could offer a sliding membership fee scale for people from different continents.

Trainers and Consultants Focus Groups

As part of the Visioning and Transformational Change Project, Dr. John Throop received input from trainers and consultants who have worked at varying degrees and levels with AVA. To accommodate the maximum number of participants, Dr. Throop facilitated two calls, one on December 4, 2003 and one on December 15, 2003, each lasting 1.5 hours, involving different participants, and asking the same questions, as follows:

- 1) What do you consider the principal strengths and weaknesses of AVA? How do those strengths and weaknesses manifest themselves?
- 2) More specifically, how does AVA use trainers and consultants? In what positive ways does AVA use your qualifications and skills? In what ways does AVA use those qualifications and skills poorly?
- 3) What do you as a trainer and/or consultant really need from AVA? What can you offer that AVA has not really utilized or utilized well?
- 4) What can AVA do to improve its use of trainers and consultants in existing patterns and channels? What are some new services, activities and/or opportunities for which consultants and trainers can provide real value?
- 5) In what ways should AVA be aware of emerging needs and changing demands in the volunteer management field? How should AVA revamp its member benefits and services to meet these changing needs?

There were a total of 11 participants in the conference calls, about half of whom have been involved with AVA for more than five years, and half less than five years. Several have held and/or currently hold positions of significant responsibility in AVA.

Summary of Input

There are five key findings from the two conference calls:

- AVA does not properly utilize the knowledge base and skill set of member consultants and trainers because there is no clearly defined role for their work inside or outside of AVA, nor is there consistent communication within AVA to involve them at appropriate points.
- ICVA, the primary point of contact between consultants and trainers and the general membership, is poorly organized, expensive and wasteful, and does not draw upon all that consultants and trainers can offer.
- AVA must work diligently to strengthen its organizational capacity, both within the AVA office and on the board, to fulfill the association's potential in North America *before* moving onto the international scene.

- AVA must work deliberately to develop geographic connections and affiliate relationships within North America, perhaps with DOVIAs and/or statewide conferences, both to strengthen AVA and directly connect member consultants and trainers with those working in the volunteer management field.
- AVA must adapt to changing realities of the “professional” volunteer manager and learn how to work with newer and younger volunteer managers—and member consultants and trainers can help deal with this trend.

AVA Strengths

Advocacy and positioning. The consensus of participants is that AVA is the primary and perhaps even the sole advocate and training resource in North America and internationally for the work of volunteer management. In particular, the participants cited *Positioning the Profession* as an essential piece of work to highlight the profession as a profession that only an organization like AVA can offer. The documents regarding volunteer management ethics is a great piece of work.

Credentialing and research. AVA is the only organization providing direct training and certification for volunteer administration, which all agreed are essential components of the organization. AVA is a key channel for leaders who are doing writing and research in the field. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* provides a key venue to add credibility to academic research in the field of volunteer management, improving understanding of the critical role of professional management of volunteers.

Expertise In-House. Individuals who are part of AVA provide a talented pool of leaders with knowledge, skill, and wisdom who can take over at just the right time. The consultants and trainers on board with AVA bring a great deal of ability, and those without national or international consulting practices can develop services and activities locally.

AVA Weaknesses

Overall, consultants and trainers think that AVA governance and management is inconsistent, and that initiatives and mandates are not carried out in a defined manner. Participants were nearly unanimous that the ICVA is a key work of the association, yet the inconsistency of the conference from year to year and the cost v. benefit to the consultant or trainer create negative impacts and result in many more missed opportunities than high-quality, measurable results for consultants and trainers.

Shifting membership. Participants noted that membership is constantly shifting. AVA is not at fault for this phenomenon. In many organizations,

volunteer administrators or managers still are considered entry-level positions. Many members do not have longevity in the field, and come and go from these positions with great frequency.

Disconnect between board and members. When there has been transition at the board level, transition planning and communication has been weak during the period of change. Board mandates are not carried through, or they are re-developed with each new group of board members. In addition, board members take positions for the membership without communicating effectively with the members. Often the members do not know what the board's position may be on a critical issue—or even if the critical issues have been defined from their perspective.

