

## ABSTRACT

*This article explicates the results of a major national survey of volunteer administrators concerning the quality and availability of training opportunities in volunteer management. Findings show that the administrators strongly endorse continuing education and that training is widely available at the beginning level. However, advanced level training is not nearly as accessible, and a sizable portion of the administrators feel that existing training opportunities do not meet their needs. Based on the preferences of the administrators, the article identifies subject areas recommended for coverage in a basic seminar and in an advanced seminar in volunteer management.*

# Training in Volunteer Administration: Assessing the Needs of the Field

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What kinds of training do administrators of volunteer programs require to perform effectively? This question has long consumed the interest of practitioners, scholars, trainers, and observers in the field of volunteerism. They have attempted to answer it in a variety of ways, for example, through functional analyses of the position of director of volunteers and examination of the time allocated to different aspects of the job. They have made assessments of the demands placed on volunteer programs and managers by pivotal constituencies, such as their superiors in the organization, boards of directors, and clients of the agency. Some research, too, has used a survey approach to ascertain directly the opinions of these officials regarding the types of training that they would find most beneficial.

Although surveys are not uncommon, rarely have they queried a national sample of directors of volunteer programs about their preferences for training. In most surveys as well, the information gathered has been intended primarily for internal uses of an agency or official and

has not been systematically coded and examined with the goal of uncovering broader trends and implications for the field. This article, in contrast, presents and analyzes the results of a recent survey of managers of volunteers, administered throughout the United States and Canada in the later part of 1989 and early 1990. The article begins with a brief description of the background for the survey and then discusses the sampling frame and response rate. Major sections then elaborate the views of the managers concerning the availability and quality of training in volunteer administration and the subjects they feel ought to be communicated through training.

## BACKGROUND OF THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SURVEY

In 1989, a small group of trainers, practitioners, and representatives of major associations in volunteer administration gradually discovered a common interest in the availability of training to directors of volunteer programs. Concerned that existing training opportunities might not be sufficient to meet the

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needs of volunteer administrators, they decided on a survey to assess the state of training in the field. In October 1989, the Board of Directors and membership of the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) called for the distribution of a survey to elicit comments and opinions on the status of continuing education programs in volunteer administration and to provide direction to new initiatives. Developed with input from its members, the survey on "Educational Needs in Volunteer Administration" received sanction not only from AVA but also VOLUNTEER: The National Center.

The authors of the present article were not involved in the design of the educational needs questionnaire nor in attendant procedures of sampling and dissemination. Instead, after the survey had been prepared and distributed, the authors were invited to process the data and discern major findings because of their interest in continuing education programs in volunteer administration and the independence and analytical capability that they can bring to this inquiry. The authors turn first to the sample of volunteer administrators canvassed by the Educational Needs Survey.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

In order to capture the diversity of opinion on training issues among administrators of volunteers, the Educational Needs Survey was mailed to the AVA membership, which numbers approximately 1,750. Directors of Voluntary Action Centers, about 320 in all, were also polled. Based on mailing lists provided by educators and directors in volunteer administration, the questionnaire was sent to another pool of approximately 1,200 managers. Because of AVA leadership's desire to obtain certain information, the questionnaire sent to AVA members contained more items but was otherwise identical to the instrument distributed to the rest of the sample; some of these items are analyzed below.

Although the probability of overlap across the various mailing lists precludes a firm estimate of total sample size, the survey likely reached some 3,000 professionals and leaders in volunteer manage-

ment. Of this group, 765 completed and returned the questionnaire. Thus, about one in four participated in the survey for a response rate of 25%. This figure is not especially high, but it is still quite acceptable for a mailed questionnaire that did not include a pre-addressed envelope for the finished survey or the necessary postage for return mail. Regardless of the exact parameters of the sampling frame, the Educational Needs Survey qualifies as one of the largest such undertakings ever in the field of volunteer administration.

