



Council for
**Certification in
Volunteer
Administration**

Tips for Leading a CVA Exam Study Group

Thank you for your interest in CVA Exam Study Groups!

The Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA) wants to help volunteer engagement professionals spread the word about our shared profession and grow the global community of CVAs.

By leading a CVA Study Group, you can help others prepare for the CVA Exam. Learn about the exam, deadlines, cost and more on the [CCVA website](https://ccva.org). You can attend a free information session by signing up at cvacert.org/info. Read on for tips to help get your Study Group started!

WHY SHOULD YOU LEAD A CVA EXAM STUDY GROUP?

- Grow the community of Certified in Volunteer Administration (CVA) professionals.
- Help encourage your peers in their professional growth.
- Meet new people.
- Make helpful connections and build a community of practice.
- Give back and help others in a flexible way.
- Keep yourself refreshed and up to date on the latest promising practices.
- Learn how others engage volunteers in different settings.

Goals and Ground Rules

GOALS OF A CVA EXAM STUDY GROUP

A CVA Study Group helps participants build confidence by reminding them they're already skilled professionals, and that an exam doesn't define their value. It's a chance to encourage everyone to participate, learning from each other's unique contexts. Through practice questions, the group can explore best practices together.



Jared Peer, CVA, a Study Group co-leader in Tennessee, advises: “Pick the answer that can't be wrong, not the one that works for your context.” Most importantly, study groups are a space to have fun and learn together.

STARTING RIGHT → SETTING GROUND RULES AND BOUNDARIES

Set ground rules and boundaries for your Study Group. You can create these with participants, or define them ahead of time. Examples include:

- We support every journey towards the CVA Exam and beyond. Everyone's unique experience is valid and welcome.
- We will start and end on time.
- We believe in API (“assume positive intent”).
- We believe in confidentiality and privacy about CVA Exam results. You can share your results or not - that's up to you.
- We support each study group participant with positive encouragement and kind, constructive criticism.
- We create a safe space, and we encourage open and active listening. We encourage asking questions for clarification and then listening some more.

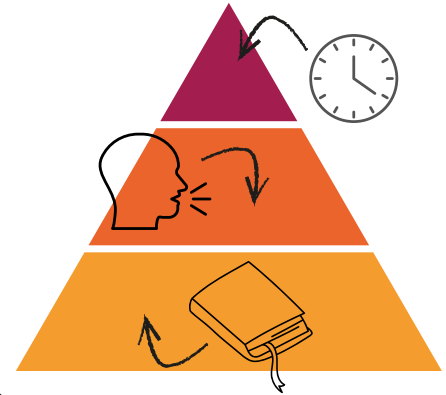
Remember to ask your study group participants if there is something they would like to add to the ground rules or boundaries.

Planning and Structure

If you want to lead a CVA Study Group, you should be a CVA yourself. Your experience preparing for and passing the exam is a helpful starting point.

TIMING AND STRUCTURE

It takes up to 6 months to properly plan and be ready to run a study group! Make sure you give yourself enough time. Study Groups usually take place in the 2 to 3 months leading up to the exam. **Also consider costs, like a fee for webinar technology or room booking, as you plan.**



Study Groups work best when structured around discussions. It can be helpful if each discussion is led by a guest facilitator, ideally a CVA.

POINTERS FOR DISCUSSIONS

- Host weekly or biweekly discussions, with the last discussion the week before the exam period.
- Aim for a 1 hour discussion. For virtual meetings, record for those who can't make it (optional).
- Set times that work for the facilitator, or use a free scheduling tool like [Doodle](#) to find a time that works for everyone.
- Use ground rules to move the conversation along, encourage open listening, and avoid individuals monopolizing the space.

ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS

In addition to a guest facilitator for each discussion, you might want to find other Study Group leaders to help you send emails/reminders, plan discussions, and coordinate facilitators. **Invite past study group participants to share words of wisdom as well.**

TOOLS

Consider using tools to help you succeed. Share copies of resources, either in-person or on an online hub (like a social media group, [Google Drive](#) folder, or [Discord](#) channel). If you're doing online discussions, consider options like [Zoom](#) or [Microsoft Teams](#). For in-person discussions, think about whether you or another volunteer will take notes.

