

*Editor's Note: The following article is reprinted (with updated format editions) from The Journal of Volunteer Administration Spring 1984, II(3), pp. 29-38*

## **Continuing Professional Education for Volunteer Administrators**

Joe Agnello

(Editor's Note: no current contact information available)

### **(Editor-generated) Abstract**

*The author proposes that alternatives for the preparation and education of volunteer administrators is critically important to meet the demands for competent volunteer administrators. He identifies three reasons why the demand for trained volunteer administrators outpaces the supply of such individuals: 1) preservice programs that are either decreasing, not readily accessible, or non-existent; 2) the lack of educational resources within volunteer-based programs; and 3) the complex and broad-reaching nature of the work itself. He discusses six attributes of any profession, argues that volunteer administration has evolved into a "professionalizing vocation", and as such, discusses the need for consistent continuing professional education for volunteer administrators.*

### **(Editor-generated) Key Words:**

volunteer administration, volunteer administrators, professional development, professionalism, profession

### **Introduction**

The need for competent, professional volunteer administrators is increasing; however, the supply of trained volunteer administrators is critically less than the demand.

Basically, there are three reasons for this shortage.

The first reason is that preservice educational programs are either decreasing, not readily accessible, or non-existent. For example, many local Voluntary Action Centers, which traditionally provided learning experiences, are not being refunded. Professional courses for volunteer administrators are not locally accessible. Relevant college courses and local workshops are available in many communities, but they are not organized as an intensive learning program to meet the specific needs of volunteer administrators on a continuing basis. Thus, it is difficult for organizations to hire volunteer

administrators who are already professionally educated.

A second reason for the shortage of trained volunteer administrators is due to the lack of educational resources within organizations. The responsibility for volunteer administration is either added to an existing staff member's job or someone with or without prior experience is either hired or promoted. However, there usually is not another volunteer administrator within the organization to serve as a mentor or peer consultant. Also, because of the complexity of the job, the volunteer administrator's supervisor is limited in his or her ability to provide guidance and development. Therefore, "on-the-job" training is often reduced to "sink or swim" training.

A third reason for the shortage of competent volunteer administrators is related to the nature of the work itself. The volunteer administrator is responsible for making the volunteers' experiences

rewarding as well as enhancing their productivity. In addition to all the human relation skills that this implies, additional responsibilities include the work of personnel director, trainer, public relations specialist, supervisor, etc. In addition to encompassing a wide variety of administrative responsibilities, literally hundreds of volunteers may be reporting to one volunteer administrator. As a result of this complexity, the job cannot easily be fragmented and assigned to several people. Since many organizations are attempting to economize, they often do not assign a person specifically to volunteer administration. Thus, a complex job is assigned as second duty to someone who already has a job to perform.

For these three reasons, the supply of competent volunteer administrators has not kept up with the increasing demand. Assuming that volunteer administrators are an essential factor contributing to successful volunteer programs, their preparation and education becomes critically important. In this paper, the nature of continuing professional education for volunteer administrators will be examined. Based upon this analysis, a model will be presented for continuing professional education.

### **The Professionalization of Volunteer Administrators**

As it has already been stated, most volunteer administrators learn their job after being assigned to the job. This is not unlike some other professions, such as adult education. Michael Cook (1980) connects the idea that since the average adult spends more time in development on the job than anything else, a major part of self-development is actually job-development or professional development. Since jobs are rapidly changing, it is essential to engage in lifelong professional development.

At first, it may appear contradictory

that the word "professional" would be associated with "volunteerism." The volunteer field is characterized by its dynamic and innovative qualities. John McKnight (1979) critically examines the nature of professionalism and concludes that it is inherently disabling. Douglas Groseclose (1981) critiques certification, which is a close corollary of professionalism. He concludes that professionals are capable of demonstrating self-development without peer review. Consistent with his view, certification is not only unimportant but restrictive and counterproductive. Yet these critics are referring more to the abuse of power than to the value of professionalism. If professionalism is viewed as developmental or, more specifically, as continuing learning, then the concept of professionalism can be associated with volunteerism.