The sample of volunteer administrators available for analysis is not only substantial, but also several indicators suggest that it is broadly representative. First, the questionnaires received come from every state and from most of the Canadian provinces. Second, of the volunteer administrators who responded to the survey, 73% are involved in nonprofit organizations, and 7% in "other" institutions; the remaining 20% work for government volunteer programs. This distribution is consistent with findings from major national surveys which show that the great bulk of volunteering occurs in nonprofit organizations (for example, Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988). Brudney's (1990) extensive study of volunteer programs in government substantiates that about one in five volunteers assists public agencies.

Finally, in response to an item on the questionnaire that asked for "the focus or general subject area of your program," directors of volunteer programs listed 34 different activities, bridging the spectrum from corporate-sponsored projects to religious institutions. As might have been anticipated, the largest group of respondents (28.5%) reported the focus of their program as volunteer support and placement; health care was second (16.5%), followed by social services (6.2%), senior services (6.0%), and youth services (5.5%). A series of biennial surveys on volunteerism conducted by the Gallup Organization since 1981 show that these substantive areas continually attract a great portion of voluntary activity (Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988; Gallup, 1986, 1981).

Two caveats to the sample deserve mention. First, a majority of the volunteer administrators are AVA members (60.7%), but their numbers are not so great as to predominate in the analysis. The response rate for this group (26.5%) is virtually equivalent to the response rate for non-AVA participants (24.1%). Second, very few of the respondents are new to the field: Just 6.5% have less than one year of experience in volunteer administration, although 36.8% have one to five years. One-quarter of the sample (25.4%) has six to ten years involvement, and 31.3% boast over ten years. While the sample may over-represent experienced administrators, it should yield reliable information concerning the educational needs of directors of volunteer programs.

#### CONTINUING EDUCATION: PREFERENCES AND AVAILABILITY

Responses to the Educational Needs Survey leave no doubt that the sample of volunteer administrators possess a very healthy interest in continuing education. Over 80% (83%) of those surveyed indicated that they would appreciate the chance to attend an in-depth, advanced course in volunteer management. An almost identical percentage (82.1%) stated that they would be interested in attending an in-depth seminar that dealt with specific topics or areas in volunteer administration, such as volunteer involvement in local government, innovative program design, and so forth.

The survey also inquired whether respondents would have appreciated the chance to attend in-depth training before or soon after they had begun work in volunteer management. On this issue, findings are more anomalous: While fully 91% of the managers said that they would have valued this opportunity, just one-quarter of them (24.5%) had attended training before starting work in the field.

This result is open to a variety of interpretations. According to one view, it may point to a lack of training opportunities in the field, which would limit the access of entering cohorts to appropriate professional skills and background. According

to another perspective often encountered in the literature, many organizations tend to hold their volunteer programs in rather low standing and, thus, do not always see to the needs of program leaders for continuing education. Marlene Wilson (1976) noted—and lamented—this possibility in her classic treatment of *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*, a catalyst to development of the field. A more generous interpretation of the same result is that organizations may not be commonly aware of the existence of volunteer administration as a profession offering a variety of support resources, such as membership associations, technical assistance, training, and credentialing. They may simply overlook sources for continuing education of volunteer managers.

While an assessment of these rival explanations lies beyond the scope of the Educational Needs Survey, a short battery of items appended to the otherwise identical questionnaire mailed to the AVA membership elucidates the availability of training to volunteer administrators. Nearly four out of five of the AVA members who responded to the survey (78.3%) said that, in general, volunteer management training exists in their area. Availability differs markedly, however, by the type of training opportunity. For example, virtually all of this group (99%) reported that beginning-level training is available. By contrast, fewer than two-thirds could find advanced-level training (63.9%), and only one-fifth training for trainers in volunteer management (20.4%). Perhaps most arresting, only 41.6% of the AVA members surveyed felt that the training available to them meets their needs.

In sum, the results of the Educational Needs Survey show that administrators of volunteer programs maintain a strong interest in continuing education. Over 80% of those who completed the questionnaire stated that they would appreciate the chance to attend an in-depth, advanced course on volunteer management or a seminar devoted to special topics in the field. The findings also suggest that the availability of training may not meet the professed demands for it, especially

for advanced skills. Based on a set of items presented only to AVA respondents, training appears to be generally available at the beginning level, but much less accessible at the advanced level, or for those who wish to become trainers in volunteer administration. More than half the AVA members, who tend to have considerable experience, were not satisfied that existing training meets their needs. What subject areas would these and the other respondents like to see addressed in training sessions?

