

**Strategic Professional Development Ahead for Volunteer Resource Managers:
Improving Quality of Life Through Contributions to Sustained Organizational Excellence**

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Abstract

Since publication of the first handbook for nonprofit organization management in 1980 to the present, the number of nonprofit organizations in the United States has doubled, while the importance of volunteers to the nation's quality of life has exponentially increased and is still growing. Professionalism in volunteer resource management has made significant progress in the 30 years since publication of the initial NPO handbook. Much remains to be done however, to realize the potential of volunteer resource management as a contributor to organizational excellence, and to meet society's needs for volunteer services, including broadening higher education offerings in volunteer resource management, and expanding training opportunities for volunteer resource managers in grassroots organizations. Even as volunteer resource management professionalism advances, the growing demands for services provided by volunteers seem to negate the perception of gaining ground relative to society's needs, much like Tantalus' fruit, "catching up" seems to remain out of reach. Meeting society's needs will not only depend on expanded education and training, but might well include establishing a new role for volunteer managers who aspire to the stratosphere of professional development in this field: strategic volunteer resource management.

Key Words:

human resource development, nonprofit organizations, volunteer management education, volunteer management professionalism, volunteer resource administrator, volunteers

Introduction

In 1980, few would have agreed there was such a professional area as "nonprofit management" or a "nonprofit executive." Since then the number of nonprofit organizations in the United States has doubled, even as the field of nonprofit management has emerged and evolved, from about 815,000 nonprofits in 1980, to over 1.5 million today.

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) provide the majority of human services in the United States, collectively called "quality of life." Better management and leadership within these organizations directly contribute to an improved quality of

life for millions of Americans. This has been the overarching goal of the many books, articles, and training courses that have been developed in recent years focused on NPOs and volunteer resource management.

It was just one score and ten years ago that the first Nonprofit Organization Handbook was published. The Handbook's organization, fulfilled by 28 contributors, established for the first time in 1980 that regardless of the specific public service provided, not-for-profit organizations shared seven areas of management, from fund raising to volunteer administration.

"Volunteers: An Indispensable Human Resource in a Democratic Society," was the title of the section in the NPO Handbook that covered all major areas of volunteer management and administration. All five chapters in that section were written by Dr. Eva Schindler-Rainman, a gifted visionary in several fields. "An organizational consultant, social worker with a Ph.D., and behavioral scientist," Ellis recalls, "she was known for her advocacy of effective human resource development - paid and volunteer - and for non-traditional organization design and development" (Ellis, 2001, ¶ 1). Here are some of the remarkably accurate predictions Dr. Schindler-Rainman made in 1980 about the world of volunteer management:

- Volunteers will be in every sector of the community, all over the country, and they will be affecting policy making, changes, and growth.
- New courses will be offered in community colleges and universities for administrators of volunteer programs as well as for volunteers themselves.
- Credit will be given for volunteer work (agencies will keep track of what volunteers do so that volunteers can include this experience in their resumes.
- Research on values and the effect of volunteers on the delivery of human services will increase.
- New collaborative bodies will emerge to utilize better the human and material resources that are available.
- New, portable, interesting, participative training programs for paraprofessionals, professionals, and volunteers will be developed.
- New ways to recognize volunteers will be developed. (Schindler-Rainman, 1980, pp. 3-7)

"This is probably the most exciting time in the history of the United States to be active in the volunteer world," Dr. Schindler-

Rainman concluded. "These times offer a tremendous opportunity for volunteers to make important contributions to the quality of life and to human services in their communities. It is clear that the volunteer administrator is a key person in translating the motivation, interest, resources, and skills of volunteers into human services to the clients of our people-helping agencies and organizations." (Schindler-Rainman, 1980, p. 3-44)

The National Answer: More Volunteers

Most would agree that the last 30 years have seen significant advances in the overall professionalism of nonprofits and the volunteer programs so many of them use to provide a huge continuum of public services. Sadly, most would also agree that our progress towards professionalism, while significant, has not kept pace with the ever-expanding need for human and social services. Certainly, Schindler-Rainman's prediction of volunteers being engaged throughout all sectors across the country, and involved in every aspect of service delivery, growth, policy making and change, has been resoundingly proven.