Study Group Content 1/3

1 REVIEW THE LATEST CCVA MATERIALS

The [resources page of the CCVA website](#) provides the latest materials for exam preparation, including the Body of Knowledge & Competency Framework, CCVA Core Values and Principles, the Ethical Decision Making Process & Worksheet, and the updated Candidate Handbook. We strongly suggest you attend a free [information session](#) and a free [Ethics session](#), too.

2 CHOOSE YOUR STUDY MATERIALS

Some Study Groups follow along with the CCVA textbook ([Volunteer Administration, Professional Practice](#)), going chapter-by-chapter. Other groups use the 7 competencies from the [Body of Knowledge](#). Remember to also explore ethics.

REMEMBER: The textbook is not required reading for the CVA exam -- it is not a memorization exam -- but the textbook can be a helpful tool to guide discussions.

3 GATHER YOUR RESOURCES

If you're using the textbook, encourage participants to acquire a digital or physical copy. They may know a CVA who already has one to share! Many public libraries carry the textbook.

If you're following the competencies, look for 2-4 resources for each competency that provide a range of perspectives and summaries on the relevant topics. This can help get everyone on the same page around the tasks under each competency. You can use the ALIVE [Resource Vault](#), [Energize](#) as well as the [Ellis Archive](#) as potential starting points to find resources.

*In the **Appendix** (p. 8), you'll find a list of free resources that connect to each competency, and a guide to connecting textbook chapters to the competencies.*

These resources provide a starting point for Study Group participants to discuss and share their approaches. Since everyone has a unique way to engage volunteers, Study Groups are a great way to learn about and land on the "most right answer" out of the options.

Study Group Content 2/3

4 PLAN DISCUSSIONS

Prepare a slide deck for each discussion, so the facilitator has a clear process to follow. Here's a suggested approach for the agenda of each discussion:

- Brief facilitator introduction
- Summary of key concepts from the chapter(s) or competencies being discussed
- A few slides on specific topic areas aligned with key concepts
- Create discussion questions or simple scenarios relevant to the topic. Explore the [CCVA Sample Questions](#) as a group, choosing questions that align with the topic. Ask participants to choose what they think is the right answer, then discuss what to look for in choosing the right answer.

This can be a lot to cover in a single discussion. Rely on your facilitators to create a manageable amount of content to explore.

[We have a slide template](#) you can use as a starting point. It includes a brief summary of each competency, an example scenario or discussion question for each competency, and one of the CCVA Sample Questions.

Edit them for your needs and use in each discussion.



5 PROVIDE EXAM-TAKING TIPS

Many Study Group participants - like most CVA candidates - will be concerned about the actual exam-writing experience. **It can be helpful to provide exam-writing tips regularly throughout the study group: in emails, in your resource space, and in the discussions themselves.**

You want to reassure study group participants about the exam experience, but also be honest about how it went for new CVAs. Compile tips from CVAs in your network, and you can always ask the CCVA for helpful tips as well. Check out [more exam-taking tips here](#).

Study Group Content 3/3

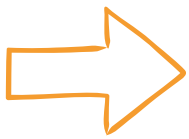
6 PLAN EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS IN ADVANCE

After you've planned everything out, write out all emails to study group participants in advance. This way you can quickly send out reminders to participants each week.

Include topic and discussion reminders, along with exam tips and links to resources.

7 CELEBRATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

At your final session, **celebrate the group's achievement**. You have all supported each other and are more prepared for the exam. It's a moment to **recognize everyone's efforts** in volunteer leadership. After the exam, invite participants to reconnect, **share experiences**, and support one another, whether they passed or not. **Remember, a participant not passing doesn't reflect on you or the group**. Exams can be tough, and sometimes it takes more than one try.



