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## Book Review by Ushnish Sengupta

**Volunteer Administration: Professional Practice.** Edited by Keith Seel. Markham, ON: LexisNexis, Canada. 2010. 557 pp. ISBN: 9780433462224

*Volunteer Administration: Professional Practice*, edited by Keith Seel is a valuable and much anticipated addition to reference books available to volunteer administrators. The book is based on, and grounded in, the five core competencies that are required for designation as a Certified in Volunteer Administration (CVA). This text is required reading and the primary reference for the professional CVA credential awarded by the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration, and is sure to gain widespread use and comment from volunteer administrators that will inform future editions.

This edited collection, written by both academics and practitioners, provides a diversity of perspectives and topics from the ethics of volunteer administration to the nuts and bolts of practical issues such as managing meetings with volunteers. Other texts on volunteer administration are typically from a single author's perspective and therefore are not as comprehensive as *Volunteer Administration and Professional Practice*. The book is well written in language accessible to volunteer administrators with diverse backgrounds who work in different types of organizations, reflecting the inherently complex and diverse world of volunteer administration.

The intent of book as a whole, as well as each chapter in particular, is to provide summaries of the best practices in volunteer administration based on each author's particular area of expertise and scholarship. The authors of each chapter take an advocate's role in promoting best practices rather than being simply detached scholars, which is a refreshing approach. The common line of argument throughout the book is that implementing the best practices described in each chapter will enable optimal volunteer administration, increase volunteer capacity, and increase the value of volunteer work for organizations. While the book does not focus on empirical studies on best practices, additional sources of information are provided for readers who want to examine the evidence behind the best practices outlined in each chapter.

The book's organization of independently authored chapters is useful as a reference for a practitioner who needs to review specific aspect of volunteer administration. From the viewpoint of a part time volunteer administrator, the Chapter 6 Volunteer Staffing and Development, and Chapter 7 – Sustaining Volunteer involvement, were particularly useful. Research does indicate that many organizations face volunteer staffing and retention issues. The authors of these specific chapters provide a well-written description of the best practices, and outline a number of useful tools volunteer administrators can utilize in staffing and retention decisions.

Despite the above strengths, there are some limitations to *Volunteer Administration*. One of the stated goals of the book is to have a text that is “internationally applicable, not country specific”, which would be a valuable contribution to the field indeed. However upon closer examination one realizes that all of the chapter authors are located in North American institutions, and therefore a broad diversity of international perspectives is not present. That said, the standpoint of the authors selected for the collection is diverse and is appropriate to the intended purpose of each chapter. With the caveat on international coverage, there are many useful aspects of volunteer management covered in the book that are applicable to administering volunteers in United States and Canada.

One of the central values of the book as an edited collection is the fact that the arguments are coherent within each chapter, and consequently each chapter can be read alone. This will make *Volunteer Administration* a valuable text for both educators and practitioners in the field. Conversely however, the “stand alone” nature of the chapters means that there are few logical linkages *between* chapters, which detracts from the books utility as a whole. This could have been achieved if the authors referenced at least one common case study throughout the book to illustrate salient points from each chapter and weave together the different but related aspects of volunteer administration together.

As mentioned above, the issue of a lack of a central case study or unifying discourse in *Volunteer Administration* highlights the need for further explanation of some of the empirical evidence that has been utilized for the development of the best practices that are outlined by the authors in the book. The evidence used to develop best practices is summarized rather than discussed in detail and, at least for this reviewer, makes it difficult to determine from these summaries if the arguments are strongly supported by the evidence. Since the authors take a standpoint of advocating best practices, conflicting or controversial evidence is rarely discussed.

The work is generally persuasive and useful to practitioners. Volunteer administrators can incorporate elements of best practices from relevant book chapters into their work on long term strategic basis and on a practical daily basis. There are few overlaps in the book as the different chapters deal with different but related areas of volunteer administration. As a consequence of taking different approaches to occasionally overlapping topics (e.g. counting volunteers), the reader is exposed to multiple sources of information. A set of common references for overlapping topics would have been ideal.

In summary, *Volunteer Administration: Professional Practice* makes a current and meaningful contribution to the set of tools and best practices available to volunteer administrators and related practitioners. The authors have been able to communicate and advocate for the best practices in their area of expertise. If the best practices described in each chapter are followed it will lead to better management, increased capacity and increased value of volunteers for a wide variety of social economy organizations.

### **About the Author / L’auteur**

**Ushnish Sengupta** is a PhD Candidate, OISE, University of Toronto, ON, Canada. Email: [u.sengupta@utoronto.ca](mailto:u.sengupta@utoronto.ca)