

Education for Volunteer Program Management: One Model in Canada

By L. Richards, Ph.D.

Volunteers have a role of increasing importance in today's society. Voluntary action and voluntary programs, as important as they now are, will become even more significant. As general disillusionment with the concept of the welfare state continues and as present governments turn their attention and resources away from social programs, so the need for more voluntary action and service will grow.

To be effective, however, volunteer programs must be coordinated with other related programs and must be organized in such a way that desired results are achieved. In doing this, the goals of the agency must be met and satisfaction must be given to the recipients of the service and to those providing the service. In other words, the volunteers themselves, as well as those for whom the volunteers work, should feel benefits from the efforts expended.

If such positive results are to be achieved then programs must be managed well. Many organizations employ full-time managers, coordinators, or directors of volunteers. The job title varies from organization to organization, although the roles and tasks are to a large extent similar. Some organizations, however, have part-time or voluntary coordinators or directors of volunteers but again the roles and tasks are of a similar nature.

Some of those occupying such positions are experienced managers. Others are not. A large number of persons occupying volunteer directors' positions feel the need for help in learning something about management.

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Two years ago (in Calgary, Alberta) I received a visit from the President of the Association of Directors of Volunteer Resources. He explained to me how members of his Association were looking for training opportunities and also felt that there should be available to them some recognized credential proving that they had completed a significant training program. Such a credential, it was felt, would be useful to the holder and also would be helpful to employers who would have some evidence of the level of training of an applicant for a job.

Despite his efforts, the President of this Association was disappointed at the lack of results. During his visit we discussed the nature of a possible program for directors of volunteers and subsequently I took up the matter with the Faculty of Continuing Education at The University of Calgary. The result was the establishment of a Certificate Program in Volunteer Management.

This new program, leading to a certificate, is being developed by the Association of Directors of Volunteer Resources in cooperation with the Faculty of Continuing Education at The University of Calgary. It is the first such program in the province and, as far as I am aware, in Canada.

The minimum requirements to obtain the certificate are the completion of seven courses and a practicum of approximately 300 hours. In addition to some required courses candidates have a choice of others. The compulsory courses are: Managing Volunteer Programs (40 hours), Human Relations in Managing Volunteers (40 hours), Management Communications (40 hours), and the practicum (20 hours of instruction and the practicum activity). Optional courses may be selected from the Management Development Certificate Program, offerings by various faculties, or through workshops. Courses taken at universities other than The University of Calgary

may also be considered for credit toward the certificate.

The complete program offers quite a challenge for those working full-time and wishing to advance their knowledge and skills in their chosen area of interest. However, the results will, I believe, be rewarding and I look forward to seeing the first cadre of graduates from this program.

As for myself, apart from acting as broker in the initial stages of the negotiations for this program, I was asked to teach the first course, i.e., Managing Volunteer Programs.

The Course in Managing Volunteer Programs

Although I had had a number of years experience as a volunteer, volunteer leader, and trainer, this was the first time that I was faced with the task of teaching a formal credit course in volunteer program management at university level. Also, it was the first time for such a course to be offered at The University of Calgary. Previous course outlines, reports, and the experience of instructors were not available. I did, however, have the benefit of a suggested outline for course content which had been prepared by members of the Association of Directors of Volunteer Resources, although this went beyond what would be possible in a forty-hour course.

In preparing such a course, two decisions had to be made. The first related to the content and the second concerned the teaching method to be used. The givens in the situation were that the course was to cover forty hours of instruction and that regular class sessions would consist of one three-hour session each week. There was to be an examination at the end of the course.

I decided to draw up a tentative outline and to discuss this with the students at the first meeting of the class, and to obtain their ideas about topics to be covered. I was prepared to devote the first two sessions of the class to this task but one session was sufficient. We agreed that the outline for the course should be as follows:

- Session 1 Introduction to the course.
- Session 2 Motivation and the volunteer.
- Session 3 The organization as a system and understanding your organization through administrative analysis.
- Session 4 The roles of the manager.
- Session 5 Individual work on the major assignment for the course.

Session 6 Managerial tasks.

Session 7 Managerial roles and tasks continued.

Session 8 Planning.

Session 9 Financial management. Budgeting.

Session 10 Stress and time management.

Session 11 Review of course and discussion of aspects of selected reports
& submitted by students.

Session 12

Session 13 End of course examination.

From information given to me I had assumed that most, if not all, of the students in the class would be adults who were already employed as volunteer managers, directors, or coordinators. With two exceptions, this proved to be so. The exceptions were a person employed in business but who took an active part as a member of a committee of the United Fund of Calgary, and one planning a change of employment to volunteer program management. I was concerned, therefore, that the course should provide a meaningful experience for those sufficiently motivated to advance their knowledge and skills by attending a three-hour session after a full day's work.

Bearing in mind that the main purpose of the course was to help the participants develop in the area of managing programs, I decided that the students should be involved in planning the course through a mixture of instructor input and student participation. For adult students in management, I personally favor a method that allows for individual study, small group discussion, full class discussion, and instructor didactic input. The combination of these methods lends itself ideally to meeting the needs of such students. This is the way the course started, but after some weeks, at the request of some of the students, a change was made and I shall comment on this later when discussing the evaluation of the course.

