

CANDIDATE HANDBOOK



Council for
**Certification in
Volunteer
Administration**

Our Vision

A world where competent, passionate leaders
effectively engage volunteers.

Our Mission

To advance excellence in volunteer administration by
delivering professional certification
and advocating for ethical practice.

cvacert.org

2026-2027 Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration.
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SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CVA CREDENTIAL

Leaders in nonprofit, government and community organizations increasingly understand that volunteers can be a critical strategic resource for delivering on a mission. Effective people management is imperative – whether they be paid or unpaid. As a result, employers and leaders expect that those individuals tasked with mobilizing and coordinating volunteer engagement demonstrate a thorough knowledge of effective practices and an understanding of how to apply that knowledge in support of real-world organizational priorities.

The Certification in Volunteer Administration (CVA) is an international professional credential in the field of volunteer resources management. Sponsored by the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA), this credential recognizes practitioners who meet specified standards as measured through an examination developed by their peers. Successful candidates who earn the credential may use the designation “CVA.” An international CVA registry is maintained and publicly available on the CCVA web site.

Unlike certificate programs that involve classes or courses, the CVA is a competency-based professional certification program. Intended for those with a strong foundation in volunteer administration, it is a self-study program that measures an individual’s “knowledge-in-use” —the application of knowledge and skills as documented by a current competency framework. The certification process includes an assessment of a candidate’s ability to structure tasks, process ideas, and solve problems related to volunteer engagement.

CCVA also promotes the ethical standards for volunteer resources management as stated in [Professional Ethics in Volunteer Administration](#) and views these values and principles as an essential part of one’s competence in the field. Candidates for the CVA credential are required to affirm their intent to uphold these ethical standards.

CCVA is governed by a board of individuals with extensive experience in the field of volunteerism and volunteer resources management.

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION CONT'D

THE CCVA BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES

CCVA periodically conducts a Job Analysis study to ensure the body of knowledge remains current and relevant. Validated by hundreds of practitioners globally, the 2025 Job Analysis confirmed the following seven competencies necessary to develop, support and sustain volunteer involvement:

A - Plan for Strategic Volunteer Engagement

1. Assess organizational needs and opportunities
2. Promote organizational readiness (e.g., commitment, capacity, competency)
3. Explore and consider similar programs and services for strategic insight
4. Align goals and objectives with organization strategic plans and mission
5. Develop policies and procedures in alignment with organization values and ethics
6. Develop supporting tools and resources
7. Confirm that volunteers are integrated into organization risk management plans
8. Establish benchmarks
9. Design evaluation plan
10. Implement evaluation plan

B - Advocate for Volunteer Involvement

11. Design communication plan
12. Implement communication plan
13. Evaluate communication plan
14. Inform stakeholders of volunteer opportunities
15. Engage stakeholders in promoting volunteer opportunities
16. Support the ongoing development of volunteers as advocates
17. Advocate for, and communicate the impact of, volunteers and volunteer services
18. Build and maintain stakeholder and partner relationships
19. Create and sustain pathways for collaboration

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION CONT'D

THE CCVA BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES CONT'D

C- Attract and Onboard a Volunteer Workforce

20. Identify current needs for volunteers
21. Develop volunteer position descriptions
22. Develop measurable outcomes for volunteer roles
23. Design recruitment strategy
24. Implement recruitment strategy
25. Evaluate recruitment strategies
26. Respond to volunteer inquiries
27. Select applicants for interviews
28. Conduct applicant interviews
29. Complete appropriate screening processes
30. Match applicant with assignments
31. Evaluate placement of volunteers

D - Prepare Volunteers for their Roles

32. Develop orientation and training plans
33. Design orientation
34. Complete orientation
35. Evaluate orientation
36. Provide role-specific training
37. Provide training and development to support volunteers' skills and abilities
38. Evaluate training

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION CONT'D

THE CCVA BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES CONT'D

E – Volunteer Involvement

- 39. Obtain permission to collect, use, and share personally identifiable information as required by law
- 40. Establish secure storage for volunteer records
- 41. Create volunteer records
- 42. Maintain volunteer records
- 43. Archive, destroy, or delete volunteer records
- 44. Verify ongoing eligibility
- 45. Generate statistical reports on volunteer services
- 46. Contribute to budget process
- 47. Monitor resources that support volunteer engagement
- 48. Provide information to support funding requests
- 49. Maintain partnership agreements
- 50. Maintain stakeholder and partnership records

