

## ABSTRACT

Two hundred sixty-eight volunteer managers in five northwestern states and two Canadian provinces were surveyed to: (1) determine the demographic characteristics of volunteer managers, (2) characterize the positions in which they work, (3) compile information about the organization for which they work, and (4) estimate the gap between current and desired levels of management competency for the volunteer managers. Findings show a diverse group of volunteer managers who need different kinds of in-service training based on education level and years of experience.

# Northwest Volunteer Managers: Their Characteristics, Jobs, Volunteer Organizations and Perceived Training Needs

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"The largest impact on masses of citizen volunteers may be had through appropriately training directors of volunteers (Wilson 1979)."

## INTRODUCTION

While the importance of people who manage/direct volunteers has been recognized for several years, little concrete information is available about these volunteer managers. Who are they? What are their characteristics? Whom do they work for? What are their job responsibilities? What education and training do they have? How do they perceive their skills as managers and what competencies do they need to improve?

These are some of the questions raised by the Regional Council of the Pacific Northwest Region of the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA). Answers to these questions could help establish base-line data and plan continuing education programs for volunteer managers. These questions also interested faculty members in the Department of Adult and Youth Education (AYE) at Washington State University who train current and po-

tential volunteer managers. A study sponsored by AVA, the Washington Center for Voluntary Action and the Department of AYE was undertaken to help answer these questions.

## PURPOSES

The purposes of this study were to: (1) find out who the volunteer managers are, describe the positions in which they work, and identify for whom they work; and (2) estimate the gap between the current and desired levels of management competency for the volunteer managers in the Pacific Northwest Region (Region X) of AVA. Region X is composed of the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington from the United States of America and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and British Columbia.

More specifically, the objectives of the study were:

1. Identify significant demographic characteristics of volunteer managers.
2. Identify significant job characteristics concerning the positions in which volunteer managers work.

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3. Identify the types of organizations for which these individuals work.
4. Assess the gap between the volunteer managers' perceptions of current and required competencies in their current position to determine training needs.
5. Determine if the gap in skills level differs when volunteer managers are compared by years of experience, by education level, by gender, and by ethnic or racial identification.
6. Make general recommendations for in-service training based on study findings.

## METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature determined general categories of skills related to managing volunteer programs. Writings and research concerning volunteerism and adult education were analyzed including the following: Boyle (1981), Brookfield (1983), Brown (1982), Carter (1984), Conrad (1976), Darkenwald & Merriam (1982), Haines (1977), Knowles (1975, 1973, 1981), Macduff (1985), Moore (1985), Navarre (1985), Naylor (1976), Schindler-Rainman & Lippit (1977), Scheier (1978), Sheridan & Shannon (1979), Vineyard (1984), and Wilson (1979, 1981). A strong pattern emerged which indicated the major skill areas for a volunteer manager could be grouped into seventeen categories as follows: (1) market research (2) advertisement and promotion (3) program planning (4) program evaluation (5) volunteer training (6) volunteer evaluation (7) reward and recognition (8) group facilitation (9) job description (10) interviews, applications and contracts (11) motivation (12) recruitment (13) supervision (14) money management (15) legalities (16) site planning and maintenance (17) interpersonal skills and general skills. Sixty-eight competencies within these seventeen categories were identified.

A mailed instrument was developed to allow respondents to rate on a six point scale their current and needed competency levels for each of the sixty-eight skills. Respondents also provided information related to: (1) personal demographic characteristics including: gender, age, marital status, level of education, (2)

the position in which they worked, and (3) the organization for which they worked. The questionnaire was reviewed by AVA Region X Council members to help ensure content validity and reliability. A pre-test was conducted with fourteen volunteer managers in Washington State and each Council member in Region X.

Since the population of volunteer managers in the Northwest was not known, a purposive sampling procedure was used. The sample was selected from the mailing list of Region X of AVA based on the following: (1) the study's sample size from each state or province was in proportion to that state/province's population, (2) each major service category of volunteer programs was represented, and (3) total sample size was large enough to represent volunteer managers in Region X.