Boards in previous time were made up of people who had some visibility in the profession, but participants agreed that this is not the case now. Members may not know who the board members are. Some participants stated that the board is always looking at itself internally, but never looks at the members, or what AVA will do for the members. In addition, participants are not sure what the governance model is for board function. There is no articulated board governance process.

They stated that the board is made up of nice people with good people skills, but not high-level management skills. So far, board members are the people who do the work of volunteer management, but they are being asked to function as visionaries, and they are not equipped to do so. This mirrors the profession, in which it is hard to move people from volunteer coordination to a managerial position. Even with this gap, the board does not take advantage of consultant experience and skill, especially in seeing the big picture and how trends are affecting AVA's work. In addition, consultants have essential business skills.

It may be important to diversify the board further, but participants believe AVA should work at making the board members better known among the association members. Likely candidates could be CEOs from nonprofits or business people that can bring resources and vision. In addition, it may be useful to have board members from political bodies. There should be someone on board as a liaison with affiliates. Also, the board is not a fundraising board, and that weakness will have to be remedied if AVA is to move forward.

Consultant underutilization. AVA does not relate well or consistently with consultants and trainers, yet they are an integral part of the organization, especially at the ICVA and in the drafting of documents such as *Positioning the Profession* (which did not include trainers and did not engage them in the work). AVA does not do much to promote the work of consultants, and the cost to become involved when one is new in the field can be greater than what is manageable.

Problems with ICVA. A local host committee runs the conference, and there is little consistency from one conference to the next. Many who attend the

ICVA are not members of AVA. Also, consultants and trainers are not well utilized or fairly treated at conferences. Unlike many associations, consultants who exhibit or who are trainers get no discounts, nor are conference fees paid, even in part. Consultants have to pay all expenses to travel to and to stay at the conference, which can be very expensive. Often consultants and trainers receive very little publicity from AVA at the conference. Since the conference can be a huge expense, consultants may assess whether the conference really is worth attending, especially when weighing the results.

Lack of organizational capacity. The AVA organizational infrastructure is weak, and the size of the office support staff is far too small to carry out the work that needs to be done. The organizational support function is very under-funded considering the size of the organization as it is now, and as it could be. Also, the board takes on too much and tries to address the needs and interests of too many people.

This weakness especially manifests itself internationally, where there are calls for assistance that stretch AVA's resources and AVA's staff beyond what is reasonable. Moreover, the international work shortchanges North American efforts, especially in advocacy. "If we were stronger in North America," several said, "then we could invite participation from others internationally." They added that AVA is not really *doing* anything overall internationally, and does not understand what "international" really is. As a result, these efforts divert the association from what is happening and needed in North America. Moreover, the UN does not think AVA has the capacity to work effectively internationally.

The consultants and trainers believe that the AVA executive director does not have to go to national/international events to represent AVA, but that skilled members out of the leadership loop should go, or draw on the input and experience of people who currently never share their expertise.

Also, they insisted, AVA does a real disservice to the internationals who attend ICVA. One participant said, "All three I talked with told me that this is not an international conference." They added that the AVA credentialing process does not work readily in another culture. Therefore, even though the credentialing process is not appropriate the way it currently is designed, AVA is saying that what it offers is the best method for the credential. They wondered whether AVA could subcontract with a consultant to adapt the credentialing process to international standards. AVA and its member consultants have experience and a baseline and can make it appropriate.

Under-funded work.

The association is under-funded because the profession is not taken seriously by nonprofit and governmental agency boards and CEOs. Therefore, the membership is low-paid and not able to afford what we need in terms of dues. Some participants believe that many financial resources are available that AVA has not sought out for some reason. For example, Kellogg Foundation grants resembled AVA initiatives. The organizations that were successful in

obtaining funding were persistent, had a strong case, and had a board working for them. At this time, we do not have a strong fundraising board. AVA should do its own fundraising structure itself to do it effectively. For example, AVA does not have a development director at this time, and such a person could be very helpful in managing the fundraising tasks. It all comes down to a lack of capacity and the importance of doing capacity building.

