



[News and Hot Topics](#) » [Moving on from 2001](#)

## Moving on from 2001

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

January  
2002

It was quite a year. 2001 started with mixed reviews for the celebration of the International Year of Volunteers and ended with recognition of the efforts of volunteers responding to the terror of September 11th as a sign of undiminished community strength. It wasn't the way any of us would have chosen to make volunteering visible, but IYV2001 will indeed be remembered!

All of us will reflect on 2001 in our own ways, but here are my major thoughts as we move forward into the new year.

### The Need for a National Voice

As has already been discussed more than enough in this space, the International Year of Volunteers was an incredibly missed opportunity to affect public opinion, most especially in the United States. It's water over the dam at this point, but a whole lot of people and organizations share the blame. IYV only served to highlight the weaknesses of our professional associations at every level.

We have a problem in the United States and that is that we no longer have a national professional association that can "speak for" us. As the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) has extended its commendable goal of reaching out internationally, it has lost (or denied) its position as representing practitioners in the United States. The Points of Light Foundation doesn't ask its members for opinions or direction, and is beholden to its funders and swayed by political influences. So, while other countries have been hard at work *creating* national associations (Canada, Japan and Australia are just three examples) run by peers, the United States is increasingly UN-organized.

The American volunteer leadership community needs and deserves a place where we can unapologetically tackle topics of concern only to us, particularly as related to government and to major national organizations affecting volunteering in our country. International work is vital (I think I have proven my commitment to that), but we also need national work.

There are a number of possible strategies to improve the situation. One is for AVA to form national divisions or "affinity groups" that have the power to participate in national discussions reflecting on volunteer issues. This would be a service to members in ANY country, once there are enough AVA members from a particular nation to reach critical mass.

## Issues, Not Tasks

We are at a very important moment in our professional history. The coming year is an opportunity to build on momentum from IYV (in countries where there was action, such as Canada) and from the publicity surrounding the volunteer response to the terrorist attacks. I urge every state/provincial, national, and international leaders of volunteers association to offer its members *substantive* information on issues confronting the field. We must stop spending all our time together on the "how to's" of volunteer management and turn instead to the *context* in which we work. This means workshops, forums, position papers, and other outreach on things like:

- Implications of spontaneous volunteering at times like natural and human-caused disasters.
- Gathering truly useful data on volunteer involvement and on the *outcomes* - the accomplishments - of volunteer efforts (see [last month's Hot Topic](#)).
- Monitoring the studies produced by academic "centers on philanthropy" to assure that citizen participation is researched as much as fundraising is.
- Educating the media about their role in the image of volunteering.
- Lobbying for reasonable policies on insurance, police checks and other legal requirements relating to volunteers.
- Incorporating the expenses of volunteer involvement into funding proposals and educating foundations about these needs.

Once we discuss and understand the issues, we next must teach ourselves successful techniques for affecting necessary change. Until we are ready to make waves through collective action - on behalf of the volunteers we represent - we will not gain respect nor will we have influence.

## United We Stand

We also need to stop our endless fragmentation and turfdom. I'm all for choice and do not think that we need just "one" organization. But it seems ridiculous that our various associations (based on settings such as hospitals, justice programs, hospices, museums, etc.) can never get together to issue joint statements or collaborate on training or resource materials.

This begins at the personal level. Are you a volunteerism practitioner or are you someone who works in a hospital, school, museum, military installation, (fill in the blank), who happens to be responsible for volunteers? If you work for the Corporation for National Service, are you part of volunteerism? How about those in school-based service-learning? Do Volunteer Center directors or City Cares managers see themselves in the same profession as a front-line volunteer program manager? What

about those who run employee volunteer programs in for-profit corporations? If you're American and attend Points of Light Conferences, notice how the many "streams of service" co-locate, but do not interact.

The fragmentation holds true for celebration of volunteering, too. National Volunteer Week in April (US and Canada) or June (UK) has never made a measurable impact on the public's consciousness, yet new volunteer-related events keep getting added to the calendar. This past November, the call to 35 million AARP members to join in a "National Day of Service" on December 6 was sent without even a mention of International Volunteer Day on December 5 (and we won't even touch the subject of attempting to add appreciation of volunteer program managers on that same December 5!).

There is light on the horizon, however. In Ontario, Canada, the two largest provincial societies consolidated to become Professional Resources of Volunteer Resources-Ontario (PAVR-O <http://www.pavro.on.ca/>) in 1998 and, just last month, colleagues in Minnesota merged no less than 13 organizations to become the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA). For more information on this exciting development, see the article about how they did it in the new issue of *e-Volunteerism*, available as of January 15. These pioneers are really moving us forward in their determination to provide a united voice for our profession.

### **What Does this Mean?**

Those of us who do not react in meaningful ways to the changes swirling around us will simply be left behind. If current professional associations do not update themselves, new ones will form. If long-standing conferences don't become more relevant, future-looking colleagues will find others, especially those who feel themselves "advanced" and yearn for more thoughtful challenges. Those who do not care to learn Internet skills will simply be left out of exciting new online training, international exchange, and collective deliberation.

I spent much of 2001 in extreme frustration. But I am starting 2002 with the determination to look ahead more often than I look back. What about you?

Related Topics: [Disaster Response](#) | [International Focus](#) | [Ethics](#) | [History](#) | [Image of Volunteering](#) | [Philosophy](#) | [Trends and Issues](#) | [Infrastructure to Support Volunteering](#)

*Posted 02Jan24*

A reader responded to a response posted January 2nd. We have posted it [with the original response](#).

