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Diana Christopulos

Dudley H. Hafner

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The American Heart Association functions as a broker
between its managers and institutions of higher education

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The rapid growth of the nonbusiness, nongovernment, "third sector" during the past fifteen years has produced, de facto, a new type of professional manager. The small "charities," which once employed only a few community organizers and a secretary, now employ one out of every six professionals in the United States (Drucker, 1982).

National voluntary organizations often have highly autonomous local units with strong, community-based needs and interests but little overall unity in planning and information sharing. In these organizations, national managers often lack the authority to hire and appraise senior staff members at the local level. At every level, moreover, agency managers must find intangible ways of rewarding performance so that they can retain those staff members who could earn more money in the for-profit sector.

For higher education, the increasing number of nonprofit managers represents a graduate-level audience that may be as significant as the audience of business managers who emerged from private industrial corporations at the turn of the century, yet colleges and universities have responded slowly and

sporadically to the needs of the third sector. This hesitant response contrasts markedly with third-sector managers' awakened sense of the need for further education.

Weaknesses in Current Programs

A 1974 study by the National Information Center on Volunteerism (NICOV) showed that at least 100 colleges and universities offered courses, workshops, certificates, or degree programs for agency managers (Gowdey, Cooper, and Scheier, 1976). Some similar offerings remain available, but third-sector managers' real choices for comprehensive professional development are often fragmented, unpredictable, and inadequate. By 1976, few of the schools in the 1974 NICOV study were offering any courses or programs for agency managers, and many so-called programs consisted of just one or two special courses or seminars (Rehnborg, 1979). This unhappy trend continues in 1982. New offerings spring up, only to go the transitory way of their predecessors.

A 1980-1981 American Heart Association (AHA) survey of the literature and interviews with about two dozen experts from higher education and voluntary agencies revealed that programs for agency managers often fall short in three vital areas: securing adequate institutional support both from agencies and schools, developing curricula to meet the needs of agency managers, and providing delivery systems appropriate to full-time workers who travel frequently and work many nights and weekends ("Toward Strong...," 1981).

Institutional Support. Agencies and schools have both fallen short in their institutional support for good management programs. One explanation is that educators do not perceive a reliable demand for academic programs among agency staff members. In part, this may reflect a past reluctance among agencies to set and reward high performance standards for their managers. In too many cases, students who spent time and money on professional development have felt unappreciated and unrewarded in their own workplaces. Furthermore, colleges have seldom taken the initiative in identifying the highly dispersed market of potential students. According to the *Nonprofit Organization (NPO) Handbook*, there may be more than six million nonprofit organizations in the United States, but few employ full-time staffs (Connors, 1980).

Even when students and agencies are pleased with an educational program, it may be discontinued because of its weak position in the college's formal curriculum structure. Business schools, which have the strongest management programs, usually prefer to concentrate on courses geared to the for-profit sector; few institutions hire faculty members with strong backgrounds in nonprofit agency management. As a result of these factors, programs may be relegated to junior faculty members or to lower-level administrators and are often housed outside the regular university structure. Lacking their own facul-

ties and political bases, such programs become vulnerable to internal political maneuvers.

Curriculum. Few collegiate programs meet the curricular needs of third-sector agency managers. Some higher education institutions do not yet realize that full-time agency managers have different long-term educational needs than do volunteers, and these institutions offer the same courses and seminars for both groups. Although agency managers need basic organizational and interpersonal skills, they also need an increasingly sophisticated knowledge of fiscal management, modern office technologies, and public policy trends.

Although many agency staff members attend extensive training courses, they usually cannot receive graduate-level credit for what they have learned if the courses are not sponsored by an institution of higher education. Other types of experiential learning, such as learning acquired on the job, are rarely eligible for graduate credit. Educational programs must be flexible enough to serve a very diverse population—middle-aged women who wish to complete baccalaureate degrees, young managers who have training but no formal education in management, midcareer managers who have much experience and little formal education, and managers with advanced degrees in nonmanagement areas.

Delivery Systems. Finally, the geographical range, scheduling, and costs of many management degree programs severely limit their availability to mobile, full-time workers. Although workshops and seminars are generally held on weekends, colleges often continue to require one or more nights per week of classroom attendance in credit courses. In addition, the high cost of many degree programs effectively reduces their availability to many agency staff members.