#### SKILLS DESIRED IN VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT: BASIC AND ADVANCED

The Educational Needs Survey asked administrators of volunteers to indicate the types of subjects they thought should be covered in a seminar on basic volunteer management skills and in a seminar on advanced skills. Both questions were presented in an open-ended format, so that respondents could elaborate their views without constraint. In order to capture the wealth of information generated by this procedure, for each administrator the authors coded up to four possible answers on both questions. In all, the respondents offered a total of 2,180 comments concerning the basic seminar and 1,826 comments about the advanced seminar. Based on these responses, the authors developed a coding scheme that consisted of nearly 100 distinct subject areas endorsed for training.

In Tables I and II following, the authors have grouped these categories according to general topics to facilitate analysis and interpretation of results. For the same reason, the tables and discussion focus on the top twenty training needs identified by the volunteer administrators, as assessed by the frequency of their comments recommending coverage of the various subjects. Since the top twenty needs account for 97.6% of all comments received concerning a basic course in volunteer management (see Table I), and 94.7% of those pertaining to an advanced course (Table II), little information is sacrificed in this process, but considerable interpretability gained. In a study of volunteer managers in AVA Re-

gion X (Pacific Northwest), Appel, Jimmerson, Macduff, and Long (1988) also elected to examine the top twenty perceived needs for training.

Table I shows the preferences of the volunteer administrators for subjects to be covered in a basic seminar in volunteer management; the preferences are enumerated for the entire sample, as well as for subgroups of managers with five or fewer years of experience in volunteer administration, and those with more than five years. The subject area most in demand for training is recruitment of volunteers, mentioned in 17.2% of the comments of the sample. Based on a closed-ended response format, recruitment also ranked first in the study by Appel, Jimmerson, Macduff, and Long (1988). The next three priorities for training, according to the Educational Needs Survey—motivation, recognition, and retention of volunteers (13.7% of comments); interviewing, screening, and placing volunteers in position in the organization (10.1%); and supervision and management of volunteers (8.2%)—constitute enduring tasks of the volunteer administrator. Professional skills (7.7%), embracing time management, leadership, ethics, communication, conflict resolution, counseling and coaching, team building, networking, and more, round out the top five subject areas for coverage in a basic seminar in volunteer administration. Together, these topics account for more than half (56.9%) of all the comments offered by the volunteer managers concerning the basic course.

The second group of five subject areas recognized by the sample as training needs are also staples of the managerial role. These topics consist of: planning and evaluation of the volunteer program (7.1% of comments), training employees for collaboration with volunteers and volunteers for the responsibilities assigned to them (5.7%), designing jobs for volunteers (5.0%), maintaining records for the volunteer program (4.5%), and publicizing the program through marketing, advertising, and the media (3.2%). These topics account for just over one-quarter (25.5%) of the comments of the administrators.

**Table I**  
**Preferences of Volunteer Administrators for Subjects to be Covered in**  
**Basic Seminar in Volunteer Management**

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Entire Sample</u>		<u>Years of Experience</u>	
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>&lt;5 Years Rank</u>	<u>&gt;5 Years Rank</u>
Recruitment of Volunteers	17.2	1	1	1
Motivation, Recog., Retention	13.7	2	2	2
Interview, Screen, Place Vols	10.1	3	3	3
Supervision and Mgmt of Vols	8.2	4	4	4
Professional Skills	7.7	5	5	5
Planning and Evaluation of Pgm	7.1	6	7	6
Training for Employees and Vols	5.7	7	6	8
Job Design for Volunteers	5.0	8	8	7
Record-keeping	4.5	9	9	9
Marketing and Publicity	3.2	10	10	10
Organization Change and Devt.	2.6	11	13	11
Volunteer-Staff Relations	2.6	11	12	12
Structure of Volunteer Program	1.6	13	11	20
Political Factors/Empowerment	1.4	14	16	13
Budgeting and Accounting	1.4	14	14	15
Fund/Resource Raising	1.4	14	14	15
Orientation for Volunteers	1.3	17	19	13
Director of Volunteer Services	1.3	17	16	15
Liability Insurance	1.1	19	18	18
Career Development	0.7	20	*	18
Other	2.4			
(Total Comments)		(2180)	(932)	(1248)

\*Indicates subject not one of top 20 preferences for this group. Volunteer administrators with five or fewer years of experience ranked "Information/Literature Sources on Volunteerism" as their twentieth preference.