A total of 269 surveys was completed and used in the data analysis (although not all 269 managers responded to each question). While this was only about 48% of those distributed, the researchers felt the respondents were representative of volunteer managers in Region X. Many organizations and individuals on the original mailing list could not be reached or felt they could not accurately complete the questionnaire because they were not in a volunteer manager position. Data were compiled as follows: (1) data related to demographics, job characteristics and organizations were summarized by frequencies and percentages; (2) the mean, standard deviation and *t* value were computed for scaled responses to current and needed levels of skills; (3) an index of need for all competencies and selected sub-groups was developed based on mean differences between current and needed competency levels. The index determined high priority training needs of the volunteer managers within Region X.

## FINDINGS

The findings are presented under headings related to each study objective.

### *Demographic Characteristics*

Table I summarizes respondents' demographic characteristics. The majority of volunteer managers who responded were white (97%), female (78%) and married

Table I

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**RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**


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	Frequency*	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	60	22
Female	208	78
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	187	70
Not Married	80	30
<b>Race</b>		
White	257	97
Nonwhite	9	3
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	25	9
30-39	108	40
40-49	87	33
50-59	40	15
60+	9	3
<b>Education</b>		
High school	11	4
Some college	80	30
Bachelor degree	71	27
Some graduate school	43	16
Graduate degree	62	23
<b>Years as a Volunteer Manager</b>		
0-4	104	40
5-9	82	31
10-14	32	12
15-19	26	10
20-24	9	3
25-29	7	3
>30	2	1
<b>Second Job</b>		
Yes	58	22
No	208	78

\*Frequencies may not add up to 269 in each category because not all respondents answered each question. Percentage is based on total responses to each question.

(70%). About 73% of the volunteer managers were 30-49 years old, although the ages ranged from 20 to 71 years. All respondents had at least a high school education with 66% having a bachelor degree or higher. Approximately 40% of the respondents had fewer than five years experience. About 71% had less than ten years experience. Twenty two percent indicated they had other employment (*i.e.*, a second job other than the job in which they manage volunteer programs).

These data suggest that programs designed to meet the needs of educated, married, middle-aged females with moderate experience in their jobs will be appropriate for most volunteer programs. They indicate a fairly high turnover rate for volunteer managers indicating a need to repeat training programs at regular intervals.

#### *Current Position*

Information related to the current posi-

Table II

<b>RESPONDENTS' CURRENT POSITIONS</b>		
<i>Proportion of time in position</i>	<i>Frequency*</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Full time	193	74
¾ time	17	6
½ time	31	12
Other	21	8
<i>Percent of position managing volunteer programs</i>		
0-49%	94	38
50-99%	73	29
100%	82	33
<i>Years in present position</i>		
0-4	159	61
5-9	71	27
10-14	13	5
15-19	10	4
20+	6	3
<i>Paid staff supervised</i>		
0-4	6	4
5-9	114	68
10-14	19	11
15-19	13	8
20+	15	9
<i>Volunteers supervised</i>		
0-49	1	
50-99	113	47
100-399	95	40
400+	31	13
<i>Household income from position</i>		
0-49%	81	34
50-99%	84	35
100%	74	31

\*Frequencies may not add up to 269 in each category because not all respondents answered each question. Percentage is based on total responses to each question.

tion of those who responded is shown in Table II. Seventy-four percent of volunteer managers surveyed worked full time, and only one third devoted all their job time to managing volunteer programs. About 61% had been in their present position for fewer than five years while only 11% had held their position ten years or more. Most of the managers who responded (68%) supervise five to nine paid staff with nine percent supervising twenty or more. The number of volunteers supervised was fifty or more for all but one respondent. Six respondents reported supervising over 1000 volunteers each. Of

those who receive compensation for their position (sixteen percent do not receive compensation), 34% earn less than 50% of the household's total income, 35% earn 50 to 99%, and 31% rely totally on this source of income.