Needs of the Agency Manager

While agency relationships with higher education have been unstable, the challenges facing the professional staffs of the many local and national voluntary agencies have grown exponentially. Staffs must organize the efforts of several hundred thousand full-time agency workers, provide vital services to millions of people, and administer budgets totaling almost $130 billion dollars ("Americans Volunteer," 1981). They must manage solicitation and expenditure of funds in a period of sustained high inflation rates; try to assume the burden of human services that government can no longer afford to deliver; learn to deal with new technological, legal, and demographic trends; and still foster the humane sense of mission that distinguishes the voluntary from the business sector.

Volunteers. A special and very complex part of the agency manager's responsibility is the recruitment and guidance of 84 million volunteers ("Americans Volunteer," 1981). Skills that would be paid for in government or

in the for-profit sector must be found at virtually no cost. A volunteer might be an investment banker who taps community resources for contributions or who serves on the agency's audit or finance committee, or the volunteer might be a blue-collar worker who travels hundreds of miles each month to train instructors in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, a homemaker who collects data for a local study, or a biomedical researcher who donates time to establish standards of practice for the entire medical profession.

To retain credibility with these diverse groups, the professional staff member must manage what others have mastered by asking the right questions and making practical sense out of the answers. The manager who fails in this very difficult task will neither attract nor retain competent volunteers who are also leading authorities in a wide variety of fields. In the end, the manager who has no credibility in the eyes of many constituencies will be more like a clerk than an acknowledged peer and professional.

Complexity. Today's managers must understand the reasons for their successes and failures. They must be able to understand, reflect on, and learn from their experiences. They must also understand and use organizational theories, principles, and concepts to address specific areas—organizational and individual communications systems, the change process, organizational behavior, diagnosis, use of power, and methods of furthering the organization's mission through grass-roots community organization and effective volunteer leadership.

In the current complex environment, it is too costly for agency managers to learn what works and what does not through simple trial and error. There are managers who do not really understand the processes involved in using a group to deal with conflicts and to plan, monitor, and evaluate projects; these managers may alienate volunteers, lose competent staff members, expend funds poorly, and even do damage to the organization and to its mission.

Mutual Benefits

The potential benefits of a partnership with higher education are clear for the voluntary sector. First, universities can, if they will, provide expert help in the teaching both of process skills and of specific content areas. Second, they can confer degrees and other legitimate professional credentials. Third, the programs that colleges and universities sponsor can help recruit highly motivated, competent people to careers in nonprofit agency management. Fourth, higher education can help agency managers see beyond the immediate pain of daily issues and to visualize their own organizations comprehensively, going beyond the demands of a specific job.

What do such partnerships offer to higher education? By modifying their offerings, colleges and universities can attract a large group of new, mature students. By working closely with voluntary agencies on work-based degree programs, colleges and universities can rapidly identify strengths and weaknesses in

their curricula and delivery systems. They can increase the relevance of classroom learning to work-site requirements and thereby enrich their academic programs. Faculty members involved in these programs can identify an almost unlimited number of opportunities for research and publication, since agency management is a very new discipline. Educators may also find partnerships with voluntary agencies ideologically congenial, because both parties exist primarily to enrich the quality of human life.

Laying the Foundation: Four Processes

It is with these mutual benefits in mind that the American Heart Association has developed close relationships with specific colleges and universities. "Toward Strong Management in the Voluntary Sector" is a project partially funded by a three-year grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) of the U.S. Department of Education from 1981–1984 (FIPSE, 1981, p. 5).

Between 1980 and 1982, the AHA training staff developed four processes to build a program that would be relevant, flexible, and highly effective for its constituencies, including senior AHA managers and volunteers, other AHA staff members, a federal funding agency, colleges and universities, and staffs from others agencies. These processes are a request for proposals (RFP), a federal grant application, a pilot group selection, and a competency study to determine the program's outcomes.

Matching the Client to the University: The RFP Process. The training department developed a seven-step RFP process to help match agency needs and collegiate resources.

1. *Identification of Needs.* Needs identification began in August and September of 1980 with an assessment of the educational levels already attained by AHA staff members who were attending training courses at AHA's national center in Dallas, Texas. The sample group included approximately 20 percent of the AHA's total professional staff; more than half of the group were women. Their length of tenure in the AHA ranged from less than six months to more than ten years, and they held jobs at all levels of the organization.

