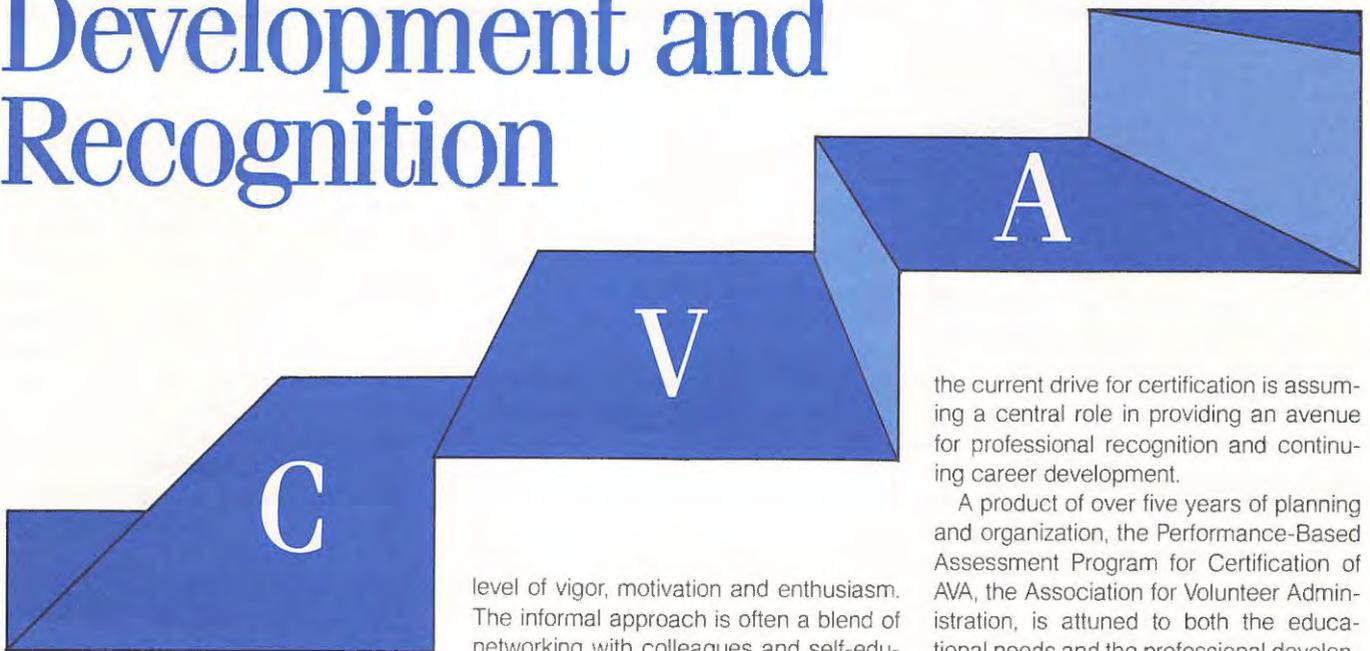


Performance-Based Certification— An Avenue for Professional Development and Recognition



By Mary DeCarlo, Ph.D.

The truth is, qualified staff is essential to the orderly maintenance of a quality volunteer program.—Dr. Gary E. Miller, Commissioner, Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT is the path one takes to acquire new skills, stay in touch with a profession's advances, and keep a high

Mary DeCarlo chaired AVA's Professional Development Committee during the certification program's developmental phase. (The Certification Committee works under the auspices of the Professional Development Committee.) She is president of the Volunteer Development Institute, a small, independent consulting firm that publishes the newsletter Options, and dean of Southeastern University's College of Undergraduate Studies in Washington, D.C.

level of vigor, motivation and enthusiasm. The informal approach is often a blend of networking with colleagues and self-education through books, journals or periodicals that are steeped in professional theory and practice. But the formal route can mean a considerable investment of time and money, and the pursuit of credentials in an accredited course of study under recognized experts, typically in a college or university granting degrees as professional recognition.

In either case, to be a professional demands drive and enthusiasm in training and on-the-job performance—a drive to get the work done however long it takes, and to endeavor that work to make the world a better place in which to live. It requires an occupational flexibility to work conditions and the willingness to lead or follow as the situation requires. It means doing what needs to be done, doing it well and doing it willingly.