F – Manage Volunteer Performance and Impact

- 51. Train and support staff to interact with volunteers
- 52. Monitor progress on volunteer performance objectives
- 53. Delegate tasks to volunteers
- 54. Supervise volunteers
- 55. Coach volunteers
- 56. Conduct volunteer performance reviews
- 57. Provide feedback to volunteers
- 58. Implement corrective action procedures
- 59. Conduct exit interviews/surveys

G – Acknowledge, Celebrate and Sustain Volunteer Involvement

- 60. Develop recognition plan
- 61. Implement recognition plan
- 62. Evaluate recognition plan
- 63. Develop retention and succession plan
- 64. Assess volunteer satisfaction
- 65. Implement and monitor retention plan
- 66. Evaluate and monitor retention plan
- 67. Provide references for volunteers

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION CONT'D

THE VALUE OF CVA CERTIFICATION

Certification offers credibility. CCVA is the only international entity that offers a professional credential for volunteer administrators. Certification serves as a third-party endorsement of knowledge and experience against industry standards in volunteer administration.

Certification can improve career opportunities and advancement. The CVA can give practitioners the advantage when being considered for promotion and career opportunities. The CVA clearly identifies those who have demonstrated mastery of volunteer administration principles based on accepted best practices.

Certification demonstrates a high level of commitment to the field of volunteer administration. The CVA is a clear indicator to employers and the community of an investment in one's own professional development.

Certification strengthens the profession's image. The CVA credential demonstrates a commitment to competence by employers and makes one stand out as a role model in the profession.

Certification = achievement. CVA certification requires the demonstration of experience and implementation of best practices as well as adherence to the highest ethical standards in volunteer administration.

Certification increases or validates skills and knowledge. Achieving the CVA requires a commitment to study and self-reflection. Re-certification is required every 5 years, ensuring that CVAs pursue continuing competency through education and experiential learning.

Certification builds self-esteem. The CVA inspires increased confidence in the volunteer administrator's core competencies.

Certification offers recognition from colleagues. CVA certification demonstrates leadership, and taking the extra step in one's professional career is respected by colleagues.

Certification supports continued professional development. Re-certification requires continued learning and development, and rewards the mentoring of others in the profession.

Certification offers international networking opportunities. The CVA designation provides a highly visible vehicle for peers to connect and network with one another.

SECTION 2: APPLYING FOR THE EXAM

EXAM ELIGIBILITY

In order to be eligible to take the CVA exam, applicants must detail educational and work experience at the time they submit their application.

1. On the CCVA Application form, applicants must document their volunteer engagement experience, any education related to volunteer engagement and how they have demonstrated a minimum of 5 of the 7 competencies from the Body of Knowledge and Competencies. This experience may be in paid or non-paid positions or a combination of both.
2. Applicants must also submit a current resume.
3. The final requirement of the application is **one** letter of professional recommendation from a supervisor, colleague, or current CVA who is familiar with the applicant's recent work with volunteers. The reference letter should include the following:
 - Brief summary of the relationship to or history with the applicant
 - Brief description of two to three specific examples of the candidate's effectiveness as a leader and manager of volunteer engagement
 - Include contact information for the author of the letter or a letterhead
 - The letter must be signed and not exceed two pages.

Note: Any eligible individual from any country may apply for the CVA exam. However, at this time CCVA only publishes the CVA exam in English.

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Make your payment on the CCVA website
2. Complete the CVA Application found on the CCVA website
3. Upload your resume in the application form
4. Upload your letter of recommendation in the application form

SECTION 2: APPLYING FOR THE EXAM CONT'D

APPLICATION DEADLINES & EXAM WINDOWS

There are two exam windows during the year when the CVA exam is offered.

Applications are accepted on a continual basis, however there is a deadline for each exam window. Applicants apply for the exam in the window that they intend to take the exam. Applications received after the testing deadline will be held for the next exam window.

April Exam

Application Deadline: March 1

Exam Period: April 1-14

October Exam

Application Deadline: September 1

Exam Period: October 1-14

INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS

Exam applicants who do not send all the required information and materials will receive one email outlining what information is missing. The missing information must be submitted in order for the application to be complete and ready for consideration. Applications submitted after the application deadline for a specific exam window will be held for the next window unless a late fee is paid.

