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Wishes and Resolves for the New Year

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

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Happy New Year! And happy new "era cluster"--the term a good friend coined to avoid the millennium 2000/2001 debate! There are many things I hope will evolve in volunteerism this century. For now, however, I'll focus on my vision for the field's professional associations--probably the most important force we have for making an impact in the years to come. First is my wish list for the future of our professional development. After that, I will provide my "era cluster" resolutions!

My Wishlist for the Future of Our Professional Development

International and National Organizations

At the international and national levels, I'd like the associations formed to support volunteer program managers to act more like professional societies in other disciplines. This means providing leadership in advocacy, being a forum for healthy debate on philosophy and practices, and offering cutting-edge education. I wish an end to turf wars that pit setting against setting as if the skills of volunteer management did not apply universally to every field, duplicate efforts to develop professional certification programs, conferences that copycat each other, and structures that exclude rather than welcome.

Instead, I want a future of combined action in defining the profession to others, the courage to protest collectively when volunteer management is overlooked at something like a national summit, and recognition of the full scope of volunteer action.

I'd welcome national associations willing to take a stand in finding ways to support the rights of volunteers AND employees AND recipients of service, rather than partying to the illogical pitting of one constituency against another. This will mean engaging such disparate groups as labor unions, insurance companies, lawmakers, and the Labor Department.

I also wish that associations which claim to have an international focus do more than provide the fun of meeting global colleagues. This means dialogue about the differences in our approaches to

volunteering, analysis of the situations in which such different practices work or don't, and joint experimentation with new ideas.

For any of this to happen in volunteerism, however, we first need practitioners who have made a commitment to this work as a career and not as a job.

Local and State/Provincial Organizations

Then we need strong local and state/provincial organizations. In my preferable future, such DOVIAs and other networks will become skilled at:

- Fostering collaboration among members beyond sharing of information: community-wide volunteer recognition events; joint recruitment efforts; volunteer training cooperatives.
- Joining forces with neighboring associations to pool time, talent and funds for training and other professional development opportunities--crossing traditional geographic boundaries.
- Representing the scope of volunteerism to their community, including demanding the best from their local Volunteer Center (which includes helping to secure a diversified and steady source of funding), participating in meaningful data collection and analysis, developing useful reports for local media and lawmakers.
- Making volunteers partners in professional development. I see a time when membership in a DOVIA is a team activity: the paid director of volunteer services plus one key administrative volunteer from each agency. This creates support back at the office and fosters shared ownership of the volunteer program.
- Envisioning an active "Volunteer Exchange" system, in which volunteers have the chance to spend time at other agencies, learning new skills and cross-fertilizing ideas, especially among organizations that may be limited in their formal connections.
- Finding common ground (at long last) with the officers of all-volunteer civic groups, faith communities, and other community organizations without paid staff at all.

Finally, I envision the day when all of us will connect in cyberspace--not as a substitute for face-to-face meetings, but as a "world-at-our-fingertips" interconnection. There will probably be a period of false starts, e-mail overload, and a high junk-to-gems ratio. But ultimately, we are seeing the evolution of a form of professional collaboration never possible before. Collaboration that does not require hierarchy or centralization. Forums for the voicing of many opinions, in many languages. Distance learning options that include live, video interaction. In truth, even my imagination fails to conjure up all the possibilities!

My "Era Cluster" Resolutions

To these--and other--ends, I personally resolve to:

1. Continue raising hard questions and eliciting debate in my presentations, printed writings, and electronic musings, even if such openness offends some people. I offer critics the chance to articulate their opposing positions so that we can, together, evolve the philosophies of this unique professional field.
2. Publicly protest--to the press, organizational leaders, academics, government officials, and any one else I can reach--whenever I feel volunteer issues are misrepresented or, even worse, ignored. And once I've got their attention, my goal will be to educate, not whine.
3. Make the most of the privilege of working internationally to be an instrument of cross-fertilization, listening to learn and speaking to share ideas from many perspectives.
4. Focus my attention on reaching audiences beyond the "converted" because I feel I can serve volunteer program leaders best by being an advocate for volunteerism to their bosses and co-workers.
5. Maintain the highest quality of content on this Web site and any future electronic services, and be truly useful to visitors, regardless of setting, level of experience, or geographic location.
6. And before the weight of this new "era cluster" brings out even more of the evangelist in me, I further resolve to maintain a balancing sense of humor, using laughter to give me and my audiences the chance to look at our work from a different point of view.