The static concept of a "professional" can easily be criticized. First, it is difficult to define. Second, few people agree on current definitions. The contemporary view of what we think of as "the professions" is that they are professionalizing vocations. Of course, some vocations are much more advanced than others. But the key to this concept is that vocations are professionalizing.

Several leaders in the field argue that volunteer administration is professionalizing. Mildred Katz (1976) defines it as "the process which gives us (the practitioners), competence, creativity, commitment, and credibility." From this perspective, professionalization is a developmental rather than a static model to which members must rigidly adhere. It becomes apparent that continuing learning is a central theme of credentialing.

To determine if volunteer administration is professionalizing, we can compare it to the criteria for professionalizing vocations and discover how close it fits. June Gallessich (1982)

presents six factors in the identification of a "profession";

1. Full Time. Of course, some volunteer administrators are volunteers themselves. But the key to this concept is that people do work full time at volunteer administration whether paid or not. The practice is not dependent on any other profession. It does have its own uniqueness.

2. A Calling. Certainly, many people who practice volunteer administration use it as a stepping stone to other careers. However, there are a significant number of practitioners who view it as a career. It does have subcultural characteristics of its own including language, practices, theories and associations.

3. Organizations. Volunteer administrators are organized at local, state and national levels. There are perhaps a dozen national organizations that are devoted to the professionalization of volunteer administration.

4. Education. Volunteer administration does have its own courses and texts. However, it relies on the adaptation of coursework in other fields such as marketing, adult education, public administration, etc. In addition, specialized education is also guided by the professional associations.

5. Service Orientation. Volunteer administrators serve two major groups of people. First, they serve a primary client group who are generally people with survival or transitional problems (at least, in human service agency volunteer programs). Secondly, they serve the volunteers. The unique way in which these two groups are matched to meet each others needs is the major technological process of volunteer administration. The field has developed a code of ethics and standards of good practice to safeguard the rights of both of these groups.

6. Autonomy. Ultimately, the goal of

all professions is to develop uniqueness, independence and the prestige that goes with it. On this factor, volunteer administration is not well developed. However, a tremendous amount of activity is invested in this area, but volunteer administrators have not received the status, recognition and social rewards they so deserve. On the basis of these six factors, it can be concluded that volunteer administration is a professionalizing vocation. It is developing in all of these areas. The major problem is that most of the people who are practitioners in this field are not yet promoting these ideas on a large scale. This is one reason why "CPE"—continuing professional education—is receiving attention today.

### **The Goals of CPE for Volunteer Administrators**

If the vocation itself is developing, so must each member of the profession be developing. A very useful concept of career development is provided by Dalton, Thompson and Price (1977). There are four stages of professional careers according to this theory. The value of this theory is that it enables each member of a profession to determine professional development goals that are appropriate to his or her level of development. With this information, volunteer administrators can better understand their relationship to other members of the profession, and profit from that relationship.

Stage I is Apprentice. At this stage, the volunteer administrator is primarily engaged in helping, learning and following directions. The major psychological issue is dependence. The implication is that at this stage, the volunteer administrator should strive to overcome dependence by mastering the rudiments of the field.

Stage II is Colleague. At this stage, the volunteer administrator is primarily engaged in being an independent contributor. The

psychological state is independence. The implication of this stage is that members need to share their competencies through networking.

Stage III is Mentor. At this stage, the volunteer administrator is primarily engaged in training and interfacing. The psychological state is assuming responsibility for others.

The implication is that mentors need to teach others what they have learned through experiential training.

Stage IV is Sponsor. At this stage, the volunteer administrator is primarily engaged in shaping the direction of the organization. The psychological state is exercising power. The implication is that a volunteer administrator at this stage is creating opportunities for other volunteer administrators. This model of career development is compatible with the notion that the role of volunteer administrator is changing. Sarah Jane Rehnborg (1979), a past president of the Association for Volunteer administration (AVA), views the role of volunteer administrator as a continually expanding role. In addition, preparation and entry into the field is very diversified. From her perspective, a central issue for leadership in the field is how to prepare people with diverse backgrounds and skills for a position with a wide range of responsibilities, while maintaining flexibility and the innovative spirit. Based on her assessment of the problem, competency-

based education appears to be the preferred methodology, leading to the next question of what competencies are required.