APPLICATION DENIALS

An application will not be accepted, and/or the candidate's authorization to test may be denied or revoked, for any of the following reasons:

- Failure to meet the minimum eligibility requirements.
- Application is incomplete
- Falsification of information on the application.
- Misrepresentation of work experience or other information on the application.

SECTION 2: APPLYING FOR THE EXAM CONT'D

CURRENT EXAM FEES

All fees are in US Dollars. Payments can be made via credit card on the CVA website payment page.

The current exam fee is \$400.

For CVA Candidates who are taking the exam again in the period that immediately follows an unsuccessful attempt. The exam fee is \$125.

For CVAs who are taking the exam to obtain credit towards renewal, the exam fee is \$125.

There will be a late fee of \$50 for the following occurrences:

- Applications received after an application deadline and before the end of an exam session. For example, after September 1 but before October 14.
- Retest requests received after an application deadline and before an exam session. For example, after September 1 but before October 14.

REFUNDS

Fees are non-transferable between individuals and refunds are only provided to exam candidates as follows:

- Full refund if the application is not successful
- Refund less \$100 for application fees prior to the application deadline
- Refund less \$50 for exam resit fees prior to the application deadline

No refunds are issued once the application deadline has passed.

DATA CONFIDENTIALITY

Certification applications and candidates' performance on the CVA exam shall remain confidential unless otherwise stipulated by the candidate or as required by law. The exception to this is the published Registry of CVAs that is made available to the public on the CCVA website. This statement does not preclude the publication of any CVAs name against whom disciplinary action has been taken.

SECTION 3: APPEALS

APPEALS

CCVA is committed to allowing applicants and candidates the opportunity to appeal decisions during the professional credentialing process. The Appeals Committee is responsible for handling all appeals and requests for refunds in a confidential, timely and fair manner. The party of last resort will be the CCVA Board of Directors. All appeals must be submitted in writing to CCVA within 30 days of notification of denial of authorization to test, or receipt of exam results. CCVA will acknowledge receipt of all appeals in writing within 30 days of receipt of appeal unless otherwise notified. All appeals are confidential.

CCVA will attempt to resolve all appeals within 60 days of receipt of appeal, and will communicate the decision in writing to the candidate. Upon receiving written a request from the candidate, staff will forward the file to the Appeals Committee, maintaining the confidentiality of the candidate's name. If the candidate has requested a hearing with the Committee, the Committee may conduct such a hearing via conference call. The Committee's decision will then be sent to the candidate in writing.

If a resolution is not reached, the decision will be referred to the CCVA Board of Directors. Upon receiving a written request from the candidate, staff will forward the file to the Board of Directors, maintaining the confidentiality of the candidate's name. If the candidate has requested a hearing with the Board, the Board may conduct such a hearing via conference call.

The Board's decision will then be sent to the candidate in writing and their decision will be final.

SECTION 4: PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

EXAM CONTENT

The CCVA exam is comprised of questions that assume the exam taker has a minimum of three years of experience managing volunteers. The exam contains 100 multiple choice questions which are scored. It will also include 15 additional unscored questions which are being tested for validity for future exams. Candidates will not know which questions are unscored.

The CVA Exam is based on the CCVA Body of Knowledge and Competency and is made up of these types of questions:

Knowledge - Knowledge questions recognize specific information and facts that do not vary by situation. Such questions are predominantly an effort of memory and include the recall of specific facts, generalizations, concepts, and procedures.

Application - Application questions require comprehension, interpretation, or manipulation of concepts or data. They primarily test simple interpretations or applications of limited data. Questions may require recognition of more than one element or concept and the ability to apply knowledge to a specific situation.

All questions are equally weighted. All questions are multiple-choice, and candidates are expected to select the best answer from among the four options given. All questions relate to the competency areas which were described previously.

NOTE: The questions on the CVA exam include several different job titles, including

“Volunteer Administrator”, “Manager of Volunteers”, “Director of Volunteer Resources”, and “Volunteer Coordinator.” This is intended to represent the wide variety of titles used in this profession. For the purposes of this exam, these job titles are used interchangeably, and do not refer to specific levels of responsibility or authority.

SECTION 4: PREPARING FOR THE EXAM CONT'D

EXAM DURATION and FORMAT

The CVA exam is administered by computer by CCVA's testing vendor, YouTestMe. Candidates have a two-week testing window and may take the test at any time during this period at the location of their choice. Proctoring is conducted through the candidate's computer camera.

