

A Body of Knowledge for the Practice of Volunteer Administration

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Abstract:

The authors describes the core competencies and performance expectations which define sound practice for those who lead and manage volunteer engagement. The Body of Knowledge document is a valuable resource for practitioners, agency executives and educators.

Key Words: volunteer management, core competencies, standards of practice, curriculum development

Acts of volunteering can be found in almost every corner of society. Volunteers deliver and extend services in virtually every type of community setting -- arts and cultural organizations, prisons, places of worship, recreation centers, political parties, immigrant settlement houses, senior daycare facilities, parks and botanical gardens, police and fire departments, self-help groups, neighborhood clubs, and emergency response agencies, to name just a few.

Furthermore, volunteers are active in the full range of policy-making, direct service and advocacy roles – for example, the board room, the office, working one-to-one with the client, advocating in a court room, or making soup in a homeless shelter. They can be found in organizations with large numbers of paid staff, with a mix of volunteers and paid staff, and in organizations which are entirely comprised of volunteers with no paid workers.

Similarly, the practice of volunteer administration is inherently complex and diverse.

Individuals who manage volunteer engagement come from very different backgrounds and careers, and may or may not have received formal or professional preparation for their specific role of leading volunteers. They may be paid, or be volunteers themselves. They may do it as their full-time responsibility, on a part-time basis, or as one of several “hats” they wear.

Managers of volunteers are found at the local, regional, state/provincial, national/federal, and international levels, and use a wide variety of job titles – volunteer coordinator, manager of volunteers, volunteer resource manager, community outreach coordinator, team leader, chairperson, coach, board member, project manager, event coordinator, etc.

Yet despite this extensive variety, breadth and depth of activity, there is a set of common elements and core competencies (a “body of knowledge”) which forms the foundation for sound practice, as defined by the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA). As with other professions, this Body of Knowledge (BOK)

speaks to the full scope of practice and provides a universal framework for courses, training, and certification.

The CCVA Body of Knowledge was developed in 2008 by a task force of practitioners with significant experience in mobilizing and managing volunteer engagement, and validated by a Job Analysis Survey of the larger field. At the heart of this BOK are five core competencies which have been identified as critical to the effective leadership and management of volunteer involvement regardless of where or how it is practiced. These core competencies are listed below, along with the key elements included in each:

Ethics: the ability to act in accordance with professional principles. This competency includes knowledge about the difference between professional, organizational, and personal ethics, an understanding of the ethical principles related to working with volunteers, and skill in ethical decision making.

Organizational Management: the ability to design and implement policies, processes and structures to align volunteer involvement with the mission and vision of the organization. This competency includes knowledge and skills in strategic planning, change management, policies and procedure development, and project management.

Human Resource Management: the ability to successfully engage, train and support volunteers in a systematic and intentional way. This competency includes activity related to volunteer staffing, such as role design, marketing, recruitment, placement, orientation, and training. It also includes activity which supports volunteers once they are on board, such as supervision, corrective action, conflict management, team building, recognition, sustaining involvement, and meeting management.

Accountability: the ability to collect relevant data and to engage in meaningful monitoring, evaluation and reporting to stakeholders. This competency includes knowledge and skills in fiscal management, data management, evaluation and outcome measurement, risk management, and quality improvement.

Leadership and Advocacy: the investment of personal integrity, skills and attitudes to advance individual, organizational and community goals advocating for effective volunteer involvement inside of the organization and in the broader community it serves. This competency includes activity related to leadership development, diversity and inclusion, community collaboration, and advocacy (both internal and external).

Within each of these core competencies there are also a number of specific performance expectations which detail how individual practitioners will exhibit their knowledge and ability.

The CCVA Body of Knowledge can be used in a variety of ways to build the capacity of both individuals and organizations. For those who suddenly find themselves responsible for leading volunteers with little or no prior training in how to do so, this role can be overwhelming and daunting. New practitioners will find the BOK to be a helpful roadmap as they seek to understand the complexity of their management and leadership role. More experienced practitioners can use the BOK to guide their own professional development. By assessing their personal level of knowledge and skill in each competency area they can identify specific topics for future training and learning.

Organizational executives and top managers can use the BOK when hiring staff to oversee volunteer engagement. Using these competencies as a framework for

crafting job announcements and selection criteria will ensure that those who work with volunteers are equipped to help the organization strategically maximize this resource.

The BOK is a tool for educators as well. It provides a valid content outline for developing course curricula and structuring student assignments consistent with real-world practice. An added benefit is that it clearly demonstrates the interconnectivity between volunteer administration and other disciplines such as human resource management and nonprofit management.

Despite the dynamic nature and demographics of service activity, there is widespread agreement that volunteers

continue to be a unique and critical human resource for accomplishing organizational missions, healthy communities, and social innovation. As the current emphasis on capacity-building continues, resources such as the CCVA Body of Knowledge are timely and valuable. Skilled and competent leadership based on these competencies and performance standards ensures that the desired results are achieved, and that the spirit of volunteering is sustained.

Reference

Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration. (2008). *Body of Knowledge in Volunteer Administration*. Midlothian, VA: Author.

About the Author

Katherine Campbell has worked in the field of nonprofit and volunteer management for 30 years as practitioner, author, trainer and leader. In 1996, she became Certified in Volunteer Administration. From 1997 to 2003 she served as executive director of the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA), the international professional association for leaders and managers of volunteer programs. In addition to her current role with the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration, Katherine teaches as adjunct faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Virginia and Tidewater Community College.