

FOLLOW-UP

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A Professional Education For Volunteer Administrators

***(A follow-up to "Educational Opportunities,"
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Many voluntary organizations traditionally have been led and administered by persons lacking formal education in administration. Such persons worked their way up to management and executive positions through the organizational ranks. Either they began as volunteers or they were experts in the content area of their organization's mission, such as community development, family and children's services. If they had advanced academic training, it was primarily in social work, counseling, education or human services.

Volunteer leaders are aware of the need to broaden their knowledge and competency in administration as well as political process. For instance, voluntary organizations of all types and sizes are being pressured externally by prospective donors, professional and governmental agencies, and the public to operate more efficiently and be more accountable in their programming. The growing sophistication of the volunteer force as well as the growing political awareness of the clients of voluntary organization programs also intensify the expectation for more effective management.

What educational opportunities are available for these managers? Tradi-

tionally, formal training has been limited to workshops and other offerings provided by such nonacademic agencies as VACs, NCVA, NICOV, United Way, Junior League, and the National Council of Jewish Women. Many of these have been and continue to be of excellent quality. Staff, budgetary and other restraints, however, necessarily limit the scope of such training programs. Designed as short courses, they are not intended to substitute for the comprehensive education a college or university program can offer.

And what do colleges offer? Until recently, very little. National surveys indicate that numerous higher educational institutions offer one or two courses in volunteer program management. A few community colleges offer associate degrees in the field; a handful of liberal arts colleges offer bachelor's degrees; and apparently three or four institutions offer master's degree programs, including Antioch College at Baltimore, Md., The Lindenwood Colleges of St. Charles/St. Louis, Missouri, and Michigan State University.

Information about these programs is extremely sketchy and difficult to gather. Surveys conducted by David Horton Smith and others report that college courses in voluntarism and voluntary administration frequently have a short life span. New ones emerge each year while others are terminated. Nevertheless, the interest on the part of practitioners of voluntary organization man-

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agement is so great that they, along with educators, have a significant opportunity to shape the contours of this emergent field of professional education.

So what should the educational objectives, content, and teaching/learning processes of such a college program be? In general, their nature and scope must be tailored to the type of learner and his/her professional and personal needs. The following objectives and subject matter focus upon a professional education for the primary population pursuing professional degree programs in this field. They are mature adult learners, ranging in age from mid-20s to at least 70s. They have had some practical experience as leaders of voluntary organizations/programs, or other experience which leads them to consider moving into such positions. And they are practitioners or activists—consultants, trainers, administrators or volunteer leaders—rather than research scholars.

Objectives

To develop distinctive administrative competencies in voluntary, nonprofit enterprises. These competencies are wide-ranging. In part, they are skill areas important to managing any sizable organization and would include basic management functions of planning, controlling, coordinating, etc.; general leadership functions of problem-solving, communicating, etc.; human resources management (e.g., recruiting, selecting, staffing, training, supervising, and evaluating personnel); computational skills for using quantitative data for accounting and marketing; managerial accounting, budgeting, and other aspects of financial management; and marketing.

In part, these administrative competencies involve skill areas more particular to managing voluntary organizations. Thus, in human resources management, special attention would be given to membership development, including board development, and the recruitment, training, placing, supervising, and evaluating of all types of volunteers. In financial management, special emphasis would be placed on fund-raising and grantsmanship. In addition, such voluntary management functions as program planning, implementation and evaluation, would be central competencies.

To broaden the student's understand-

ing and knowledge of voluntary organizations, their dynamics, functions and membership. The study of structural models of voluntary organizations and of interaction patterns between board, staff, client and volunteer is important. Similarly, an understanding of general approaches to management, theories of organizational development, and interpersonal communications is also important. The broader a practitioner's knowledge of management and organizations, the more flexible, imaginative, and resourceful she/he may be when solving problems, motivating groups toward collective goals, and otherwise administering organizations.

To help practitioners develop their political knowledge and skills about the issues and processes of voluntary action. Such leaders need to know how their organizational activities fit into the broader political and economic environment. The achievement of their organizational mission is vitally dependent upon the actions of corporate, governmental and voluntary organizations. Their ability to mobilize resources for their programs and objectives requires an understanding of the policy-making process and where they can make an impact upon it; of the power structure and the location of financial, political, technical and other resources in their communities.

To help practitioners develop an understanding of the values of voluntarism and the significance of the voluntary sector in a democratic society. What are the benefits of voluntarism for individual volunteers, their organizations, and society at large? What are some of the potential difficulties and disadvantages of various forms of voluntary action, including citizen participation? What are the value dilemmas facing leaders of voluntary organizations as they go about their work?