Candidates for the CVA exam have up to 2 hours and 15 minutes to complete the test. The test must be completed in one sitting.

EQUIPMENT CHECK and TRIAL TEST

Prior to the testing window, candidates will be sent a link via email to complete an Equipment Check and a Trial Test. This step is required of all candidates.

The purpose of the Equipment Check is to test the technical specifications of the computer, microphone, camera and network connection each candidate is using. Candidates are responsible for providing their own equipment and will need their own reliable network connection.

The Trial Test is a set of questions unrelated to the actual CVA exam that allow candidates to experience the testing software and how questions will be presented.

THE PROCTORING EXPERIENCE

Your exam is proctored through a sound and video recording which is created as you take the exam. The software is really sensitive and will alert you when there are any slight changes to the environment as detected by the software. This is bound to happen when taking an exam if you shift in your chair or look away from the screen or even read questions aloud to yourself. It can be stressful to see an alert while you are taking the exam. If you are not doing anything wrong, you do not need to worry. During your Trial Test, cough or speak aloud so you can see what an alert will look like. Our Executive Director is the individual that views the footage of your exam. If there are any alerts, they will be able to verify that they are simply you just taking the exam and not an indication of any cheating.

SECTION 4: PREPARING FOR THE EXAM CONT'D

THE PROCTORING EXPERIENCE CONT'D

Here is a testimonial from a recent CVA on their experience with the exam,

“My name is Sammy Feilchenfeld, Manager, Learning at Volunteer Toronto. As a trainer for volunteer managers, I was confident about my preparation for the exam questions. However, as a person living with Tourette Syndrome, I was anxious about the exam-writing experience using the proctoring tool. Specifically, my twitches can cause my head to turn, and I was uncertain about how the tool would react to me not staring straight ahead for the entire exam. It was helpful to know that the exam was not being “live proctored” – instead, Faiza was reviewing the video after exams were completed. In the exam itself, however, there is a small circle with the camera view of my face which would turn red whenever I looked anywhere but straight ahead, or if there were sounds in the background. Despite my nervousness, this wasn’t triggered as often as I thought. I stayed focused on the questions, made sure to turn off my second computer screen entirely and found that everything went smoothly. Even though the circle turned red a couple times, I didn’t let it bother me and kept focusing on reading and answering the questions. After the exam was done, I realized I was more nervous about the proctoring tool than the questions, but it turned out to be a much smoother experience than I expected! Don’t let the little circle bother you – stay focused on the questions and you’ll do great too!”

CANDIDATE SUPPORT

CCVA offers a number of resources to support CVA candidates while they pursue certification. Current candidates are encouraged to visit the Resources section of the website to find information about these resources.

CVA Self-Assessment: CCVA offers a free Self-Assessment tool to all CVA candidates, available on the CCVA website. This is a self-study process and many candidates find it helpful to start by evaluating their level of knowledge and experience with each competency area. This can be a useful step to identify gaps in experience and knowledge to better understand where a candidate will benefit from additional reading or training.

SECTION 4: PREPARING FOR THE EXAM CONT'D

CANDIDATE SUPPORT CONT'D

CCVA Facebook and LinkedIn pages: Use these as a way to connect with current candidates and those who are already certified. Cheer each other on, ask questions, share your study tips, etc.

Individual Support: Many candidates find it helpful to talk with a CVA who has already completed the credentialing process, or another current candidate. If you want assistance in connecting with those in your geographic area, or in similar types of settings, please contact the CCVA office at execdir@cvacert.org prior to the application deadline.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

The CVA exam is designed to assess the candidate's ability to apply the concepts of effective practice, rather than the memorization of information learned through direct study of any particular book or reference. ***A sample of recommended (not required) resources are listed here:***

- Volunteer Administration: Professional Practice (any edition). Current 4th edition is available [HERE](#).
- Ellis, Susan. From the Top Down. (1996) and e-Volunteerism – The Electronic Journal of the Volunteer Community
Both are available from: www.energizeinc.com/store/
- Professional Ethics in Volunteer Administration
 - Free and online at <https://cvacert.org/professional-ethics/>

SECTION 4: PREPARING FOR THE EXAM CONT'D

SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS

Several sample questions are provided on the CVA website [Resources](#) page.