Four out of five nonprofits (those with incomes above \$25,000 annually in gross receipts) rely on volunteers to provide an enormous range of services that enable these organizations to fulfill their public service missions. A 2004 joint study by the UPS Foundation, the Corporation for National and Community Service and the USA Freedom Corps also found that most of these organizations did not have the resources or knowledge to effectively manage these vital human resources (AFP eWire, 2004).

Volunteers brought benefits to 90% of these major nonprofits, with two-thirds reporting substantial cost savings and increased quality of services and programs. About 60% of these nonprofits had a paid

staff person for volunteer coordination, but one-third of those had no prior training in volunteer resource management, and only half of the "volunteer coordinators" devoted more than 30% of their time to coordinating volunteers. As woeful a picture as these data suggest, 90% of these organizations also reported they were ready to take on even more volunteers (nearly 3.5 million more volunteers) without enhancing their capacity to do so. Clearly, "taking on" and "managing effectively" are two very different concepts for these organizations.

It will come as no surprise to any of IJOVA's readers to learn that the study found a strong correlation between the amount of time the paid staff volunteer coordinator devoted to volunteer management and the effectiveness of the organization's volunteer programs, which, as we have already noted, play a vital role in the organization's ability to fulfill its public service mission and roles. By that same measure, we can safely assume that those organizations "taking on" volunteers, but having little or no professional volunteer management infrastructure to support that new human capital, will have ineffective or dysfunctional volunteer programs, thus missing the inherent potential the new volunteers represent--for the organization and the publics it serves.

New Courses, Inadequate Higher Echelon Support

The new courses predicted by Schindler-Rainman are being offered in fewer than half of our state universities and colleges, not nearly as many as there should be to meet the growing need for volunteer resource management professionals. In addition, the courses listed (with links) by ENERG!ZE reflect little standardization and range, from those purporting to offer certifications in volunteer management (with no course listings) to others that might have

something or other to do with managing volunteers. In short, there are fewer courses than we need and most reflect little depth of subject matter penetration, mastery, or research. Improving and expanding volunteer resource management course listings (substantive) and volunteer focused research within higher education is what the military might call a "target rich" environment.

Recent personal experience suggests that this paucity of quantity and quality has more to do with short-sighted prioritization by university leaders (above the department level), than the advocacy or qualifications of the faculty. At most universities and colleges it is a challenge (that is worsening) to get the needed support or funding for programs or research relating to volunteer resource management.

Quo Vadis, Volunteer Resource Management

In the early 1990's, circumstances led me to meet and study with Dr. W. Edwards Deming, one of our most noted statisticians, authors and teachers who is often credited with helping both the Japanese and American economies through his insistence on process improvement and product quality. "Man's job," he said, "is to govern the future, not simply be a victim of the wind blowing this way and that way. I know, the best plans are upset. But, without a plan there is no chance. Best efforts will not do it!" (Connors, 2001, p. 3).

Whether or not we plan on it or for it, there will be a future for volunteer resource management and professional development. We have an essential choice: we can attempt to influence the future through vision and planning, or we can let the winds of change blow us "this way and that." Without a vision and a plan we have little chance of affecting whatever outcome lies ahead.

Clearly, the need for the services provided by nonprofits will continue to increase. This increase will surely be accompanied by an expanding job market in positions relating to nonprofit human resource management and, in particular, volunteer resource management. The extent to which those applicants are truly qualified to effectively manage those programs depends on the robustness of our education and credentialing programs. Who might logically be expected to best fulfill the responsibilities of those positions, applicants who had completed a 24-hour course of instruction provided through a national agency, or by university graduates having completed a challenging (150-hour) volunteer management course taught at the graduate level (e.g. University of Florida or University of Texas at Austin), or those having earned a graduate degree in nonprofit management or volunteer resource management? What is our plan to make these courses and levels of instruction more widely known and available?

More than three million Floridians volunteer each year and provide in excess of 430 million hours of service to nonprofit organizations in such areas as teaching, tutoring, fund raising, and providing human services. Volunteer Florida, the Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, recently awarded Certificates of Achievement to University of Florida students completing the first college-level course covering volunteer resource management at the university. These conferrals signaled strong support at the state level for expanded offerings in higher education that deliver advanced training for volunteer resource managers. "Volunteering and developing professional volunteer managers is especially important now when community needs are great and resources are dwindling," explained Volunteer Florida CEO Wendy Spencer. "Giving volunteer

managers the tools they need to recruit and retain volunteers is a key to increasing civic participation in Florida," Spencer said. "College-level training for future professionals aspiring to manage and lead volunteer programs is a giant step in the right direction" (§ 3).