The AHA had originally conceived of the project as an undergraduate-level program. Anecdotal information had suggested that many staff members lacked the baccalaureate degree. The needs assessment discovered that, while this may have been true ten years ago, new staff members are now almost always college graduates. With this data in mind, the AHA began to explore the possibilities for both a baccalaureate and a masters' degree program.

2. *Establishing Goals and Criteria.* Next, the training department conferred with senior AHA managers and with the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL) to develop criteria to describe the agency's needs and to use in selecting colleges and universities to participate in the project. From the AHA's point of view, the criteria essential for a successful pro

gram included accessibility to AHA staff regardless of geographical location, reasonable cost, credit for generic courses from local institutions, and willingness to grant credit for AHA training courses. Desirable (but not essential) criteria, in descending order of importance, included minimal on-campus residency requirements, experience with adult learners, high-quality assessment of relevant life and work experience, and a national reputation.

3. *Distribution and Retrieval of RFPs.* In the fall and winter of 1980–1981, about eighty colleges and universities received five-page RFP documents outlining the general need for agency management programs. The RFP also listed the criteria and asked for a five-page response by a specific deadline. In most cases, universities had between six and eight weeks to develop their proposals. To ensure that the RFPs would reach institutions qualified to conduct high-quality programs for adult full-time workers, the AHA tapped into the network established by CAEL. RFPs were distributed at the CAEL national assembly and through the CAEL regional managers. Additional prospects were identified by AHA staff personnel. Fifteen institutions, including state colleges and universities and a number of private institutions, responded with full proposals.

4. *Preliminary Evaluation of Proposals.* A twenty-one member academic advisory group read and evaluated each institution's proposal. The group included fourteen geographically representative AHA staff members and seven readers, who came either from national voluntary agencies or from the academic community.

5. *Final Evaluation of Proposals.* Six core members of the academic advisory group, who were geographically representative of the AHA staff, met for one and a half days to conduct a final evaluation. They had at their disposal a summary of all readers' comments and ratings on each proposal, as well as a summary ranking of all proposals and supporting materials from each institution. In the end, the group recommended site visits to two institutions and continuing contact with several other universities that had submitted proposals.

6. *Site Visits.* Two members of the academic advisory group visited the two universities. Before the visits, they mailed each university feedback on its proposal and specific questions from the group. The site visits enabled the AHA to refine its evaluation of each institution's willingness and ability to deliver what it had described in its proposal. The visits also gave university representatives a chance to explore the short- and long-range implications of partnership with the AHA.

7. *Final Action.* On the basis of the proposals and reports on the site visits, the academic advisory group recommended to the AHA's executive vice president that the AHA enter into an agreement with Central Michigan University (CMU) to deliver a master's degree in program management with a concentration in voluntary agency management. The group also recommended that baccalaureate programs be handled by referral to the many

existing general external-degree programs available at the undergraduate level. Accordingly, the AHA and Central Michigan University signed a letter of understanding in October of 1981.

This seven-step RFP process requires that the needs of the student — the agency staff member — be the starting point for all discussions and negotiations with the university. In the past, universities have usually controlled this process by focusing on their own needs, and individual students have had to struggle through catalogues and accommodate themselves to curricula and delivery systems that may have been inadequate or inappropriate. The seven-step process challenges universities to modify their practices to meet adult student needs more adequately. By serving as a broker, the agency causes the relationship between student and university to be more equal and relevant to the student's career.

The inclusion, either in the process' development or in the academic advisory group, of senior and middle managers from throughout AHA helped establish a broad internal consensus on the program's values, goals, and major objectives.

In reviewing and discussing the RFP with university administrators, the AHA learned a great deal about the types of institutions willing and able to serve as partners. The most likely prospects all had explicit missions to serve adult learners. These were land-grant universities and institutions with well-established external degree programs.

The RFP process addresses all three of the problem areas commonly cited by higher education institutions and agency staff members. First, it shows universities that agencies are willing to provide significant support for the academic programs, and it allows universities to demonstrate their own commitment. Second, the process clearly establishes the intent to develop a relevant curriculum with appropriate credit for experiential learning, both prior and sponsored. Third, it provides a means for exploring universities' willingness and ability to tailor their delivery systems to meet the needs of adult full-time workers. Finally, the inclusion of external readers gives the entire process greater credibility and helps spread the news of the program's development.

