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Blogosphere

Addressing Volunteerism Issues in the Blogosphere

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

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Sometimes I worry that I am known more for criticizing than celebrating, so I'm happy to devote this Hot Topic to praising the courageous people who post their informed opinions about volunteer-related topics online. While serious discussion of principles and issues is so often missing at major conferences in our field, in the last couple of years we've seen the emergence of some truly wonderful and provocative blogs. Here are some of my favorite volunteerism blogs at this time and the reasons why you should pay attention to them.

The following blogs are listed randomly with no particular hierarchy, but they are *all* written by authors who are willing – in fact, *determined* – to address philosophy, ethics, and the “big questions” facing the volunteer field. They open discussion even if the opinions expressed might not be popular. I made a point of including blogs from different countries and within some special areas of focus. I couldn't include everything out there, so please do not assume that something not described here is not quality reading. (We do try hard to keep a current list of [all the volunteer leadership-related blogs and Twitter accounts](#) on the Energize Web site.) If I've omitted something really wonderful because I haven't discovered it yet, I really want to learn about it. That's where you come in. Please share *your* favorites and why you like them, using the response form at the end of this Hot Topic.

Engaging Volunteers

<http://blogs.volunteermatch.org/engagingvolunteers/>

Written by members of the [VolunteerMatch](#) team and third-party experts in the volunteering and technology community, this is emerging as the most relevant, timely, and informative blog on the American scene. They post often and generally scoop most news stories in the field.

Rob Jackson Consulting Blog

<http://robjacksonconsulting.blogspot.com/>

UK colleague and friend Rob Jackson comments wisely on volunteer management topics. This is the newest entry into the volunteerism blogosphere, but already worthwhile. Rob may be new to consulting and blogging, but he has an impressive resume, just having left a management role at Volunteering England.

The Jayne Cravens Blog

<http://coyotecommunications.com/coyoteblog/>

In contrast, colleague and friend Jayne Cravens writes one of our field's first blogs—no surprise as she is the go-to person on using Internet technology and developing online volunteering. She offers information and insight on volunteerism as well as nonprofits, development, and women's issues. She's an American but very international in perspective, having run the Online Volunteering Project for United Nations Volunteers and worked personally in developing countries.

Realizing Your Worth

<http://realizedworth.blogspot.com/>

Canadian Chris Jarvis shares cogent thoughts on corporate social responsibility and employee volunteering. Valuable both to business people and to leaders of volunteers wanting to make inroads in partnering with for-profit companies. The series on "[The Business Case for Employee Volunteering](#)" is excellent.

Exploring Volunteering: Participation, Volunteering, and the Social Web

<http://jocote.org/>

Patrick Daniels in the UK explores, in his words, "the issues raised with how the web is changing volunteering. I'm looking to learn from the thinking of the past, to open up possibilities for the future."

Uncollectiveconsciousness' blog on i-volunteer

<http://ivo.org/uncollectiveconsciousness/posts/>

i-volunteer is a UK-based "social action network," giving volunteers and leaders of volunteers a forum on which to share their thoughts, including the chance to write a blog. I don't know who "Uncollectiveconsciousness" is in the real world, but I enjoy his posts (there's a picture of a man with his profile). Here is how he describes himself: "A Devil's Advocate of the volunteering world; and proud that my glass is half empty, as it means people have to make an effort to fill it, i.e. government! Straight talking no nonsense approach to volunteer management; I enter the 'debate' as me, rather than the organisation I happen to work for."

Speaking out on Volunteer Management!

<http://djcronin.blogspot.com/>

Australian colleague DJ Cronin challenges the volunteer management community to get engaged in debate to strengthen the profession.

Church Volunteer Blog

<http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com/blog/>

Daily tips on working with volunteers in churches – but very applicable to any faith and also any secular setting. It's fascinating to see how the contributors to this blog apply current news items and generic volunteer management guidance to working within congregations.

An Observation

While some of these blogs are produced by major organizations, it is striking that the majority are written by private consultants. Is there a lesson here? Is it necessary to have a degree of independence to comment and criticize – to be willing to take risks? Do consultants feel that their primary loyalty is to the readers of their blogs – their actual target market – without having to worry about offending any third-party funding sources? What makes some organizations and individuals take a stand publicly? And that last question refers to both the blogger and the reader, who always has the choice to join in.