The matter of a bibliography was of some concern to me, as was the selection of an assignment or assignments. The question of the assignment was settled tentatively at the first session of the class and confirmed at the next session. The choice was for one major assignment only. In considering these two factors I was influenced by my own teaching and volunteer experience. Also, I have for some time felt that many instructors place too much emphasis on numerous assignments and lengthy bibliographies. The effect of this is to encourage students to see assignments and requirements for reading as ends in themselves instead of being

merely means to ends. In order to avoid such pitfalls, I decided to restrict the requirements to one assignment, two books as required reading, and a number of articles and notes as handouts during sessions for optional or subsequent reading. The books chosen for the required reading were: Marlene Wilson, The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs,¹ and Henry Mintzberg, The Nature of Managerial Work.² Many other books in the field of administration or management were available, some of more recent publication; however, these two seemed to fit the requirements of this particular course.

Students were informed at the beginning of the course that its major purpose was to provide an overview of the roles and tasks of the manager with specific attention being paid to the manager of volunteer programs. It was also intended that in addition to providing an introduction to the topic of management, the course could be seen as providing a useful foundation for the total certificate program. It was explained that many of the matters mentioned in this course could be studied in greater depth later in other courses.

Management of any program calls for a wide variety of skills and knowledge. I personally felt that if this course raised in students an awareness of the areas to be inquired into and skills to be mastered, then it would have achieved a valuable objective. It was also intended that the course should provide some knowledge of the fundamentals of management, and opportunity for students to benefit from the interchange of ideas and experiences between themselves and an introduction to the literature of the subject.

During the first session of the course the students entered into the process of selecting the content for the course. This provided an opportunity to participate in the process of program planning which in itself is an essential task of the manager.

In this introductory session the concept of management was introduced. In one way or another management undoubtedly affects the lives of all of us and I felt that it was important to emphasize that (because management decisions affect many people in numerous ways), those making such decisions should be adequately prepared for their tasks and also should develop their own personal philosophy of management.

The nature of management or administration³ and the similarities and differences between public and private administration received attention. As administration does not take place in a vacuum, we dealt with the ecology of administration. The fact that any organization exists within its environment and is a part of that environment is important. It

was stressed that although an organization is affected by its environment, it may in turn affect the environment.

The second session focused on the volunteer. A videotape, "It Begins With a Friend,"⁴ was shown and discussed. Anita Kelly, a Fine Arts student at The University of Calgary, spoke to the class of her experiences and feelings about being a volunteer at the Calgary Distress Centre. This proved to be a very useful contribution to the course. As the instructor for the course I felt that it was important to speak of some of my own personal experiences as a volunteer. These presentations provided some background for a general class discussion of volunteer service from the volunteer's perspective. This session concluded with some mention of the major assignment for the course.

The third session dealt with the organization as a system, an introduction to structural/functional theory and its application to the analysis of an organization. This was followed by a discussion of the major assignment, i.e., that each student would carry out an administrative analysis of an organization or of a part of an organization, and submit a written report.

The fourth session began with discussion arising from students' questions on the assignment. As students would have to interview a number of persons in order to complete the assignment, there was a handout on interviewing and a general class discussion on interviewing. This was followed by an introduction to the roles of the manager with reference to the Wilson and Mintzberg texts.

Students devoted the fifth session to individual work on their administrative analysis and in the sixth session focused on managerial roles and tasks with particular reference to Mintzberg's ten observable roles.

Decision-making and communication were the subjects of the seventh session. A framework for decision-making was presented to the students and there was discussion on personal and organizational decisions. The importance of communication was discussed and patterns of formal and informal communication presented to the class. The session finished with a discussion of the application of these two concepts to the management of volunteer programs.

Session eight dealt with the planning process. There was discussion of purpose, goals, and objectives in the planning process, and a review of the planning process itself. There was discussion on what good planning can and cannot do and why it sometimes fails. Personal planning and organizational planning also were discussed. Financial

management, including the obtaining of funds and the process of budgeting, was the topic of the ninth session. The first part of the tenth session dealt with motivation and the second part of this session was given to a discussion of time management.

The eleventh session was split into three parts. The first part was a discussion of stress. There is increasing interest and concern with stress and its results by those involved in management. I felt this topic could not be omitted even though the time available was limited. During the second part of this session students discussed the highlights of their administrative analyses and the session finished with an audio tape on the appraisal interview and a discussion of the tape.

In the twelfth session the class listened to a tape on interviewing and discussed it. This was followed by student discussion of aspects of their administrative analyses.

The thirteenth and final session was taken up by my summary of the course, highlighting the major ideas, and by a general class discussion.

The Assignment

Carrying out an analysis of an organization can be an excellent way to learn about that particular organization and also about the structures, functions, and processes in administration. With this in mind I suggested this as the major assignment for the class. The class was given the opportunity to choose the kind of assignment and the weight to be attached to it in grading. Students decided to try their hands at an administrative analysis and time was spent in class going over details of the content and methodology for such an assignment. Students also met with me individually to discuss their proposals for the assignment.