Harriet Naylor (1975), a leader in the field of volunteer administration, agrees with this view. In her analysis of the educational needs of volunteer administrators, she concludes that it is essential to develop continuing education in which "learning opportunities must be created by the learner and the training resources most conveniently available."

George Krebs (1981), an educator, observes from his own continuing education program for volunteer administrators that the participants' motivation to learn and their resourcefulness to each other were two very important strengths of his training programs. The implication is that active participation and experiences as a resource for learning are two important ingredients of CPE for volunteer administrators.

There is no clearly defined set of professional development goals for volunteer administrators. However, there are common standards that apply to most volunteer administrators. The Association of Volunteer Bureaus published a book titled "Standards and Guidelines for the Field of Volunteerism." These standards for volunteer programs can easily be converted into personal professional development goals, or competencies, and would be most important at the Apprentice stage of development (Table 1).

*Table 1. A Model for the Goals of Continuing Professional Education for Volunteer Administrators*

*The following phases can be converted into learning goals by preceding them with “to learn”. Competency statements can be created by preceding them with “I can ---,” and using the model as a checklist. The ethical statements can be sued as learning objectives by inquiring what each volunteer administrator personally is doing to maintain each principle.*

<b>I. Apprentice Stage (Mastering Fundamentals)</b>	<b>II. Colleague Stage (Organizing Networks)</b>
Resource information Record keeping Job descriptions Recruitment Interviewing Selection & placement Follow-up Preparation: orientation & training Supervision Evaluation Motivation Career development	Defining the function Mastering the rudiments Using theory Knowing the knowledge base Studying other topics Teaching others Testing & credentialing competencies Creating a subculture Gaining legal support Educating the public Creating a code of ethics Censuring incompetence Networking with related fields Defining relations with volunteers and clients
<b>III. Mentor Stage (Experiential Training)</b>	<b>IV. Sponsor Stage (Creating Opportunities)</b>
Philosophy of Volunteerism Human dignity Self determination Privacy Staff relations Social responsibility Professional responsibility	Organization framework Staff (paid & unpaid) Facilities Financial management

In an excellent summary of the literature on continuing professional education, Cyril O. Houle (1980) identifies fourteen goals. Assuming that volunteer administration is a professionalizing vocation, most of these goals are very appropriate for the Colleague stage. This is not to imply that an Apprentice should not

strive toward these goals. It is meant that an Apprentice is more likely to engage in learning the rudiments while a Colleague is more likely to engage in activity with other volunteer administrators to promote the field of volunteer administration.

This stage of development is critically important for the development of networks

and professional associations. By definition, a network is a group of people with a common interest or identity who share resources. Since a volunteer administrator must go outside of her organization to learn the job, networks are important. This idea of continuing professional education through networks fits with Leonard Nadler's scheme of human resource development (1979). Although the learners are grouped in a professional association which is outside the boundary of their organizations (non-employee development), it can have a significant impact on their job. The AVA Affiliate group is an example of such a learning network, which helps assess the learning needs of its members, increases awareness of learning resources available to members, fosters skill and career development, and provides a format for shaping the field.

An example of a less formal group is a DOVIA (Directors of Volunteers in Agencies). The flourishing DOVIA movement is based on local networks in which volunteer administrators occasionally meet together to share achievements and problems. The members provide each other with social support. In the truest sense of volunteerism, these groups help their members, their organizations and their community.

If the Colleague stage is most important for developing a network, the Mentor stage is most important for teaching members the wisdom and moral values of the profession. In addition to being able to teach others the goals of the previous stages, Mentors should also be able to express a code of ethics. Ultimately, each person develops her or his own ethical code, but there are fundamental ethics for volunteer administrators. The code of ethics developed by AVA is reflected in the Model shown here.