These findings suggest that the volunteer manager is well-educated, middle class, and has diverse job responsibilities. To reduce obstacles to learning, training programs need to be short, concise, inexpensive, and close to home in order to fit into the restraints of the volunteer manager.

Table III

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**CHARACTERISTICS OF VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS**


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<i>Largest Area Served</i>	<i>Frequency*</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Community/City	101	40
County	66	26
Multi-county	49	19
State/Province	22	9
Regional	15	6
<i>Organizational Affiliations</i>		
State/Province	103	30
National	113	33
International	40	12
None	87	25
<i>Profit/Nonprofit Status</i>		
Profit	5	2
Nonprofit	260	98
<i>Sources of Income for Volunteer Program</i>		
Local	102	14
State/Province	139	19
Federal	102	14
Individual	158	22
Foundation	103	14
Corporation	70	10
Other	53	7
<i>Groups Served</i>		
Senior Citizens	213	33
Adults	222	34
Children/Youth	216	33
<i>Services Provided</i>		
Health	113	19
Education	131	22
Government	35	6
Housing	32	5
Transportation	26	4
Nutrition	50	8
Mental Health	66	11
Safety/Security	42	7
Employment	25	4
Professional	13	2
Other	72	12

\*Frequencies may not add up to 269 in each category because not all respondents answered each question or indicated more than one response to the question. Percentage is based on total responses to each question.

#### *Characteristics of Volunteer Organizations*

The characteristics of the volunteer organizations for which respondents worked are summarized in Table III. The typical organization served a local community or city, was affiliated at the state

or province level and was run for non-profit purposes. Most organizations received funding from more than one source, with private individuals and states/provinces listed most often as funding sources. Most organizations

Table IV

**TOP 20 TRAINING NEEDS OF VOLUNTEER MANAGERS IN AVA REGION X  
BY EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION LEVEL, 1986**

Competency Category and Skill	Overall Rank	Yrs. Exp.		Ed. Level	
		<5	≥5	<BA	≥BA
<i>Group Facilitation</i>					
Ability to apply conflict resolution to group facilitation.	7		X	X	X
Ability to utilize knowledge of problem solving in groups.	10	X	X	X	
Ability to use a wide variety of presentation methods effectively.	14		X	X	X
Ability to guide individuals through the problem solving process.	18	X	X	X	
<i>Recruitment</i>					
Ability to identify potential volunteer markets and recruit from specifically.	1	X	X	X	X
Ability to make effective use of volunteers to recruit other volunteers.	2	X	X	X	X
Ability to recruit and retain volunteers with the necessary skills.	5	X	X	X	
<i>Advertisement/Promotion</i>					
Ability to design and use promotion, publicity, and public relations strategies effectively.	3	X	X	X	X
Ability to use marketing research in the advancement/promotion of the program I manage.	4	X	X	X	X
<i>Program Planning</i>					
Ability to determine the effect of outside forces on the organization and manage them constructively.	6	X	X	X	X
Ability to effectively involve volunteers, boards, and others in the planning process.	19	X		X	
<i>Interviews, Applications, Contracts</i>					
Ability to identify needed attitudes and behaviors of volunteer applicants.	12	X			X
Ability to identify volunteers with skills needed to achieve program/services goals.	17	X	X		X
<i>Money Management</i>					
Ability to get resources (money, people, materials, etc.)	8	X	X	X	X
<i>Market Research</i>					
Ability to use appropriate methods to identify the special characteristics of your volunteers.	15	X			X
<i>Program Evaluation</i>					
Ability to conduct formal program reviews.	16	X	X	X	X
<i>Volunteer Training</i>					
Ability to evaluate the effectiveness of training methods, techniques or devices.	11		X		X
<i>Volunteer Evaluation</i>					
Ability to provide constructive ongoing feedback to volunteers.	13		X		X
<i>Legal</i>					
Ability to analyze and interpret legislation affecting volunteer organizations.	20	X		X	X

served all three client groups: senior citizens, adults and children/youth as indicated by the high frequency levels. On a percentage basis all three groups were equally served. The services provided by the respondents' organizations were diverse, with education and health-related services the most frequently identified.