Use or Misuse of Member Trainers and Consultants

Overall, the participants in the conference calls do not think that the national leadership uses trainers and consultants effectively. There is considerable ambiguity about whether AVA is utilizing the talents and skills that the trainers and consultants possess and frustration over how consultants are offered work-related opportunities, either to AVA itself or to its members.

Under-utilization of trainers and consultants. Several participants asserted that there have been "reciprocity problems beyond the conference." They are irritated that AVA leaders do not allow the consultants to participate in developmental efforts. Some believe that AVA makes it hard for member consultants and trainers to participate in contract work, and sometimes opts them out of the processes. In their view, rarely does AVA send consultants and trainers open RFPs for bid.

Additionally, they asserted that there never is discussion or an opportunity for anyone in AVA to participate in significant work. The Visioning and Transformational Change Process was cited as an example. Some participants say that, while they may bid on an RFP, the AVA leadership exempts or removes them from participation because they are members. There is a general sense that trainers and consultants are not properly utilized for work that will assist the association of which they are members, and with which they are familiar. They believe that they always have to re-prove themselves.

"There's so much endemically wrong," several said, "and there is an actual hostility against the consultants. Perhaps there is some jealousy there." They believe that consultants are misused, and AVA takes them from the field rather than value them for what they can give. "AVA really doesn't want to learn from anything we tell them, such as basic business sense," several said.

Ongoing communication problems between AVA and consultants. The consultants and trainers get all manner of mixed messages from the AVA office. The AVA Academy was cited as a specific example of communications problems. There is lack of clarity regarding CVA credentialing requirements between the national office and the AVA Academy. Some in the call believe that the academy could provide some training to help members qualify more readily or more quickly for the CVA credential.

For example, one consultant who publishes materials heard that the academy has recognized and recommended books that the company has available, but they did not know about it. As a result, the publisher does not have

the books available for academy participants. She added, "And we could have cut a deal with AVA."

Another issue with the academy is miscommunication between ICVA local host planners and the academy leadership. At the academy, some said, they are always scrambling to get information. There are changes and little continuity year to year with the ICVA local planning committees.

As another piece of evidence regarding the lack of linkage between ICVA and the academy, this year the conference had just seven workshops, several said. The academy's program officially takes eight for completion—so the academy shortchanged participants in 2003. "And people think that this is our contribution to AVA," they said. There is a need for better linkage between the academy and ICVA, and the credentialing process in general.

ICVA conundrums. There were several complaints regarding trainer and consultant participation in ICVA—and about the design of ICVA itself. Several observed that, to provide training at the conference is a major financial commitment. For many, it costs at least US \$1,000 in travel, and all that is received is a US \$50 honorarium. Consultants and trainers present at the conference out of loyalty.

Several were unhappy that they have to submit proposals for each conference, just like anyone else. The committees plan ICVA each time as if brand new. It is a waste of time and money because there is no documentation or template to use again, so skills and resources are not wisely used. "Every conference reinvents itself," one observed. "There have been 21 conferences, and they never have been done the same way twice."

In addition, some trainers and consultants are not used in their specialty at all and can be frustrating. They are not recruited well. On the other hand, some observed, it may be best not to use a list of "must use" consultants, so that there is no specific ownership of the conference.

In addition, the ICVA does not utilize specific skills and talents effectively because there currently is no way to track conference participation and offer programs that can address specific experience levels, or create a thematic linkage. Often, they assert, the problem is the "brand-newness" of many conference attendees. To that end, a self-described "relative newcomer" observed, "One of the things AVA could do more effectively is to link those who have less experience with those who have more, especially at the conference." There does not appear to be much opportunity to utilize talents from long-standing peers, in her view.