### **The Learning Process**

Since a Mentor helps people learn through experience, it would be helpful to re-examine the learning process. David Kolb's theory of experiential learning (1979) is particularly helpful because it also offers suggestions on how to guide it.

Kolb views learning essentially as a problem solving process. The process moves cyclically through four phases. The first phase is concrete experience, which could be past or present, on-the-job or in the classroom. In the second phase, reflective observations are made about that experience. These observations can be made by the learner or by someone else, such as a Mentor. From these observations, patterns can be identified. The third phase is abstract conceptualization. Theories can be developed to explain the pattern of personal observations, or the theoretical knowledge of the field can be used to explain it. The fourth phase is active experimentation. Implications of the theory can be applied and tested to determine the validity of the theory. Finally, the cycle repeats itself, moving in greater depth or in a different direction.

This theory combines inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning. It draws upon personal knowledge as well as authority and tradition as legitimate sources of knowledge. In addition to drawing upon several sources of knowledge, the theory has other advantages. It has the potential for helping people learn how they learn and how they teach. The value and potential of these concepts is explored in detail by Robert Smith (1982). Not only would professionals engage in continuing education, but they would have the potential for becoming more effective and efficient learners.

In relation to training, the Mentor is first responsible for establishing a purpose for training and a climate of trust. Second,

using Kolb's theory as a guide, the Mentor can help an Apprentice to recall prior experiences or make observations relative to the purpose. Questionnaires, tests, surveys or the Socratic method could be used either individually or in groups. At this point, understanding can be enhanced by discovering and discussing relationships among these observations. Also, theory from the Mentor's experience or from the profession can also be introduced to explain the observations. Fourth, implications of the theory can be derived for applications to the job. This test should demonstrate the usefulness of the theory. Finally, after completing the training cycle, it can also be evaluated to determine the quality of the learning and the training. Thus, there are experiential models available to help Mentors teach what they know about volunteer administration.

### **A Strategy for CPE for Volunteer Administrators**

The key to any professional development strategy is that it is planned. Houle (1980) notes a significant weakness in the process of development as it is traditionally practiced. He distinguishes between continuous and discontinuous learning. By continuous, he refers to the occasional workshops or unplanned reading and study engaged in by professionals. By discontinuous, he refers to a lifelong learning plan that has at least the fourteen goals he identified. These goals include shaping the field, becoming more assertive lifelong learners and developing a personal ethic to guide practice as well as keeping up with new knowledge and techniques in the profession. The implication is that the profession can provide guidance, but the professional must be assertive and innovative through continuing self-development. Thus, a synergistic relationship exists between a professional

association or network and its members.

A strategy that is well suited for volunteer administrators is self-directed learning. It is a strategy that uses natural learning resources such as experience, networks and mentors. In addition, it is a learning process that is managed by the volunteer administrator. Adapted from the adult education model presented by Malcolm Knowles (1978), it has five steps. These steps are described in terms of what each volunteer administrator should do.

#### **Step 1 – Diagnosis**

The first step in self-directed learning is a diagnosis of personal learning needs relative to the self-development goals for volunteer administrators. A learning need is a gap between your present level of competence and your desired level of competence for each goal.

For each goal, brainstorm your present strengths and weaknesses. An alternative is to rate your level of competence for each goal. You will naturally discover you do have strengths as well as weaknesses. The key is to validate and reinforce your strengths, which eliminating or over-coming your weaknesses.

Because these are self-assessments, keep in mind that you may be overrating or underrating yourself. Compensate for this source of error by using the wisdom of a Colleague, Mentor, or Sponsor. Be prepared to explain or present evidence to validate your assessment wherever you identify great strengths or great weaknesses.

Another source of error in this self-assessment is in the model itself. The four sets of standards may be inaccurate or ignore important points. Use your learning resource person to discuss additional learning goals. A third source of error is that these learning goals may not reflect important strengths and weaknesses that you

are aware of. Make notes on these items and include them in your assessment.

### **Step 2 – Objectives**

After diagnosing your learning needs, you are ready to state your learning objectives. These objectives are statements of what you want to learn. Make each objective relevant for you by writing a list of questions that you want answered to help you achieve the objective.