Building Credibility: The FIPSE Grant. To ensure adequate financing for the project, the AHA began drafting a three-year proposal to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) in October of 1980. FIPSE was chosen because of its strong interest in adult learners, its commitment to innovative approaches, and its credibility among educators.

The lengthy and demanding application process had several extremely important benefits. Most obviously, it led to the receipt, in August of 1981, of a three-year grant. The FIPSE funds allowed the AHA to hire a full-time associate project director and help defray the costs of program consultants, academic advisory group meetings, and staff travel. The grant also has other benefits that are less obvious. The application process provided another

opportunity to involve senior managers in the project. They were asked to read and revise the application draft, and the executive vice-president formally endorsed the final version. The grant commits the AHA to matching financial support for at least three years, and so the project will not have to struggle through the budgeting process during its infancy. Because FIPSE insists on a learner-centered approach, the application produced a document that balanced organizational (AHA) and individual learner goals. This balance is important, because a midmanager trying to influence senior managers inevitably emphasizes organizational benefits; a third party such as FIPSE can help keep the individual student's needs high on the agenda. The application process also encouraged the training staff to research existing literature and interview university and agency staff members throughout the country to establish a strong case for support. This search for a broader and deeper perspective might have been slighted or ignored if the AHA had undertaken the project alone, but, thanks to the research, the AHA has tapped into several informal networks that will be useful as the program grows and expands.

The FIPSE grant increases the project's credibility with several audiences—AHA managers and volunteers, universities, and other voluntary agencies. It is a going concern now, rather than just a good idea.

Recruiting Students. The AHA's initial recruitment strategy combined two purposes—eventual access to an unusual learning opportunity for all staff members and immediate management development for a select pilot group.

All AHA staff members received information in late 1981 that described the pilot program and invited them to apply if they had at least two years of tenure in the AHA. Participation was limited to thirty students, to allow for careful development and revision of the curriculum. The responses indicated the existence of a healthy market, since more than seventy people applied for the first thirty openings. Each person completed a rigorous application process that included nomination and approval by a senior staff member, supervisory ratings in specific management areas, summarization of educational and professional background, and completion of a personal statement about qualifications and goals.

The nominees represented a very promising cross-section of AHA staff—eighteen men and twelve women, with from two to fourteen years' experience and an average of slightly more than five and a half years in the AHA. For twenty-five of the nominees, the baccalaureate was the highest degree, although nine of these nominees also had completed some graduate work. The remaining five had masters' degrees in other fields.

The pilot group began its formal studies in September of 1982. It will receive a conditional loan to subsidize travel expenses. (Coincidentally, the selection of a relatively small pilot group has given the program special visibility within the AHA.) In its second year, 1983, the program will be open to all staff members who meet CMU's admission requirements and have super-

visory approval and at least two years' experience in the AHA. The program will also be open to staff members from other agencies.

The Competency Study: Developing the Curriculum. Perhaps the greatest challenge of this AHA partnership with higher education will be developing a curriculum with outcomes that satisfy not only the needs of the agency and its individual staff members, but also the standards of the university. CMU's willingness to participate in this difficult collaborative process is one of its most outstanding contributions to the partnership. At the stage of curriculum development, the work passed on to the implementors—the CMU faculty and the AHA's associate project director.

The key to the curriculum is the integration of well researched management competencies into specific knowledge areas. To help with this effort, the AHA engaged the services of McBer and Company, a Boston-based research organization. The McBer staff has developed a method for identifying the clusters of skills, traits, and knowledge required for superior management in a wide variety of settings. These might include the abilities to coordinate the planning and organization of work, take calculated risks, speak effectively in formal and informal settings, and similar skills (Boyatzis, 1982).

Raising the Roofbeams: The Future

At least five additional processes must be undertaken to complete the partnership between the AHA and higher education. These are an audit of the AHA's training courses, a study of delivery systems, the development of a national network of universities offering relevant master's degrees, the participation of other agencies in the project, and program evaluation.

Educational Audit. Once the competency study is completed, the AHA will ask a team of educators and practitioners to conduct an educational audit of training courses currently offered through AHA's national center. The audit team will recommend changes in course design and content to meet two objectives. First, students in the training courses should be able to learn the competencies associated with superior management. Second, the students should have the option of completing the courses in a manner that makes them eligible for master's-level college credit. The audit and revisions should be completed by late 1983.