Professionalism in volunteer resource management will continue to advance, not only because of the commendable leadership of national organizations such as the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA), but also because of the pragmatic linkage between expanded knowledge and skills in volunteer management and career success; better training (as acquired and validated through a credentialing or graduate degree process) provides significant career advantages, as well it should.

A recent book by Dr. Edward Lawler, co-creator with Dr. Lyman Porter of the Porter-Lawler Theory of Motivation, offers a vision of the virtually untapped potential represented by human resource (HR) managers as major "players" at the strategic level on any organization's management team. For the "promise to become a reality, human resource executives need to develop new skills and knowledge to be able to execute human resource management administration activities effectively" (Lawler, 2009, p. 142). It is true, at present, that relatively few nonprofits share Lawler's vision of HR professionals operating at the strategic level, much less for managers of volunteer resource programs. However, Lawler is correct; like water behind a dam, the potential for such roles and contributions to organizational excellence exists. When the value of that untapped potential is recognized (perhaps by nonprofits hard pressed by expanding service needs, increasing budget constraints, and rapidly changing environments), the roles and

contributions of nonprofit human resource and volunteer program managers will change for those who are qualified and capable of successfully filling those roles.

The challenges for those involved in improving the professionalism of volunteer resource managers include improved "packaging" and expanding opportunities for more comprehensive training (current positions) and education (professional expansion and development) for current and future professionals in this vital area. These new offerings will advance strategic professional development for volunteer resource managers to the extent they provide better understandings of the theoretical foundations on which effective management practices are based, and recognition of the practical-to-strategic range existing within each of the typical components of a volunteer management program, including demographics; organizational environment, planning and analysis to establish and maintain professional volunteer programs; policy making and implementation; new and evolving options for volunteer service; financial planning and accountability; marketing, recruiting, screening, assimilating and motivating volunteers (including rewards/recognition); legal and risk management; effective synergy and relations between all HR functions (staff/volunteer/board); effective communications via ever expanding media options; evaluation of volunteers and volunteer programs; and, overall effective management (program administration/resource efficiency) and leadership (innovation/change management for effectiveness).

Schindler-Rainman's assessment in 1980 of it being an exciting time to be active in the volunteer world remains true for us today. But the excitement is both caused by and tempered by our realization of the challenges ahead for us to meet the

increasing needs for human services through voluntary action, and to do so while maintaining ever more demanding levels of professionalism in volunteer resources management.

Schindler-Rainman and Lawler represent two points on a 30-year time line that we can now begin (with caution) to extrapolate into the future of volunteer resource management professionalism. Volunteers continue to make important contributions to our quality of life. Managers of volunteer programs remain the key to translating the enormous potential of those volunteers into human services so badly needed to maintain our society's quality of life. Development of management science and practice now provide the tools (and potential) for human resource and volunteer resource managers to operate at both strategic and operational levels, and thus make substantial contributions to operational effectiveness and efficiency, the two foundations of sustained excellence. Strategic human resources management integrates human resources management "with the strategic mission of the organization" . . . Human resource departments (including volunteer resource managers) "must take a proactive role in guiding and supporting agency efforts to meet the changing demands of their external and internal environments" (Pynes, 2009, p. xv).

Expanded, visionary, strategic professional development for current and future leaders of volunteer programs (including focused research to support that development) is our best hope to meet the increasing demands for improved human services, and to realize the inherent potential within human resource management and volunteer resource management to contribute substantially to achieving and sustaining organizational excellence. While doing so, we can take some measure of pride

in our collective efforts and commitment, however halting or disorganized at times, to improving the quality of life for others.

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Since publication of the first *Nonprofit Handbook* (McGraw-Hill) in 1980, Tracy D. Connors has edited and/or authored eight major management handbooks for nonprofit organizations, including the *Nonprofit Handbook: Management* (2001, John Wiley & Sons) and the *Volunteer Management Handbook* (1995, John Wiley & Sons), a second edition of which is currently in development. Captain (USN Ret.) Connors has also published two major military history works: *Baited Trap, the Ambush of Mission 1890* (2008) and *Truckbusters from Dogpatch, the Combat Diary of the 18th Fighter-Bomber Wing in the Korean War* (2006). Connors is adjunct faculty at the University of Florida where he recently developed and teaches Volunteer Management for Nonprofit Organizations.