The first ten subject areas listed in Table I encompass 82.4% of the recommendations of the volunteer managers. By the frequency of their comments, both the newer and the more senior managers agreed on the priorities that should be assigned to coverage of the different areas. As the final two columns of the Table illustrate, managers with less than five years of experience in volunteer administration, and those with more than five years, ranked these topics in virtually identical order. Thus, these subject areas might well constitute the core of a basic seminar in volunteer management.

Several of the remaining subjects enumerated in Table I, while not endorsed as frequently by the administrators, represent emerging issues that training must begin to address—if not at the basic level, then in an advanced seminar in volunteer management (see below). With the exception of orientation for volunteers (1.3% of comments), volunteer-staff relations (2.6%), and, perhaps, fund/resource raising (1.4%) and budgeting and accounting for the program (1.4%), these topics are relatively new to the field.

Organizational change and development (2.6%) is a good example: This topic

**Table II**  
**Preferences of Volunteer Administrators for Subjects to be Covered in**  
**Advanced Seminar in Volunteer Management**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Entire Sample</b>		<b>Years of Experience</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>&lt;5 Years Rank</b>	<b>&gt;5 Years Rank</b>
Professional Skills	15.1	1	1	1
Supervision and Mgmt of Vols	10.2	2	2	2
Planning and Evaluation of Pgm	8.8	3	3	3
Organization Change and Devt.	6.6	4	7	4
Motivation, Recog., Retention	6.2	5	4	7
Fund/Resource Raising	5.5	6	5	5
Marketing and Publicity	5.0	7	9	6
Director of Volunteer Services	4.4	8	8	11
Budgeting and Accounting	4.2	9	11	8
Recruitment of Volunteers	4.2	9	5	13
Political Factors/Empowerment	4.2	9	10	10
Training for Employees and Vols	3.9	12	12	9
Volunteer-Staff Relations	3.0	13	13	12
Burnout of Vols, DVS, Employees	2.6	14	14	14
Liability Insurance	2.4	15	14	15
Career Development	2.0	16	19	15
Interview, Screen, Place Vols	1.8	17	14	20
Structure of Volunteer Program	1.7	18	17	17
Computer Applications	1.5	19	20	17
Community Relations	1.3	20	*	17
Other	5.3			
(Total Comments)		(1826)	(734)	(1092)

\*Indicates subject not one of top 20 preferences for this group. Volunteer administrators with five or fewer years of experience ranked "Substantive Issues" (*i.e.*, volunteering in mental health services, or in education, or in recreation, etc.) as their seventeenth preference (tied with "Structure of Volunteer Program" in Table above).

includes organizational needs assessment and development, new programs and innovation, and future trends. Political factors and empowerment (1.4%) entails involving volunteers in program management, building organizational support for the program, and fashioning the political skills and savvy of the volunteer administrator. Interest in the director of volunteer services (1.3%) as the focal point for the volunteer program, and associated issues of Directors of Volunteer Services (DVS) training, organizational status, compensation, and board of director relations, is

also comparatively recent. Other recent interests are attention to career development in volunteerism (certification/credentialing, volunteer experience as a path to paid employment) and to liability insurance for the volunteer program and participants (1.1%).

These topics are less well-established in the literature and training of volunteer administration than are the first ten areas enumerated in Table I but tend to be contemporary concerns. As a result, it should not be surprising that according to the frequency of their recommenda-

tions, the subgroups of more and less experienced administrators diverged to a much greater extent in the rankings they assigned to the final ten subjects for coverage in a basic volunteer management seminar. For example, those with five or more years of experience in the field accorded higher priority to political factors and empowerment and to orientation for volunteers than did those with less than five years and evaluated the structure of the volunteer program as a far less important topic for training.