This is also a good time to recognize the volunteers who helped your Study Group succeed. Acknowledge their time with a certificate or letter that notes the number of hours they contributed (which they can use toward CVA renewal).

EXTRA IDEAS

- Engage a CVA mentor as a resource to help people build comfort with the exam process. Find a mentor by connecting with the CCVA's Executive Director and learn about CVAs in your community.
- Provide or link to small readings for each discussion; give everyone a starting point for the discussion.
- Celebrate members who pass after each study group, and learn what they liked most. A post-exam connection point can help you collect feedback.
- Send formal congratulations to those who pass. This is an opportunity to highlight opportunities to connect, share knowledge, or volunteer for your next Study Group.
- Encourage each Study Group member to make a short video about their experience to help others ([see this resource to learn more](#)).

Troubleshooting

These troubleshooting pointers are based on real-life Study Group challenges:



What happens if someone doesn't pass?

This is not a reflection on you or your Study Group. It's up to each participant to prepare for the exam in the way that works for them. The exam is difficult and not everyone passes on the first or additional attempt. Encourage participants to keep trying and consider inviting participants back to attend the next Study Group.



What happens if someone misses the exam window?

The CVA exam is offered twice a year on April 1-14 and October 1-14.

Remind participants about the application and payment deadlines, and to complete the online Trial Test in the weeks before the exam.

If a participant misses (or will miss) the exam window, they must contact CCVA directly: execdir@cvacert.org.

Study Groups are focused on the studying experience - CCVA administers the exam independently from Study Groups.



What if study group participants don't end up taking the exam?

That's fine! Sometimes people join a Study Group to evolve their skills, learn about the exam preparation process, or even just build a community practice. Every voice increases the value of the Study Group (and the range of experiences represented), and those participants may come back when they intend to take the exam.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Study Groups who shared their wisdom for this guide:

- [ALIVE](#) - Led by [Sherrill Isenhower, CVA](#), [Lynn Lauritzen, CVA](#), and [Rosemary Badger, CVA](#)
- [PAVRO & Volunteer Toronto](#) - Led by [Sammy Feilchenfeld, CVA](#) and [Heather Johnson, CVA](#)
- [DOVIA Tennessee](#) - Led by [Sidney Enss, CVA](#) and [Jared Peer, CVA](#)
- [Katie Campbell, CVA](#), who put together an [earlier guide](#) for Study Groups.

Appendix

Example Resources to Use and Share

- Plan for Strategic Volunteer Engagement – [Article on the Strategic Value of Volunteers, Planning and Policy Development Video](#)
- Advocate for Volunteer Involvement – [Article on Rethinking Language](#), [Article on Staff Buy-In](#)
- Attract and Onboard a Volunteer Workforce – [List of Recruitment Guides](#), [Recruitment and Selection Video](#)
- Prepare Volunteers for the Role – [Article on Equipping Volunteers to Serve](#), [Article on the Risk Management Process](#)
- Document Volunteer Involvement – [Resource on Privacy & Data Security](#), [Article on Volunteer Program Budgets](#)
- Manage Volunteer Performance and Impact – [Article on Empowering Motivation](#), [Article on Firing Volunteers](#)
- Acknowledge, Celebrate & Sustain Volunteer Involvement – [Article on Investing in Volunteers](#), [Resource for Satisfaction Surveys](#)
- Ethics – [Article on Ethics and Risk](#), [Article on “Uncivil Society”](#)

The Seven Competencies and Ethics

(chapters cited from textbook, fourth edition)

1. Plan for Strategic Volunteer Engagement – **Chapters 1, 2, and 4**
2. Advocate for Volunteer Involvement – **Chapters 5, 13**
3. Attract and Onboard a Volunteer Workforce – **Chapters 6, 7**
4. Prepare Volunteers for the Role – **Chapter 12**
5. Document Volunteer Involvement – **Chapters 9, 10**
6. Manage Volunteer Performance and Impact – **Chapter 11**
7. Acknowledge, Celebrate & Sustain Volunteer Involvement – **Chapters 8, 14**
8. Ethics – **Chapters 3, 7**