Now it's your turn. What do you want to see in the future of volunteerism and what resolutions are you making to focus your professional energies on the steps needed to reach that future?

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Submitted by Andre, manager/volunteer center, KS

I think that we will all be spewing "POLF" propaganda in the new century. I wonder when they will realize that we won't use their logo until they start funding volunteer centers rather than trying to claim them as their own. Talk about identity theft!!!

Submitted by Gerald (Jerry) Pannozzo, CVA, Rivington House Health Care Facility, New York, NY, U.S.
ADVOCACY

I believe International and National Associations and Local and State/Provincial Organizations need to focus on building strong links. I suggest we look to grassroots movements that developed into national and/or international organizations (centralization doesn't have to be the enemy). A key ingredient is effective communication both ways.

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Prior to my intentional career change, I scheduled information interviews with volunteer administrators who identified networking and training opportunities. Once hired, my employer encouraged me to attend trainings and conferences (provided by professional associations). There were few options for formal training or degree programs so I applied for certification through AVA. I received my CVA at the time I accepted a job in health care. I discovered another professional association and I attended health care specific trainings. We work in a variety of settings and yet it is my hope that by 2010 there will be easily accessible accepted credentials for us, (like other professions). We need to come together and define what training will look like; agree on who we invite to the table as we develop this training ("bosses and co-workers"); and make the personal commitment to invest in credentialing. Part of the training should reinforce the importance of collecting and sharing data and systems for measuring outcomes beyond merely volunteer hours and numbers.

MY RESOLUTION

Promoting the profession and my professional development is too important to me to delegate the "power" to someone else. Therefore, I will continue to volunteer (on my own time when necessary) for local and international associations.

Submitted by Diane Leipper, Leipper Management Group, Nevada, USA

We need strong leadership in our associations to define the profession, to set the standards, and to consolidate the efforts. But it is a membership that understands what being a professional is really all about, is willing to do the work and make the necessary sacrifices that provides the direction for the association. Some major shifts in the attitudes and perceptions of "practitioners" will have to occur before societal recognition for the value of volunteer management as a profession can become a reality.

We have to do more than pay lip service to the idea that we are professionals. We can't just pick and choose those things that are easy, don't require too much effort or investment on our part, and won't upset our personal apple carts. On the other hand - what is it we are really after? Why do we want or need these things? Why are they important? To whom are they important? Will being a recognized profession achieve these things or would some other method be more beneficial? Why? How? Unless we participate in honest review and provide straight forward answers to questions like these, how can we know which direction we are going and determine the best way to achieve our goals? How can we expect an association to advocate for us if we haven't first clarified what it is we want and why? We have to ask hard questions and face hard answers. We have to work together and as you say, end the turf wars, quit duplicating efforts, and develop inclusive structures. We have to believe that the efforts required to become a recognized profession are worth working for.

Submitted by Lucas Meijs, Meijs Consultancy, The Netherlands

Bravo for Susan. Again you make good points! I would like to join you in the crusade to explain to the world that volunteering and volunteerism is not as simple and unequivocal as many people think! My

personal fifth point would be to develop and present a more elaborate insight into the diversity of organizations and organizational forms that work with volunteers. As I frequently tell my students (and colleagues) at the business school "yeah, we have twenty five books on volunteers within organizations so we think we know everything about it. We have thousands of books about paid staff in organizations and we still think we have to study and research it...." We need to stop talking about volunteers, volunteerism and volunteer programs as if it is all the same!!!

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