To complete this assignment, students were required to: (a) select an organization; (b) clear with me regarding suitability and feasibility; (c) clear with the organization's director, board chairperson or someone else in authority regarding permission to do the exercise; (d) consult documents and interview relevant persons to obtain information on the organization; and (e) submit a written report to me and a copy to the executive director or board of the organization.

Students also were given the opportunity to meet with me, as the course instructor, on an individual tutorial basis if they felt it would be useful to them. A number of students took advantage of this opportunity and found it to be helpful.

The Examination

There was no great enthusiasm in the class for an examination, but it could not be avoided since it was a requirement for the management certificate program. In discussing this, the class elected to have a take-home examination. A time limit was set and dates to receive the examination paper and to hand it in were agreed upon between students and instructor. The examination consisted of five questions, two of which contained some options.

Student Evaluation

As part of the normal procedure for continuing education courses at The University of Calgary, students were requested to complete course evaluation forms and to hand these directly to the Faculty of Continuing Education. At a later date these evaluations were shared with the instructor.

There was general agreement among the students that the content of the course was suitable. One student advocated more practical application and less theory. One would have liked more case studies. Two would have liked to see more interaction with the class and four recommended more small group discussions. One felt there should have been more opportunity for students to discuss their personal experiences in volunteer programs. Only one student stated in the written evaluation that the course should be reduced to thirty hours from forty and that each session should be of two-and-one-half hours each. It is pertinent to add that in informal discussions outside class it was obvious that all students found a three-hour session after a day's work somewhat draining.

Instructor's Evaluation

My own evaluation of the course included the following: (a) the three-hour sessions should be reduced to two hours; and (b) the nature of the major assignment be reviewed. I am still convinced that the organizational analysis was a useful learning tool and this has been borne out by comments of students in this class and in other classes in administration. However, it is a heavy assignment which requires a great deal of time and effort. For a course of this nature, taken after a full day's work, it may well be advisable to consider asking students to write something pertinent to their own volunteer program experience or some alternative should student interest indicate this.

I tend to agree with the student who advocated more opportunity in class for students to discuss their own volunteer program experiences. I should

add that my agreement with this assumes that such discussion would be of an analytical nature.

The comments of four students that there should be more small group discussion is interesting. As part of my proposed methodology for the course I included small group discussions throughout and, indeed, the course started with this taking place. After a number of students came to me, outside class, to request that there be less small group discussion, I dropped this particular activity. In retrospect I see that I should have confronted the total class with this matter and resolved the issue in that way.

The comment by one student that there should be more case studies was perceptive. When I was asked to teach the course one of my initial comments was that it was the kind of course that would benefit from a case-study approach, at least for a large part of it. The problem is that case studies of volunteer programs in Canada need to be developed and one cannot hold up giving a much-needed course while this is being done. I would emphasize the need for such case studies and would certainly advocate their use in the future.

In short, if I were to prepare such a course again, I would use only the Wilson text, references to a few pertinent articles, and a limited selection of hand-outs. I would retain the administrative analysis as one option for a class assignment but would add some other options according to the interests of the students. I also would retain small group discussions throughout the course. I would still favor a mixture of instructor didactic input and student participation.

Conclusion

My own experience of teaching this course and comments later received from professionals, volunteers, and other community representatives serve to reinforce my view that such opportunities are needed for those wishing to work in the field of management of volunteer programs. I further believe that more attention needs to be given to developing quality volunteer programs and to enlarging the scope of voluntary action in many ways. In order to do these things managers or coordinators, whichever label is preferred, must be prepared for their part.

I also would like to see a course on volunteer program management made available to students in the Bachelor of Social Work program since many of these will become involved in some way or another with volunteer programs after graduating. Furthermore, I would suggest that such courses in volunteer program management are valuable for those already holding managerial positions but who have not had any formal education in the field and for volunteers who aspire to such positions. In addition, many church workers (both clergy and lay) would find such a course useful as many of them spend a considerable amount of time working with volunteers and in organizing volunteer programs.

Finally, I wish to emphasize what I said at the beginning of this article. Volunteer programs and voluntary action are important in today's society and will become even more important in the future. It behooves us, therefore, to do all we can to strengthen such programs and to assist those who direct them.

Further information and applications for this program can be obtained by contacting the Registrar, A.D.V.R., c/o Volunteer Centre of Calgary, 1129-17th Avenue S.W., Calgary, Alberta, T2T 0B6.

Footnotes

¹Marlene Wilson, The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs, Boulder, Colorado: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976.

²Henry Mintzberg, The Nature of Managerial Work, New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

³The terms "administration" and "management" are frequently used in the literature in such a way as to be considered synonymous. Personally I see administration as having a wider perspective than does management.

⁴Ramsay, R.F. (content specialist), "It Begins With a Friend," 16 mm. film, The University of Calgary, Communications Media, 1979.