

Tips for CVA Study Groups

From Portland, Oregon:

- NOVAA (Northern Oregon Volunteer Administrators Association) advertises the CVA opportunity and offers to host one or two CVA study groups each year. We advertise the opportunity to our members via our monthly newsletter, as well as online on our website, in person at our monthly meetings and in at least one nonprofit-focused listserv in the community.
- Interested volunteer management professionals sign up to attend an informational meeting hosted by our professional development committee in January. At this meeting, we describe the process of obtaining a CVA, organize study group(s) as interest dictates and encourage people to register for their CVA if they have not done so already.
- We recruit one or two NOVAA members to volunteer as Study Group Facilitators for each study group that forms. See attached Study Group Facilitator position description for details on their responsibilities.
- We also recruit a CVA Mentor to serve as a resource to both groups, as well as to any individuals who are studying for the CVA on their own. I have attached their position description as well. Last year, the Mentor and I hosted the informational meeting described above, which I think was effective at convincing our attendees to go for their CVAs.
- Each group handled how they met differently - some groups chose to meet every other week until the test in May; other groups met at a different rate. Both groups developed a schedule for each meeting to show which readings they would cover at each meeting. I think some groups shared responsibility for developing outlines for each reading and shared those with each other and other groups were more discussion-oriented. I don't really think there is a best practice for this as each group is made of different individuals and they did whatever worked best for their people.
- After the test in May, the groups continue to share ideas and help read/edit the written pieces. I know my group did continue to meet, but less often. Other groups do all of the sharing at this point via email.

NOTE: A position description for Study Group Facilitator is provided at the end of this document.

From Virginia and Ohio:

- Conference calls – Remember that candidates can conference in when unable to make a meeting or live too far away.
- Study groups should begin no later than early January. Waiting till March makes it very crammed and means you have to meet more often.
- Everyone needs to commit to reading the assigned material before each meeting.
- It is especially helpful to have someone who has completed the process serve as a leader or facilitator.
- “Reply to All” feature on emails – This feature is not appropriate for all communication, but when several study group members are communicating to set up dates and times, it makes the process occur faster. There’s less “back & forth” from the central facilitator.

Study Group Best Practices

Compiled by Doug Della Pietra

General Considerations for Group Dynamics, Design and Formation:

- Because group chemistry is critical to a group's success, group member selection needs to occur carefully.
- Consider forming study groups based on the projected date of exam – a common element shared among group members that creates shared interest and motivation.
- Create a list of content experts available to study group facilitators to provide assistance, coaching, and answers to questions, issues, problems, etc. raised in study group sessions that can be brought back to the group by the facilitator when the group meets next.
- Use Doodle.com as a meeting scheduling resource.
- Require a written commitment by study group members to minimum requirements to ensure equal and shared participation – a key to successful study groups.
- Create group ground rules to maximize effective listening, sharing, and communication.
Examples:
 - ✓ One person speaks at a time
 - ✓ Wait until other person finishes speaking
 - ✓ Constructively disagree when necessary by offering other solutions/suggestions
 - ✓ Avoid monopolizing; give time for others to share as well
 - ✓ Listening attentively with openness to speaker instead of planning counterpoint
- Use a variety of adult learning methods: visual media; outside speakers; participant presentations and/or participant-led discussions; etc.
- Have a specific goal for each study group meeting and set a written agenda accordingly. Without a written agenda, the group can easily digress into a social group (only or primarily).
- Minimize the inevitable distractions and keep the group focused and away from side topics.
- Use a team-building exercise at each meeting to build group trust, ownership, and engagement.
- Each group member will be responsible for presenting the study material at a group meeting on a set/determined basis so that the expectations are clear before the member commits. The group member should be so well prepared that he/she can answer the bulk of questions posed by the other group members.
- Using Survey Monkey or another survey tool, conduct periodic anonymous surveys to “assess the commitment and effort of each member.”¹

¹ Study Group Best Practices.

Role and Responsibility of Group Members

- Include time for each member to share their individual professional goals and how certification fits with those goals.
- Find ways to make it fun. Use a variety of study techniques to keep the process and experience new, interesting and fresh. Perhaps the study group may wish to write an article, blog, or do a research study and publish it based on a specific topic of group interest.
- Get personal. “When you get to know each member on a personal as well as a professional level, sharing information, views and thoughts on your family, values, hobbies, interests, likes, dislikes and life goals, the group will jell more quickly and function more smoothly.”²
- Take ownership. Although a facilitator is assigned to the study group, it is every member’s responsibility to keep the group focused and to stay on track.
- Rotate roles on a meeting-by-meeting or after-three-meeting, etc. basis. Doing so addresses one of the most challenging pitfalls of study groups, namely, unfairness of work done by group members.³
- Take personal notes during the study group session, send a copy of or type up their notes, and send them to a member of the group acting as the “note-compiler” for that particular study group session. (The “note-compiler” is responsible for compiling all of the notes from group members and emailing them to the group prior to the next meeting.)
- A “study question writer” is appointed to bring 5-10 questions to their assigned meeting. The “study question writer” creates questions based on the upcoming meeting’s material; the questions should be thoughtful and address ideas and processes rather than just facts.⁴

Resources:

Sclafani, Ray. 12 Tips for a Successful Study Group. Practice Management Center. July/August 2011. Accessed on Tuesday, November 20, 2012 at <http://www.fpanet.org/professionals/PracticeManagement/PracticeSolutionsMagazine/JulyAugust2011/12TipsforaSuccessfulStudyGroup/>

Study Group Best Practices: Successful Study Group Best Practices. Breakthru Organization. Accessed on Tuesday, November 20, 2012 at <http://www.georgiabreakthru.org/node/262>.

² Sclafani.

³ Study Group Best Practices.

⁴ Ibid. ⁵ Ibid.

NORTHERN OREGON VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION

Position Title: CVA Study Group Facilitator

Division / Program: Professional Development

Purpose:

NOVAA's professional development committee supports the professional development of local area volunteer management professionals by encouraging members to obtain their certification in volunteer administration (CVA). The professional development committee provides support by introducing local volunteer managers to the CVA process and by forming an annual CVA study group. The CVA Study Group Facilitator is responsible for facilitating the progress of the CVA study group by organizing the group's meeting schedule, communications and assignments.

Essential Job Duties:

- Work with CVA study group members to plan study group meeting schedule and location.
- Lead initial discussion and finalize study group meeting assignments/topics.
- Maintain communication with study group to remind group of meetings, topics and other certification process details.
- Gather and distribute materials that may assist study group (CVA study group notes from past years and successful CVA's management narratives and portfolios).
- With study group participants, develop ground rules, group attendance requirements and assignment requirements for study group.
- If a study group participant does not follow ground rules or does not meet attendance or assignment requirements, the facilitator will notify the participant that they can no longer participate in the group.

Required knowledge, skills, and abilities:

- Currently seeking CVA and desire to participate in the CVA study group.
- Strong organizational skills.
- Attention to detail.
- Excellent communication skills.
- Strong leadership/facilitation skills and good follow-through.
- Commitment to profession of volunteer management and the CVA process.

Time Commitment:

Preparation for and attendance at CVA study group meetings (to be determined by study group). In the past, study groups have met 2 to 4 times monthly February – May and less frequently during the rest of the year.

Training Provided: *On-the-job training*

Receives Guidance From / Reports To: *Professional Development Co-Chair.*