

Evaluation Report:

**Volunteer Managers/Workers
Training and Networking Sessions**

March 9 and 10, 2011

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Volunteer Managers/Workers Training and Networking Sessions

Summary

The Volunteer Managers/Workers Training and Networking Session was an exceptional meeting for PAN members. At the session, volunteer managers:

- created a feeling of community amongst themselves
- were very highly engaged in learning and networking and
- post-training, gave this session an extremely high rating

The Volunteer Managers/Workers proposed that there be a continuation of the connections established at the training session. Indeed, follow-up emails and information have already been circulated among the group. Besides their volunteer management work, many of the participants have multiple program responsibilities at their agencies.

Some participants indicated they did their volunteer management “from the side of their desks.” These managers/workers were looking for support and information from their colleagues; they clearly indicated that they had received both.

Both the design and structure of the meeting were effective in promoting the sharing of knowledge and also in providing the needed networking opportunities. As one participant summed things up:

“Very enjoyable. I gained lots of new knowledge. The best conference yet.”

Background

The Pacific AIDS Network (PAN) is a provincial association whose members – fifty community-based organizations and allied agencies – are devoted to addressing the care, treatment, support and prevention-education needs of persons living with HIV/AIDS; persons co-infected with HCV; and persons at-risk for infection. PAN supports its member organizations by providing training to their staff members and volunteers.

On March 9 and 10, 2011, 20 participants and 5 (some presented more than once) presenters met for the first ever PAN training that was focussed solely on the needs of volunteer managers/workers. The meeting design was based on previously collected input from PAN members, including executive directors and volunteer managers/workers. The meeting utilized the skills of experienced facilitators and presenters Marc Sequin, Quinn Bennett and Leslie

Robinson, each of whom is also a volunteer manager in a British Columbia AIDS Service Organization. The sessions covered a range of topics and allowed for lots of participation. The topics included:

- *Critical and emerging issues of interest for the sector/practice.* Roundtable discussion facilitated by Leslie Robinson, AIDS Vancouver Island and Stacy Leblanc, PAN
- *The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement.* Presented by Cari Moore, Canadian Administrators of Volunteer Resources, British Columbia
- *Engaging PHA Volunteers.* Presented by Marc Sequin, BCPWA and Quinn Bennett
- *“I think We Might Be On To Something” – Sharing best practices.* Roundtable discussion facilitated by Jennifer Evin Jones and Stacy Leblanc, PAN
- *Too Much of a Good Thing: Creating Boundaries for Volunteers.* Presented by Steve McCurley, Volunteer Management Consultant
- *Identifying and Managing Risks in Volunteer Programs.* Presented by Steve McCurley, Volunteer Management Consultant.
- *Closing Roundtable.* Facilitated by Marc Sequin, BCPWA and Stacy Leblanc, PAN

During the two-day session, ample non-program time was allowed for the volunteer managers/workers to network and discuss issues of importance to them.

This evaluation report is based on interviews with participants as well as their evaluation reports, and also on personal observation of the sessions. The data include:

- Responses from five face-to-face interviews with participants were based on a series of standardized questions. These interviews provide a wealth of feedback for session organizers: one-on-one conversations provide the opportunity to explain ideas/thoughts and to offer a greater depth of analysis. The interviewees were chosen at random from the session registration list. Interviews ran between 15 and 45 minutes.
- Responses from 18 participants who filled in evaluation forms.

What the Volunteer Manager/Workers Said

Why they came?

- According to the PAN evaluation forms, 72% of the volunteer managers/workers came to learn new skills that would make them more effective. The second most-noted reason for coming was to network/meet new people.

What was the result of coming to this session?

- All the participants (100%) agreed that their knowledge about HIV/AIDS, HIV/HCV co-infection and related issues increased to some degree. However, 30 % of the participants indicated only a moderate increase in their knowledge. This is not surprising considering the extensive prior experience of many of the participants.
- All the participants (100%) agreed that they made meaningful connections with their peers. In fact, the small size of the group and a session design that encouraged interaction resulted in a 94 % 'highest rating' for having made meaningful connections.
- All the participants (100%) agreed that they will use what they learned at this conference in their paid/volunteer work.
- All the participants (100%) agreed that they plan to use what they learned from this conference in their everyday lives.

Were they satisfied with the organization of the session?

- 100 % of the respondents were satisfied with how the agenda/meeting was structured
- 100% of the respondents were satisfied with the atmosphere of the meeting

How did the Volunteer Managers/Workers rate this PAN session?

- 100% of the respondents gave the conference a high rating, with 83% of the respondents giving the conference the highest rating possible

Three comments from participants illustrate the general highly-favourable response to the sessions:

“Excellent training. As always, you both have done an excellent job at preparing and delivering a great training for the community. Thanks!!”

“Very applicable and impeccable timing for our organization.”

“Really enjoyed the two days – covered lots and lots. I always desire more time to go deeper into topics that is available. Thank you!”

What other topics/subjects would you as a Volunteer Manager/Worker like to see covered at future PAN sessions?

Participants offered many and varied suggestions for future topics to be covered at PAN conferences; PAN session/conference planners have been sent the complete list to aid in future planning. Below are the suggestions that related directly to volunteer management:

- Social media training: Using Face book and Twitter to connect with members, the public and volunteers. *(This topic was suggested ten times)*
- More detailed information on how volunteer management works
- Learning through examples from other organizations
- Workshop on cultural sensitivity – offering ideas about different practices such as gifts, body language and language
- Mental health – front line, volunteer management and point-of-contact
- Volunteer evaluations
- Dealing with ‘difficult’ volunteers
- Concrete information on how to get and keep effective volunteers
- A discussion around how to manage volunteer programs and work with other volunteer coordinators
- Recruitment

Other comments/ideas you would like to tell us?

“This is the only way to connect with others doing this work, which can be very isolating”

“PAN allows access to some training that [I] wouldn’t otherwise get”

“Really grateful – it was really informative to me coming from a rural area”

Conclusion

This training session was very successful. From informal discussions, Volunteer managers/workers believed that the PAN strategy of having targeted trainings proved really effective for them. At the end of the two days there was a palpable sense of achievement and an increased desire to continue learning to become better volunteer managers. As one volunteer manager stated,

“We have an opportunity to build on this first session”