Some urged that the ICVA return to a focus on issues. Today, with basic skills training available in many places, there may not be the need for such training but rather for some time to be able to access "experienced settings" that deal with broader issues. One positive note about IVCA is when researchers presented information on trends in volunteerism or demographics, consultants helped to translate the implications of these trends to assist members in planning and working in their settings.

Making Better Use of Consultants and Trainers

Participants were clear that AVA does not make effective or consistent use of consultants and trainers to provide services to members. One way consultants could be utilized more effectively may be to provide direct connections to statewide conferences and affiliate organizations. In addition, it may be time for AVA to offer consulting services as a direct benefit to members, not only in more general areas of volunteer management, but also in specific and unserved areas such as volunteer risk management.

Better delegation by AVA leadership. The consensus of the consultants and trainers is that there are too few staff members trying to do too much. While striving to meet the needs of a diverse membership, AVA should focus on trainers as the best customers in AVA. They are members with significant knowledge and resources. The moment that a project may require it, they add expertise. The consultant or trainer could be plugged in right away as part of that person's professional and association duty. It is a matter of good delegation.

Consultant credentialing. Some consultants and trainers believe that it would be great to have a credentialing process for consultants in the field. They said that anyone can label himself or herself as a volunteer management consultant, but credentialing could help by creating a performance benchmark. So recommendations could be made based on skill and experience as well as the credential. Currently, credentialing is portrayed and marketed as appropriate for a volunteer resources manager, but not for a consultant. It is not marketed to others than those in volunteer resources management.

Better consultant referral. If an AVA member is looking for a specific skill set in consulting or training, turn the directory as it now exists into a searchable index. Let the people making the decision to contract do so in their own context and on their own schedule. Consultants and trainers do not need AVA as a "broker" in the middle. As one observed, "If people could compare me to others who are AVA members, there could be good comparison shopping."

Another assertion: consultants should not have to go through an RFP process each time with AVA, but identify specific competencies in advance. When connecting with a DOVIA, for example, AVA's office could say, "Here are 22 consultants with core competencies, and here are your choices."

Finally, if those who are deeply engaged in AVA with experience and knowledge could focus on and address core competencies, then it would be possible to determine other areas that are not addressed. In that case, it would be possible to have "newbie trainers" fill in and deal with practical matters. Moreover, this work could take place more at the local level rather than the national or international levels.

Consultants may be available to collaborate between AVA and nonprofit management work, but AVA offers no invitation or appreciation for this utilization

of consultants. AVA may offer market availability in a general sense, but there also is interconnectivity among trainers and direct referral between colleagues. AVA and Mary Merrill, editor of *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, need to provide ways through the journal to further this conversation and networking.

Re-connection with regional work. While the regional structure did not work well, participants agreed, there has been no replacement system or method to keep members and consultants coordinated. As a result, not only do they not connect well or often, but AVA also misses opportunities (as do the consultants and trainers).

Participants added that, if a more formal connection existed between AVA at the international level and DOVIAs at the regional level, there would be more statewide and local training, as well as service that is more direct. It is important to develop more and better partnerships with DOVIAs, statewide organizations, and/or provincial associations. No one has looked yet at the continuity between the national and local levels, where members work. AVA has missed many opportunities to be part of state conferences in some way. AVA, through its consultants and trainers, could bring the national perspective. As it is, they said, AVA is not on the "radar screen" at many local conferences.

Affiliate work. Participants were concerned whether AVA has an affiliate plan and if it is functioning. Once a group affiliates or forms an affinity network, does AVA work with the affiliate/affinity in any way (i.e., discounting, help getting started in the relationship)? Several cited the new affiliate of senior/national managers. AVA may get the senior/national managers, but AVA has not followed up with them. As a result, the senior managers have begun their own organization. There have been hours of donated time to get the senior/national management group formed, but now they have a name, and are debating whether to link with AVA. AVA promised services such as a listserv. Does the affiliate/affinity group have one? Here is another way consultants could have been of help.