As a professional occupational group, volunteer administrators are eager for development opportunities and wish to demonstrate competence on the job. Yet, over the past two decades, we have faced a decided ebb and flow in the recognition accorded our professional status. Consequently, it is no surprise that

the current drive for certification is assuming a central role in providing an avenue for professional recognition and continuing career development.

A product of over five years of planning and organization, the Performance-Based Assessment Program for Certification of AVA, the Association for Volunteer Administration, is attuned to both the educational needs and the professional development concerns of volunteer leaders. AVA's approach is unique. Its philosophy for granting these credentials is grounded in the evaluation of an administrator's special experience in volunteer management. Its program is synergistic with higher education, since it encourages a lifelong relationship with continued learning, but it eliminates the rigid credit and residence requirements of most degree programs. Moreover, its review is weighted toward the certificate-seeker's own self-analysis, and thus his/her active involvement in assessing individual achievements and demonstrating competence.

Developed in conjunction with its overall program of professional development, AVA designed the certification program for those who view volunteer administration as a career rather than a job. It requires an assessment of past performance and learning through experience, and encourages participants to map their own development strategies for the future. Thus, the process recognizes strengths as well as weaknesses, and identifies certain areas for growth and development.



Performance-Based Certification in Volunteer Administration

What it is

AVA's Performance-Based Certification Program is based on competency statements and performance criteria identified as necessary to administer a volunteer program. It is open to all experienced professionals in the field of volunteer administration, both salaried and unsalaried. —It is the first professional credentialing system to utilize portfolio development to assess professional competence demonstrated in work experiences.

—It involves partnerships between AVA and institutions of higher education.

—It will enable the field to update itself through evaluation of the competencies and performance criteria.

Who should seek certification?

- If you have made volunteer administration a personal career focus;
- If you want
 - to examine your work experiences and analyze your skills in an indepth manner,
 - to chart career and development plans,
 - to examine or review the philosophical and historical bases for the issues and trends facing the field; and
- If you want the quality of your professional practice and your profession to receive widespread recognition, then certification is for you.

What the process involves

Each candidate has an advisor who guides her or him through a process of self-assessment and philosophical development, culminating in a portfolio that demonstrates the candidate's knowledge in the field of volunteer administration, portfolio compilation, management principles

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The principal vehicle for this documentation and analysis—and the major challenge of the certification process—is the career portfolio that a candidate must develop. Assisted by an advisor, who is either a volunteer administrator or an educator, the participant compiles a record of accomplishments and volunteer work experiences. From this the administrator fashions a written declaration of competency, a painstaking process through which the participant documents his/her relevant past and submits it to AVA for evaluation and formal recognition.

At the heart of the certification program is a respect for experiential education. The underlying assumption is a belief in the skills one brings to any learning environment that can be recognized and validated as legitimate professional achievements. Many colleges and universities accept experiential learning as an integral part of professional growth and development, as shown by the programs, workshops and special examinations they sponsor to help the returning adult describe his/her lifework learning, and thus earn academic credit while pursuing a course of study. AVA simply adapts such techniques to a certificate program that is the only one of its kind in the United States.

This skills evaluation focuses on 19 professional competencies deemed critical to volunteer administration. They are divided into four major categories for measurement:

1. Program planning and organization
2. Staffing and directing
3. Controlling (evaluation)
4. Agency, community and professional relations

These competencies were developed and the general scope of the credentialing program was molded under the direc-

tion of Sarah Jane Rehnborg, a past AVA president and education chairperson. Today, certification is the work of the Certification Committee of AVA's Professional Development Committee. Coordinated by Joanne H. Patton, CAVS, this committee has included Rehnborg and Page Bristow, Ph.D.; Winifred Brown, CAVS; Connie Eaton Cheren, Ph.D.; Mark Cheren; Anne W. Hayden, CAVS; and Rhoda White, who spent more than 20 months planning the program and scheduling tests throughout the country. For the 1982-1983 field-test year, certification sites included Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, Buffalo, Boston, Takoma and Milwaukee.

Prior to these tests, AVA first tried the Performance-Based Certification Program at Adelphi University with funding from the Kellogg Foundation.