In the subject matter outline which follows, an explicit attempt is made to examine the "whys" and "so whats" (justification and significance) of what we do, as well as the skills and methods (technical competence) for doing it. It is my opinion that such inquiry is absolutely essential to a professional education in our field. It distinguishes an education from training. It helps the learner understand the meaning and significance of his/her experience.

Subject Matter

The educational objectives are reflected in the following subject matter outline. It is a list, based upon Lindewood's curriculum, of 11 core areas which might be included in a comprehensive degree program in our field. Other programs with different objectives would construct a somewhat different list. For example, they might offer a more systematic study of economics, policy research, or statistics than is represented in the curriculum.

Organizational Theory and Management Studies—knowledge of organizational development and behavior, including psychology and sociology of organizations, as well as various approaches to management (humanistic, behavioral, systems, Management by Objectives).

Human Resources Management—understanding personnel and staff supervision, selection and training, staffing systems, interviewing and testing, labor-management relations, job satisfaction, women's and minority concerns.

The Voluntary Organization: Dynamics of Membership and Management—structural models of voluntary organizations; group process, decision-making, communications and leadership; membership development; recruiting, training and evaluating; organizational behavior and change (board, staff and volunteer relations, etc.).

Computational Skills—basic quantitative knowledge and skills needed by managers to analyze statistical reports and effectively use quantitative data for accounting and marketing.

Managerial Accounting—uses of budgeting for projections and forecasting, knowledge of financing and assets.

Marketing—knowledge related to nonprofit and voluntary enterprises, including how to plan and market new services and programs to different target populations.

Financial Aspects of Nonprofit Management—fiscal management in nonprofit organizations; budgeting; funding resources and grantsmanship.

Communications and Program Development—action research: resource assessment and needs assessment; program planning, development and implementation; program evaluation and feedback systems; public relations and the mass media; information processing and systems.

Political Process: Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations as Change Agents—policy-making process: advocacy through voluntary organizations and impact of voluntary organizations on public policy; community power structure: systems and hierarchies, power and influence; strategies for change: conflict management, collaboration and coordination; community development and community organization.

The Role of Voluntary Action in a Democracy—public policy and voluntarism; interaction of profit-making, governmental and voluntary agencies; citizen participation and voluntary associations; voluntary associations, pluralism and democracy.

Issues in Voluntarism—voluntary organizations and the law; values (personal, organizational, and societal goals, etc.); futurism and voluntarism.

Teaching/Learning Process

Mature adult learners are likely to have acquired levels of experience and responsibility which make them excellent resource persons for their student colleagues. Particularly on practical topics such as budgeting, fundraising and public relations, these students can serve as seasoned instructors of their peers. Therefore, the overall pedagogical approach (ensemble of teaching strategies and methods) we suggest is designed to cultivate peer instruction as fully as student resources allow. It also is designed to connect academic with practical, didactic with experimental learning. Here are some suggestions for specific pedagogical strategies:

“Cluster groups.” Clusters are learning groups of not more than 10 students with a faculty member. These groups can study two or three core areas outlined above in each academic term. They provide a more realistic opportunity to develop group skills and processes, because students are allowed to stay with-

in the same small group of peers for all of their semester's studies, rather than splitting their time among different groups in separate courses. The student's active involvement in the learning experience is promoted further by a format in which the cluster group meets for one 3-5 hour session each week rather than three 1-hour sessions. The longer session allows for more student participation and a more natural evolution of group processes and dynamics. Cluster group sessions are characterized by dialogue and discussion. Students' oral presentation skills are cultivated, including workshop directing.

Group as well as individual learning assignments and skill development. The leadership of voluntary organizations is a group phenomenon. Thus, learning exercises on group dynamics, group problem-solving, etc., are essential. So are assignments which help students analyze their attitudes and styles regarding interpersonal and intergroup conflict, the exercise of power, and other important social processes.

Individualized study. This is a learning contract approach in which each student shapes her/his own objectives and study plans in consultation with faculty. While covering all the core areas identified above, students nevertheless are encouraged to determine their own emphases regarding both subject matter and skill development. A student who wants to specialize in training can emphasize work in planning and conducting workshops; while a student who wants to specialize in board development and evaluation may do just that.

Practical and academic requirements. Written projects which integrate academic research with practical applications to issues confronting students in their professional lives are important. Thus, a student interested in learning about social marketing can apply his/her knowledge to his/her role in religious programming in a church federation; a student interested in improving volunteer board effectiveness can write a master's thesis synthesizing research on group dynamics with a detailed handbook including workshop plans, questionnaires, training guides, and other materials for developing and evaluating board members.