These questions should be derived directly from your diagnosis in Step 1. When writing these questions, use terms that are meaningful for you. State the knowledge, skills and/or attitudes that you want to learn. These questions will then be used to guide your learning through interviews with a Colleague, Mentor or Sponsor.

### **Step 3 – Strategy**

Your purpose is to achieve the learning objectives in Step 2. There is a wide range of resources available to help you achieve these objectives. Reflecting on your experience and applying concepts that you read are two important strategies. However, learning does not take place in a vacuum. It generally occurs in a relationship. Seek out a relationship that will be beneficial to both yourself and the resource person. Depending on your level of career development, it could be an Apprentice, Colleague, Mentor Sponsor or a network. In this field, you should not experience much difficulty finding someone to help you learn voluntarily.

The key to learning in this relationship is assertiveness in giving and receiving feedback. First, actively solicit feedback from your resource person. The objectives that you developed will help you to explore areas that are unknown to you. Also, your resource person cannot be very helpful to you unless you ask for what you want and you must freely disclose information that

you already know. Unless your resource person understands where you are in your own development or is sensitive to your work situation, he/she will not be relevant to you. It is important that you let your resource person learn about you.

Having assessed your present levels of competence in Step 1, you have probably noticed that you learned something from that experience alone! Thus, you are a learning resource to yourself. Although this is helpful in achieving your learning objectives, this kind of private learning does not necessarily help you to apply it in your organizational setting nor to a future job. These are two more reasons for seeking out a resource person.

Having identified your learning objectives, discuss them with your Mentor. Depending on the amount of time available and the depth and breadth of your learning objectives, schedule a meeting or a series of meetings. To maximize the learning benefits of these meetings, use the following guidelines.

Establish a learning climate before discussing your learning objectives. Engage in personal, informal conversation or discuss your Mentor's thoughts and feeling about the project. Another way to set the climate is to determine the amount of time available for the meeting, the purpose of the meeting and how to set aside distractions such as the phone or visitors. Also encourage frankness and openness. After establishing a climate, share your strengths and weaknesses to give your Mentor a sense of your present level of competence. Your Mentor may have questions or comments on the justifications of your self-ratings. Be prepared to share.

The third phase of the interview is to discuss your learning objectives. As you describe what you want to learn, take notes on the key points that your Mentor makes. Find out how these competencies are actually practiced in organizations and how

important they are. The notes should be brief and answer your questions identified in Step 2. Together with your personal knowledge, most of your questions should be answered. Summarize these key concepts. The questions that have not been answered can be tabled for further research on skill development in your continuing education plan.

The fourth phase of these interviews with your Mentor is to discuss strategies in which you can develop these competencies. Because learning is a continuous process, this is a critically important part of this project. Before this project, you will have already learned parts of these competencies and after the project, you will continue to develop them. The key concept here is that awareness precedes action. The more concise your awareness of the competencies you are studying, the more precise your actions will be.

Therefore, be sure to learn from your Mentor what you can do to develop these competencies within your organization.

The fifth phase is closure. When the interview is completed, briefly summarize the key concepts that you learned. Conclude the meeting with an expression of gratitude.

#### **Step 4 - Report**

Think about what you have learned about your learning objectives. Perhaps you became more sensitive, more knowledgeable or perhaps you did something that you haven't done before. This is the topic for your final report.

It must be emphasized that writing reports is an essential competency. However, aside from this practical consideration, it is an important learning resource. If you know something, you are able to express it. If you can't express it, you don't know it. Therefore, by articulating what you have learned, you and others can evaluate what you have learned.

Similarly, if you have learned skills, you should be able to demonstrate them. Therefore, be prepared to provide some evidence of the skill, i.e., develop a flyer, a PSA, a plan, etc.

It is very probable that you learned many things that were not specified in your objectives. Perhaps the most important thing you learned was discovering what you need to know. Regardless of what you learned and how much you learned, some things were more important to you than other things. Therefore, because this report should be brief and concise, report on your major learnings.