Emerging Needs and Issues

Participants in the focus groups believe that AVA should work aggressively to develop more products and services in light of the changing volunteer environment in North America. In addition, they stated that AVA needs to become more technologically proficient and add more services through the Web site and using on-line training. In addition, AVA must adapt to generational changes in the perception of a career in volunteer management, and develop new strategies and techniques to train and develop younger members.

Link AVA-based consultants to larger nonprofit management issues. Some participants observed that consultants, because of their client base, work across a number of agency approaches and see a lot more than simply an individual in a single agency for 10 years. Yet there is a disconnect, they said.

AVA does not bring the breadth of realities and models to the table. AVA needs to be able to draw on the consultant skill set and use a consultant as a partner or trainer in volunteer administration.

Several also said that consultants could address the growing potential in the field for mentoring and coaching. Funders are interested in this sort of process. There also are specific start-up issues in launching a professionally managed volunteer program. As part of its administrative function, AVA could offer a branch of consulting services and outsource projects to consultants.

Another venue for AVA's work with consultants is through nonprofit development centers and centers for nonprofit management. Perhaps AVA can create a consultant-based incubator for nonprofit development. This work might be more effective than what AVA is doing, since AVA then would be more than a manager of a credential or a maintainer of ethics. It would become entrepreneurial, incorporating volunteer management in the overall management framework of a nonprofit.

AVA has kept alert regarding changing needs in volunteer management, but that has not filtered down to the membership. One of the problems with people who have been in the field for a long time is to view the loss of volunteers and say, "Why is this happening?" Consultants and trainers agreed that AVA could answer this question more directly as well as provide training for volunteer management.

Some participants said that AVA is in an excellent place to address the issue of risk management with volunteer programs. If member groups could license their organizational competencies (or there could be a tie-in with CVA designation), then insurers could offer insurance for volunteer programs at a discount. AVA could take insurance products directly to members. We could be objective and adjudicate problems. AVA might focus this product especially in smaller communities, and get lower rates for organizations in those settings. AVA also could offer a consulting arm on insurance and risk management. This effort would be in keeping with the mandate for AVA to offer programs and services of only the highest quality.

Moving beyond the "profession" in volunteer management.

Participants agreed that, if we look at younger generations in volunteer management, they are not using the word "profession" and have a disconnect regarding the word. For example, ASAE has looked at this trend for 2 to 3 years now. AVA issued *Positioning the Profession*, but we may be behind the trend.

An entirely different mindset requires a new approach from AVA. Younger people in the field are talking, not of careers, but about jobs that have skills and can be re-positioned. Those who are hiring still have an older view that would support the notion of "profession." Perhaps consultants and trainers can explore this in a forum and a workshop at the annual conference. There are significant implications regarding credentialing, and the ways that trainers and consultants can be involved in moving in a new direction. Generational diversity is crucial in an association like AVA.

Technological interconnectivity. Consultants and trainers also can help AVA provide Internet-based training, engage in long-distance learning technologies, and enable on-line access to conference information both prior to and after the event. AVA has to care about the Internet and its implications for providing consulting and training.

Overall, participants were critical of current technological efforts. For example, AVA staff took over the CyberVPM system and "let it die." Hardly anyone answers the listserv, they asserted. Nor can AVA deal with electronic subscriptions to the Journal or how to put the journal on-line. One other thought regarding the journal is that it needs to work harder to bridge the gap between researchers and members, and consultants are in a good place to do that.

One other technological concern: consultants and trainers are irritated that, when presenting at ICVA, there is no way to offer a PowerPoint presentation unless they bring all of their own equipment.

New patterns of volunteerism. The current buzzword is homeland security, the consultants said. There are the Freedom Corps, the Citizen Corps, volunteerism at every level, and a funding stream for Freedom Corps. Does AVA offer professional trainers to help at the local level?

Increasingly, participants observed, there are corporate avenues in volunteering, and the funders are providing money to take on new methods of volunteering and the need to provide appropriate management.