Table II reveals the preferences of volunteer administrators for subjects to be covered in an advanced seminar in volunteer management. While the topics identified most often by the sample for the basic seminar focus on building the volunteer program (Table I), the preferred areas for the advanced course place greater emphasis on developing the skills and position of the manager of volunteers. In fact, the administrators accord professional skills top priority, endorsed in 15.1% of their comments. Treatment of the position of director of volunteer services (4.4%), political skills (4.2%), and career development (2.0%) also receive higher priority for coverage in an advanced seminar than they do in the basic seminar. According to these responses, a substantial portion of advanced training should be devoted to enhancing the personal competencies of the volunteer administrator.

Comparison of the training preferences revealed in Table I and Table II also suggests that certain of the topics nominated by the managers for inclusion in the basic course would be more appropriate for treatment in the advanced course. For example, by frequency of comments, organization change and development (6.6% of comments), fund/resource raising (5.5%), marketing and publicity (5.0%), budgeting and accounting (4.2%), and liability insurance (2.4%) rank much closer to the top of the list of recommended subjects for an advanced course than for a basic one. The same conclusion applies to three areas not among the top twenty preferences of the administrators for the basic course but drawing some attention for the advanced

seminar: problems of burnout of volunteers, employees, and the DVS (2.6% of comments); computer applications to the volunteer program (1.5%); and relations with the community (1.3%).

The reverse holds true for some subject areas: recruitment of volunteers is the first priority for coverage in a basic course (Table I) but only the ninth for the advanced course (Table II). The topics of interviewing, screening, and placing volunteers, the structure of the volunteer program, and training for employees and volunteers also earn much higher rankings for coverage in a basic, rather than an advanced, seminar. To the subjects for the basic course should be added job design for volunteers, record-keeping, and orientation for volunteers—which are not among the top twenty preferences of the administrators for an advanced course. This listing reinforces the emphasis of the basic course on the fundamentals of building a viable volunteer program.

A small group of topics received high rankings for inclusion in both a basic and an advanced seminar in volunteer administration. Coverage of supervision and management of volunteers (10.2% of comments in Table II), planning and evaluation of the volunteer program (8.8%), and motivation, recognition, and retention of volunteers (6.2%) are popular subjects for either course. Relationships between volunteers and paid staff, an enduring issue in volunteer administration, also attracts very similar notice from the managers in Tables I and II albeit at a lower level of overall attention. Perhaps an indication of greater uncertainty concerning the advanced course, the rankings accorded the different subject areas by the more senior administrators and their junior counterparts are not as consistent in Table II as they are in Table I for the basic course.

## IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results of a major national survey of Educational Needs in Volunteer Administration, managers of volunteer programs profess a healthy interest in augmenting their background and expertise. Yet only one-fourth of the respondents to the survey had attended

training in volunteer management prior to working in the field. Thus, an important implication of the findings of this study is that researchers and practitioners should work to raise the profile of volunteer administration as a profession. Organizations and agencies with an interest in involving volunteers—but perhaps uninformed or apprehensive about the process—must have better access to existing resources in the field that can assist them. Voluntary action centers, professional associations, academic programs, trainers, and managers all possess a vital stake in expanding awareness of volunteer administration.

The findings of this study also suggest that a large number of volunteer managers do not feel that the training available to them meets their needs. The present inquiry has sought to aid training efforts by identifying subject areas that administrators recommend for inclusion in basic and advanced seminars in volunteer management. According to this analysis, the basic course should focus most strongly on the requisites of the volunteer program: recruitment, motivation and retention, interviewing and placement, supervision and management, planning and evaluation, training, job design, record-keeping, orientation, volunteer-staff relations, and the like. Treatment of professional skills should not be overlooked. The advanced course should place greater emphasis on enhancing the competencies of the volunteer manager, but it should also touch on supervision and management, planning and evaluation, motivation and retention, organization change and development, fund/resource raising, marketing and publicity, budgeting and accounting, volunteer-staff relations, personnel burnout, and liability insurance.

Of course, a multitude of factors weigh into the calculus of whether a particular training opportunity will satisfy the needs of those who take advantage of it, but the content of the training must surely be one of the most crucial.

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