To summarize the format for this report, the beginning should state what you wanted to learn. The middle should state what you learned that was most meaningful to you. If it was a skill, describe what you learned about the skill as well as what you did. The end should describe what you intend to do to continue your learning.

#### **Step 5 - Evaluation**

The purpose of the self-directed learning project is to facilitate your development of volunteer administration competence. These five steps should be applied to each competency. There are two persons who are best suited to assess the extent to which this purpose has been achieved: yourself and your Mentor (or Colleague, Sponsor, etc.).

Your report is a summation of what you learned. However, to evaluate it, it must be compared to something. The basis for the evaluation is the learning goal or learning objective that the self-directed learning project was designed to meet. Therefore, both your Mentor and yourself should rate the extent to which you achieved the purpose of your project. By comparing evaluations, you can be more confident in how realistic your progress has been.

In addition to providing a basis for evaluation, the report serves you as a

statement of what you will do in the future to continue your learning. In essence, this is a more accurate description of self-directed learning.

A final word on self-directed learning. Documentation is an essential skill and a portfolio is the best device for documenting your learning and achievements. A portfolio is a collection of reference papers, reports, notes, letters of evaluation and printed evidence of projects you have developed. In order to be useful, this material should be well organized, concise and brief.

### Summary

To summarize, it is proposed in this paper that alternatives for the preparation and education of volunteer administrators is critically important to meet the demand for competent volunteer administrators. Considering that volunteer administration is a professionalizing vocation, a professional association or network is an important element in the delivery of continuing professional education. Through this network, individual goals for each professional's education can be planned, and resources for meeting these goals can be provided. Finally, a self-directed learning plan is an effective strategy for maintaining continuity, self-development and on-the-job relevance.

### References

- Association for Volunteer Administration.  
"Affiliation Plan."
- Association of Volunteer Bureaus.  
"Standards and Guidelines for the  
Field of Volunteerism," 1978.
- Cook, Michael. "Association Membership:  
The Key to Professional  
Development." *Training and  
Development Journal*, May, 1980.

Dalton, G., P. Thompson, and R. Price. "The  
Four Stages of Professional  
Careers—A New Look at  
Performance by Professionals."  
*Organizational Dynamics*, Summer,  
1977.

Gallessich, June. *The Profession and  
Practice of Consultation*. San  
Francisco: JosseyBass, 1983.

Gallup Organization. "Americans  
Volunteer." Conducted for  
Independent Sector, 1981.

Groseclose, Douglas. "One Vote Against  
Certification in HRD."  
*Training/HRD*, April, 1981.

Houle, Cyril O. *Continuing Learning in the  
Professions*. San Francisco: Josey-  
Bass, 1980.

Katz, Mildred. "Professionalization of  
Volunteer Administration."  
*Volunteer Administration*, Vol. IX,  
No. 4, Winter 1976.

Knowles, Malcolm. *The Adult Learner: A  
Neglected Species*. Houston: Gulf  
Publishing, 1979.

Kolb, David. *Organizational Psychology,  
An Experiential Approach*.  
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-  
Hall, 1979.

McKnight, John. "Professionalized Service  
and Disabling Help." A paper  
presented at the First Annual  
Symposium on Bioethics of the  
Clinical Research Institute of  
Montreal, Oct. 8, 1976.

Nadler, Leonard. *Developing Human  
Resources*. Austin, Texas: Learning

- Concepts, 1979.
- Naylor, Harriet. "The Need for Education in Volunteerism." Resource Paper, Office of Human Development, Office of the Secretary, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Jan. 22, 1975.
- Rehnborg, Sarah Jane. "Assessing Skills as a Volunteer Administrator: A New Approach to Certification," *Volunteer Administration*, Vol. XII, No. 3, Fall 1979.
- Smith, Robert. *Learning How to Learn*. Chicago: Follett, 1982.
- 

**About the Author**

At the time this article was written, Joe Agnello was a Training Consultant for United Way of Chicago, and developed and conducted training programs for human service organizations designed to improve competencies in management, training, volunteer administration and human relations. He received his Master's Degree in Adult Education from Northern Illinois University.