Delivery Systems. CMU and the AHA already have established a flexible delivery system for the pilot group. Four one-week intensive courses offered through CMU will be the program's core, which all students will be required to take. Participants will apply their learning in a field-based setting through one-credit application modules, which follow each core course. Some competencies may be learned and demonstrated best through AHA training courses. Students will also have the option of taking a variety of generic courses at local colleges and universities or through CMU. Finally, CMU allows for a small number of credits through CMU correspondence courses.

In the future, however, methods may be used that are even more flexible. It is now possible for combinations of satellite transmissions, videotaped modules, sophisticated telephone-switching systems, and other new technologies to be applied to parts of the degree program. It is also possible, of course, that traditional face-to-face telephone and correspondence techniques will be cost-effective. Part of the AHA/FIPSE project will be a study to determine the best way of delivering the program during a five-year period.

Additional Colleges and Universities. The AHA actively welcomes the direct involvement of other colleges and universities in the project and has already received several promising proposals. The addition of schools capable of serving a variety of geographical regions is highly desirable and will not only allow students to find local participating institutions but will also eventually create a national network of universities responsive to the needs of voluntary agencies. The addition of each new institution will require a negotiation process similar to that followed by the AHA and CMU.

Other Agencies and Associations. The AHA also hopes that other service agencies will participate in the master's degree program beginning in 1983. In practical terms, the enrollment of students from other organizations will help guarantee a steady flow of program participants who can support regular course offerings on a regional basis. This approach is philosophically congenial, too, since improved management practices throughout the entire independent sector should benefit everyone.

Program Evaluation. Partnerships with higher education require a major investment of time and money from the AHA. Evaluation will be difficult, but not impossible. Crucial questions include:

1. Does the program develop more effective managers? Are participants enhancing their competencies and their knowledge? Are they performing more effectively on the job? Are they moving upward within their organizations?
2. Does the program help retain effective managers? How does the participants' turnover rate compare with that of comparable groups?
3. Do participants believe that the program contributes to personal and professional growth?
4. Does the university partnership contribute substantially to the AHA's goals? Is it cost-effective? Is it providing resources that the AHA cannot reasonably duplicate?
5. Is the university satisfied with the relationship?
6. Is the program attractive to staff members from other agencies?

Conclusions

The idea of partnership between higher education and the third sector is not new. Many small partnerships spring up every year. Those who would be partners must understand, however, that an effective program takes time,

patience, and very careful planning. Institutional support must come from the top and be embedded in the values and the mission of each partner. The partners must come to a clear agreement on the desired outcomes of the curriculum, so that it will meet the demands of practical relevance as well as the demands of academic rigor. Once the mission and the outcomes are known, the partners can creatively explore and move forward to develop the most effective delivery system.

Resources

This is a partial list of the persons who were interviewed on current links between higher education and the voluntary sector:

Randy Anderson
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
California State University

Delwyn Dyer
Director, Center for Volunteer Development
Virginia Polytechnical Institute

Larry Gamm
Association of Voluntary Action Scholars
Pennsylvania State University

Robert Harlan
Executive Vice-President
INDEPENDENT SECTOR

John E. McClusky
Lindenwood 4 (College for Individualized Education)

Alida Mesrop
Dean, College for Human Services (New York City)

Mel Moyer
School of Administrative Studies
York University, Canada

Sarah Jane Rehnborg
President, Association for Volunteer Administration

David Horton Smith
Department of Sociology
Boston College

Professor Barbara E. Stone
Vocational, Adult, and Extension Education
Texas A & M University

Ms. Ardy Trost
Freelance Consultant
State of Washington

Professor John Van Til
Editor, *Voluntary Action Research*
Department of Urban Studies
Rutgers University

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Diana Christopulos is the American Heart Association's national training manager and project director for a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. She holds degrees from Cornell University and the State University of New York at Binghamton, and she has extensive experience both as a college faculty member and as a consultant-trainer for the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning and other organizations. She has been active as a volunteer in the Adirondack Mountain Club and the Houston Network, a clerical workers' group affiliated with the organization, Nine to Five.

Dudley H. Hafner is the national executive vice-president and chief operating officer of the American Heart Association. He has twenty-four years of agency management experience in the nonprofit sector. Educated at the University of Texas at Austin, Northwestern University, and St. Edward's University, he has been a guest lecturer for the Graduate School of Business of the University of Texas at Austin.