*Posted 02Jan16*

**Submitted by Nicole Stedman, Graduate Student, University of Florida, Florida, United States**

As a Doctoral student at the University of Florida studying Volunteer Leadership Development, I would agree that there are so many issues at hand for Volunteer Leaders. Unfortunately, much of the academic research on Volunteerism, either in the form of Dissertations or Master's Research, is not

published and not easily found. I think that a forum for graduate students to submit writings on Volunteerism would be a great way to harness this "lost" information.

***Response from Susan:***

You are so right! In fact, several of us are talking about developing a repository of graduate theses on volunteerism subjects, ideally to be housed physically in a central archive at a university plus with an online component. We will keep everyone posted this.

02Jan15

***Submitted by Donna Schumacher, Director of Volunteers, Virtua Health System, New Jersey, USA***

I can only whole heartedly agree. A good example of our own national group not working together was the unfortunate need to cancel the conference due to events of September 11th. As a result, those of us who planned to become certified were left out in the cold because of the national organization not giving authority to local groups to proctor and offer this test. Even the National Emergency Medical Technician group allow state (and local) organizations to administer a test that certifies people to save lives!!! If we do not respect ourselves and see ALL as professional, how can we ever expect our own organizations to respect us or our volunteers?

02Jan10

***Submitted by Katrina Purcell, Volunteer Co-ordinator Lanarkshire Primary Care NHS Trust, Lanarkshire, Scotland***

One thing that is always comforting is that the issues surrounding volunteers managers are the same world-wide. We all spend our time feeling guilty about actually being precious about spending time on our own professional development and organisation when we could be devoting our time to our volunteers or volunteer programmes. 2001 was the year, for me personally when I realised that I was part of a group and not just an individual practitioner and my own development would make me a better practitioner. Hopefully in 2002, I can encourage others to be just as "selfish."

02Jan09

***Submitted by Anne Hislop, Training Officer, Volunteer Development Scotland, Stirling, Scotland***

In many areas in Scotland, Volunteer Managers Forums have been set up to enable Volunteer Managers to meet regularly to discuss common issues, sometimes with an invited speaker and/or to share their own skills and experience. Those involved find this a useful way to recharge batteries at busy times.

02Jan08

***Submitted by Ada Nanning, Volunteer Resources, Calgary, Alberta***

We can become complacent, after all the extra efforts volunteer managers put into IYV... I would like to take it a little easier in 2002. The demands I placed on myself and the demands of the agency, community heightend the work load. There is only so much that volunteer managers can do... I hope that I can focus my efforts in 2002 to address issues that will make a difference. It's a balancing act... to know how much to give towards your agency needs and how much for the greater good .

02Jan07

**Submitted by Laurie Eytel, Volunteer Manager, Fairfax County Dept. of Family Services, VA, USA**

You brought up some good points. I think, as with so many other areas, it is a matter of setting up unification as a priority. Of course, the problem is finding the TIME. I know I am currently working on a variety of new initiatives within my program areas. I WANT to become more involved at a national level, but it can be difficult, when issues close at home cry out for attention.

That being said, I will make a real effort to be more involved. One way is a round table meeting of volunteer managers some of us are starting up this year, hopefully with monthly meetings. I also wonder why, if one is a member of a branch of AVA (in my case NVAVA), why separate dues are also necessary to be a member of AVA. In other organizations I've been involved with, paying branch dues covers membership in the larger umbrella organization. Perhaps AVA should look at this and work out one payment "plan", it might alleviate some of the fragmentation you discuss. Just some thoughts...

**Response to [above response](#) about NAVA:**

Posted 02Jan24

**Submitted by Susan Herbert, Communications Committee, NVAVA, Fairfax, VA USA**

I am responding to the question from Laurie Eytel about affiliation, etc. but it may be useful to others. While NVAVA uses the same acronym as AVA, it is not an affiliate of AVA. It was at one time, when organizations were members of AVA instead of individuals.

Until about 3 years ago, AVA did not have one member, one vote. It was a "unique" system -- more on that if you want background. Three years ago, that changed. AVA was trying to reach out to local associations of volunteer administrators, (sometimes using the AVA acronym in their names, others called DOVIAs). AVA changed its dues structure. Rather than just an organizational membership, AVA lowered its overall dues, but to "use" the affiliate relationship, the independent groups needed to have a percentage of their members be AVA national/int'l members. The number of individual AVA members of the local had to be 50% -- for NVAVA that meant that at least 40 of our then 80 members had to be AVA members and we just! didn't have the numbers)

For many in NVAVA, and in other DOVIAs, that was too high a cost to pay... NVAVA's local dues are almost as high as AVA dues - many NVAVA members didn't see the value of being members of both, even if it did mean a discount on the AVA dues ( \$10) It was a difficult decision for NVAVA and its board and I know that the decision has impacted other DOVIAs. For many, it was a bigger investment than many local members could afford. I doubt that in a group our size (100+) we will ever roust the numbers required to get "affiliated."

The bottom line is that it costs money to run organizations, whether our local group or at the national level... NVAVA doesn't have staff, etc yet our dues are the same as a national organization with paid staff, headquarters, etc. In our profession, many individuals are on limited budgets and just can't

swing the dues for both -- they stay involved locally because that is where they see immediate results... it is harder to do on the national level (though I firmly believe that it also boils down to the fact that many people just don't invest in themselves... my opinion, not NVAVAs.

---

Sign up for our Newsletter

PRIVACY STATEMENT

Energize, a program of Adisa <https://adisagroup.com/>

Follow us   

Copyright © 1997-2025