These data indicate that while volunteer organizations offer diverse services there is much common ground in services provided and areas and client groups served, as well as in sources of income, affiliation and non-profit status. This suggests that existing organizational networks could be utilized to promote pro-

gram offerings attractive to organizations that offer services to a diverse group of individuals. Plans need to be flexible in order to meet the organizations' particular needs and expectations.

#### *Index of Need*

The respondents rated their current and ideal competency levels in 68 skills using a six point Likert scale where 0 = low competency and 5 = high competency. Mean scores for current competency and ideal competency were computed for each of the 68 competencies. T scores based on the difference between the mean for current competency level

and the mean for ideal competency were computed for each of the 68 skills. An index of need was computed utilizing the *t* scores. On the basis of the index score for each skill, all skills were ranked.

The respondents were divided by: (1) gender (2) level of education (3) marital status and (4) number of years as a volunteer manager to determine whether there were substantial differences in their needs. There were significant differences in the needs only for those with less than and more than five years experience and for those with less than and more than a bachelor degree.

Table IV shows the 20 top-ranked training needs of volunteer managers by their years of experience (less than 5 years and greater than or equal to 5 years) and by their education level (less than bachelor degree and greater than or equal to a bachelor degree). The skills are grouped within the skill areas discussed earlier. An *x* indicates competencies ranked within the top twenty for each subgroup.

The table illustrates a strongly felt need for an increased level of skill in the areas of recruitment and advertisement/promotion since the top five competencies overall are from these areas and these are in the top 20 for all subgroups. In addition, three other skills are in the top 20 for all subgroups. These are (1) ability to determine the effect of outside forces on the organization and manage them constructively, (2) ability to get resources, and (3) ability to conduct formal program reviews. These competencies were respectively ranked 6th, 8th and 16th overall.

It is important that for other competencies, program planners carefully discriminate the training needs according to their target audience. For example, those volunteer managers with less than five years experience did *not* place four of the overall top twenty needs (*i.e.*, those skills ranked seventh, fourteenth, eleventh and thirteenth overall) among *their* top twenty. This suggests avoiding topics related to these skills for this subgroup or helping this subgroup recognize these as high priority needs.

## DISCUSSION

While self-ranking of competencies by volunteer managers is a useful tool for

those who plan training programs, it should be used in conjunction with other needs assessments. For example, perceived needs of managers might be quite different from how volunteers view their manager's competencies. Also, more experienced managers might have better perceptions of their shortcomings than less experienced managers. For example, ability to apply conflict resolution to group facilitation was ranked second by those with more than five years experience, seventh overall and twenty-eighth by those with less than five years experience. It is not likely that those with less experience are more skilled in applying conflict resolution; they might simply not recognize the need in their current position or see other needs as higher priorities.

## SUMMARY

This study provides an initial view of volunteer managers, their personal demographic characteristics and a view of their job responsibilities and organizations they work for. It provides data regarding volunteer managers' perceived needs for professional development based on their current and ideal competencies for the jobs they hold. These data can be viewed as a starting point for better understanding volunteer managers and their training needs.

The range of job responsibilities which can be carried out by volunteer managers suggests that employers examine carefully the specific competencies needed in their organization as a basis for recruiting, placing and orienting new volunteer managers. The emphasis of this study was on understanding the needs of volunteer managers in their current positions. The data show a diverse group of volunteer managers who need different kinds of in-service training based on education level and years of experience. Employers need to encourage their volunteer managers (through release time and other support) to participate in relevant continuing education activities. AVA and other agencies/organizations need to be aware of these diverse needs in order to plan the most appropriate continuing education programs.

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