A sponsoring organization is required to administer this certification program at the local level. In 1982-83, for example, these sponsors have been AVA regions or affiliate groups, although colleges, universities, community colleges and similar organizations are prime candidates for sharing the future responsibility. Once approved by AVA, they must select a project coordinator—preferably a CVA or CAVS (for Certified in Administration of Volunteer Services, the designation of AVA's certification before its performance-based program was launched), and identify the 20 to 40 certification candidates needed to qualify the program in that location.

The key to the project's success, a coordinator is the one who recruits the advisors, deploys the personnel, stages the necessary workshops and generally plots the course. But the coordinator never is cast adrift, since AVA appoints for each region an active certification liaison to provide support and oversee the project.

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THE AVA CERTIFICATION program offers volunteer administrators an unprecedented path toward public acceptance and professional recognition. But it was not always so. The field underwent years of trial and expectation before reaching its current status. Due largely to the advocacy and example of a number of national volunteer leaders, among them Harriet Naylor, Marlene Wilson, Ivan Scheier, volunteer administration as a calling gradually claimed its rightful place in the galaxy of modern professions. And while the definitive history of the movement remains to be written, three particular events have been instrumental in its advance: the publication of a journal, the development of educational initiatives and the emergence of a professional association.

In 1968, Northeastern University’s Center for Continuing Education introduced *Volunteer Administration* “to provide a dialogue among directors of volunteer services and other professionals” involved with citizen volunteers. AVA later assumed publication and provided a fresh look and format.

Educational initiatives were soon to follow. Two years after the journal’s debut, the 1970 conference, *College Curricula for Leadership of Volunteer Programs*, grew into the Volunteer Management Program at the University of Colorado. The conference had emphasized the need of degreed curricula and intensive training workshops for volunteer leaders, and by 1972 Wilson, and such other experts as Scheier and Naylor, had begun a series of workshops for the management program at UC’s Boulder campus.

First conceived as a master’s degree, what unfolded instead was a certificate program as the best way to accommodate likely participants. In all, the Boulder program has attracted about 1,600 candi-

dates from the United States and abroad, of whom 89 percent were active volunteer administrators, 60 percent had bachelor’s degrees and 26 percent master’s degrees.

Before long, both institutions of higher learning and other organizations were offering a wide range of degree and certificate programs. At one extreme was the one-day, in-service workshop, designed largely to augment the inexperienced volunteer’s on-the-job training. And at the other was the full range of degree, license and certification opportunities leading to enhanced careers not only in higher level administration or in academic research and teaching, but also as specialists in volunteer policy, planning, accounting and budgeting.

The third event influencing the growth and development of volunteer administration was the coming of age of its professional association. Founded in 1960, AVA passed through two metamorphoses in name and structure before evolving to its present state. Throughout its history, AVA has had a concern for education, as demonstrated through its planning and sponsoring of conferences, courses and workshops. The current certification program is internally tied to this focus.

Certification is not the only route to professional development and recognition, but AVA includes on its Certification Assessment Panel employers, volunteer administrators, educators and volunteers especially sensitive to the role volunteer administrators play in delivering service. Moreover, as the profession gains prominence and begins to assert itself, there is the additional prospect of tangible recognition through increasing salaries and benefits.

For further information on certification, write AVA, PO Box 4584, Boulder, CO 80306. ♥

and volunteerism. Portfolio development is the essential element in this process.

All participants must purchase a “Preparation for Certification” packet, begin working on their application, and then attend an all-day Certification Workshop. Participants may proceed at their own pace.

After the workshop, participants finish and submit their application. If accepted as a “Candidate for Certification,” an advisor is assigned and participants are encouraged to join a peer support network. After completion of the portfolio, each candidate analyzes and submits a case study.

An independent Certification Assessment Panel of practitioners, educators, employers and certified volunteer administrators, determines who is accepted into the program and who is awarded the professional credential, “CVA—Certified in Volunteer Administration.”

About AVA

The Association for Volunteer Administration is the national professional association for those in the field of volunteer administration who want to shape the future of volunteerism, develop their professional skills and further their careers. A volunteer administrator does not have to be a member of AVA to participate in its certification program.

The Performance-Based Certification Program is coordinated by AVA’s Certification Committee, which is responsible for the implementation and delivery of this program throughout the U.S. and Canada.

The Certification Program is offered locally through the sponsorship of an AVA Region or AVA Affiliate. The sponsoring group organizes the workshop, identifies advisors and oversees the entire local certification process.

For more information:

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