Overwhelmed by Information? A Few Tips

Who can keep up with all this reading? In case you're wondering, I certainly cannot. There was a time when someone could, with a bit of time management, read everything that was published in the volunteer field: 20 years ago. Happily, there is now more good stuff out there than any one person can get to. That means we benefit from many informed opinions, but also have to separate the inane from the worthwhile.

Here are a few quick tips for how to read and digest the blog postings and other useful materials:

- Learn to use RSS feeds and “readers” that aggregate all the writings you want to keep on top of. I use iGoogle (along with Google Reader) now, but there are many options out there. Talk to colleagues and friends to get their recommendations. The point is that I can set aside a bit of time each day to quickly skim the headlines of *all* the blogs, tweets, Facebook postings, and other sources of information to which I subscribe by going to a *single spot* on the Web. This lets me read more only on those topics that spark my interest.
- Get volunteers to help! Assign one or two blogs to as many volunteers as you need. Ask them to read their designated resource at least weekly and keep you posted on any particularly relevant ideas. This is a particularly wonderful activity for a volunteer already in a leadership role: committee chairs, shift or team leaders, board or advisory group members. They ought to find the content of these blogs useful to their work, too.

- Form a collaborative with other leaders of volunteers, particularly if you are all members of a local DOVIA or professional network. Divvy up your mutual list of worthwhile blogs, newsletters, whatever and each commit to reading only a few carefully – sharing the highlights with everyone else.
- Spot check randomly. If you can't read everything, read some. Rotate from site to site each day or week, so that you benefit from different sources even if you don't read each site all the time. It's ok. You'll find that really important news is mentioned on most of the good blogs anyway, so – just like watching a daily morning television show in bits and pieces – over time the key items will sink in.

By the way, just last month Jayne Cravens wrote a great blog post, "[Walking My Talk: How Do I Use Online Tools for Outreach?](#)" It's tips from the opposite perspective – being most effective in using social media tools to send your messages to others.

So, now I really want to know:

- What other volunteerism blogs do you find worthwhile and why? (Be sure to include the URL so we all can look at them, too.)
- Are there any blogs on subjects *other than* volunteer management that you follow because you can apply them to your work with volunteers?

Related Topics: [Online Community](#) | [Social Media and Internet Technology](#) | [Image of Volunteering](#) | [Trends and Issues](#) | [Profession of Volunteer Management](#)

Submitted on 26 September 2011 by Wendy Moore, Volunteer Coordinator, Brisbane, Australia

Following a Retreat for Advanced Volunteer Management in 2010, I plucked up courage to start a blog, initially, on something I was very familiar with, parenting teenagers. For me this was a sort of therapy and hopefully was of assistance to other parents also going through the challenges of dealing with wayward teenagers. With the experience gained from designing a blog, writing posts, placing comments and following stats, in June 2011, I felt that I was ready to start another blog; this time on matters relating to volunteer management:

<http://wendy-moore.blogspot.com/>.

The purpose of this blog was to support, encourage and inspire people in the field of volunteer management, through sharing information and ideas to take our sector and boldly go where no one has gone before.

Prior to starting my blog on volunteer management issues, I visited and contributed to I-Volunteer <http://ivo.org> because there was opportunity to have intelligent discussion on issues on volunteer management and volunteering in general. I have been fortunate enough to have some of my posts

featured. I am a contributor to the response page of the OZVPM Hot Topics which are usually featured every two months.

In October 2010, I, along with other volunteer managers, participated in the IBM Service Jam and was privileged to have one of my comments included in the "White Paper"

http://www.ibm.com/ibm/responsibility/minijam/pdf/IBM_ServiceJam_WhitePaper_Final.pdf .

I also visit and occasionally contribute to other blogs

DJ Cronin <http://djcronin.blogspot.com/> and

Susan J Ellis Energize <http://www.energizeinc.com/hot.html> and

Jayne Cravens <http://coyoteblog.posterous.com/> and

Martin J Cowling <http://cowlingreport.blogspot.com/> and

Sue Hine <https://management4volunteers.wordpress.com/>.

I do not blog for or on behalf of an organisation. I blog to share my thoughts and vision for Volunteer Management and hopefully by doing this encourage and inspire others to take the plunge and share their thoughts and vision through blogging.

Submitted on 20 September 2011 by Robert Rosenthal, Director of Communications, VolunteerMatch, San Francisco, USA

Ditto to what my colleague Shari said! Thank you, Susan. We have more work to do on Engaging Volunteers, but we're getting there.

Submitted on 19 September 2011 by Krista Balbach, Communications Manager, VolunteerHub, USA

VolunteerHub (<https://www.volunteerhub.com/blog/>) highlights ways nonprofits can boost productivity. We focus on tools that enhance communication/collaboration between staff and streamline volunteer coordination. Stay up on trends in volunteering, headlines, articles, and volunteering news.

Thanks for providing this excellent list of blogs relating to volunteer leadership. Looking forward to reading through all of them.

Submitted on 13 September 2011 by DJ Cronin, Blogger, Brisbane, Australia

[My "Speaking out on Volunteer Management!" blog](#) is not produced by a major organisation. Neither is it written by a private consultant. I have never considered readers to be a target Market though I understand the terminology. I have stated from the start that "This is my personal blog on matters pertaining to Volunteer Management and Volunteerism. It consists of my own opinions and does not represent the opinions of any other person, business or organization."

I have always felt that the beauty of blogging lies in the fact that anyone can do it. I've been pulled up in the past when I've used the phrase "Just a volunteer manager" in this context. Whilst I understand that this word mix can cause consternation in some quarters I have used the wording to try and go to the heart of my motivation for blogging on matters related to Volunteerism and Volunteer Management. That's to say I am "just" availing of the opportunity to speak as someone who is on the ground as a Volunteer Manager. I believe there should be more bloggers in a similar vein sharing their experience. I believe that this is happening slowly. But happening nonetheless!

I do understand that it takes some courage to write publically. What I feel may be a deterrent to those who want to write is fear of being attacked. Yes, sure, when we express a view then the right to talk should be always respected whether or not we agree with that view. But I know of some people who will not express a view for fear of being assailed. This is a shame. I wonder how many of you reading this are nodding your head in agreement.

I am not afraid to be constructively critical of organisations that purport to represent my profession or volunteerism. After all if you choose to be part of a board or committee then critical analysis become part of the territory.

As bloggers and commentators though we need to be aware of the language we use.

Susan adds: Read the entirety of DJ's [new posting](#) (scroll down past the introduction) -- he references some excellent other postings on iVolunteer, too.

Submitted on 12 September 2011 by Martin J Cowling, CEO, People First, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Thanks Jayne for your continuing support and encouragement of my blog:

<http://cowlingreport.blogspot.com/>

I continue to be amazed at the readership growth with people from around the world checking in.

Sarah, I need to convert you from dipping in and out of mine to becoming a regular reader?! I too love Sue Hine's blog.

Submitted on 09 September 2011 by Shari Ilse, Online Communications Manager, VolunteerMatch, San Francisco/CA, USA

Thank you for including [Engaging Volunteers](#), Susan! This is an excellent list and we're honored to be here amidst these other impressive blogs. Of course, you belong here as well, as one of the premier resources for academic and practical thought related to volunteerism.

Submitted on 05 September 2011 by Jayne Cravens, Consultant, www.coyotecomunications.com, Portland, Oregon, USA

Thanks for the inclusion in such a great list! And for noting that I don't just blog about "techy" issues! (I guess I'm never going to live down that rep).

I'm rather fond of Martin Cowling's blog (<http://cowlingreport.blogspot.com/>), which not only provides practical issues, but really gets provocative re: various volunteer engagement issues - in line with your observation that it seems to be individuals that are pushing the envelope rather than organizations.

I'll add that what is driving me to blogs regarding volunteer engagement, even more than my RSS reader these days, is Twitter! Following tags for phrases like #volunteers, #nonprofits, #NGOs, #voluntarios & #tech4good, plus following various folks, has lead to some fantastic volunteer-related info!

Submitted on 05 September 2011 by Sarah Collins, Coordinator, Volunteer Program, WA AIDS Council, Perth, Australia

Thanks Susan for leading me to a few blogs I wasn't aware of. One I read regularly that isn't on your list is Sue Hines Management4Volunteers blog - <https://management4volunteers.wordpress.com/>.

May favourites are Sue Hines and DJ Cronin, and Jayne Cravens for techy information. Others I dip in and out of - haven't investigated RSS feeds yet.

Submitted on 2 September 2011 by Hillary Roberts, President/Founder, PLNJ Inc./Blankie Depot, Keyport/NJ, USA

[The Tech Soup blog](#) addresses common and complicated issues facing non profits from a tech perspective.

Let's Hear What You Think

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