These will provide a sense of the format of CVA exam questions. Please note they are not intended as a study tool related to exam content, nor as an indicator of exam success.

Please note: These are the only sample questions endorsed by the CCVA.

STUDY GROUPS

Study groups can be self organized by candidates. There is a great deal of benefit to studying with others, especially those who work in a variety of settings and organizations. Anyone can organize a study group. Usually two types of information are shared in study groups:

- Topic information from reference materials
- Informal study tips, support and general assistance

Virtual study groups have proven to be very successful in the past. Identify others preparing for the examination who are willing to share ideas and information and to provide support by social media, video conference, phone or email. Even though you are separated by distance, this can work effectively.

From time to time, CCVA partners may operate study groups. CCVA does not operate any study groups but we encourage you to form a local study group if there are others in your organization or community preparing for the examination. Invite other colleagues or members of your local professional association to apply and go through the credentialing process with you.

SECTION 5: TAKING THE EXAM

The CVA exam will be administered by online proctoring. You will have a two-week window within which to complete your exam, anytime any day. Your exam must be completed without interruption in one sitting during a 2 hour and 15 minute period.

LANGUAGE

The CVA exam is currently only available in English.

NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

Sharing information can be a good thing, but not when it comes to examination content. When you take a CCVA exam, you agree to not disclose information in any format about exam questions and answers. This includes talking publicly about exam items in classes, on message boards, and/ or social media (e.g., Facebook). It also includes discussing exam material privately with your friends, clients, students, colleagues, supervisors, mentors, or coaches.

An exam session will last 2 hours and 15 minutes. At the beginning of the exam, candidates have up to five minutes to agree to the Nondisclosure Agreement. If candidates do not agree to the Nondisclosure Agreement, they are not allowed to take the exam and also forfeit the exam fee. Please review the Nondisclosure Agreement (below) prior to taking the CVA exam.

EXAM IRREGULARITIES

In accordance with CCVA's Professional Ethics Statement and the CCVA Certification Application, it is the policy of CCVA that any candidate or proctor who possesses, receives, or transmits examination materials in violation of the Test Guidelines is considered in breach of CCVA Certification policy. Such actions are strictly forbidden. This policy covers the time period before the examination and on-site during the examination and includes examination questions and materials in any form

SECTION 5: TAKING THE EXAM CONT'D

Nondisclosure Agreement for CCVA Examinations

This examination is confidential and is protected by trade secrets law. It is made available to you, the examinee, solely for the purpose of becoming Certified in Volunteer Administration. You understand, acknowledge, and agree:

- That the questions and answers of the exam are the exclusive and confidential property of CCVA, are protected by copyright, and are protected by CCVA's intellectual property rights;
- Not to disclose the exam questions or answers or discuss any of the content of the exam materials with any person without prior written approval of CCVA
- Not to copy or attempt to make copies (written, photographic, or otherwise) of any exam material, including, without limitation, any exam questions or answers;
- Not to sell, license, distribute, give away, or obtain from any source other than CCVA, the exam materials, questions, or answers; that your obligations under this agreement shall continue to be in effect after the examination and, if applicable, after termination of your certification, regardless of the reason or reasons for termination, and whether such termination is voluntary or involuntary.

CCVA reserves the right to take whatever measures are necessary, with a candidate or Proctor, to protect the integrity of its examinations. This could include, but is not limited to, exclusion from a current examination or future examination, decertification and suit for recovery of damages.

SECTION 5: TAKING THE EXAM CONT'D

Examples of irregularities affecting the validity of scores, which would necessitate the withholding of scores pending further investigation, would include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Copying of answers from another candidate;
2. Permitting one's questions or answers to be copied;
3. Discussing the specific content of the examination with one or more fellow candidates, before, during, or after the administration of an examination;
4. Unauthorized possession, reproduction, recording, transmission or disclosure of materials or other information regarding the content of an examination before, during, or after the administration of an examination;
5. Other evidence indicating that the security of an examination had been compromised;
6. Improper or unauthorized use of a password;
7. Removing or attempting to remove exam material (in any format) from the testing area.

Upon analysis of all available information in such circumstances, CCVA will determine the validity of the examination scores in question and will notify candidates. If CCVA determines from all facts available that an irregularity has occurred, it will take appropriate steps.

Appropriate actions could include barring the candidate from any future exams, delaying the exam, invalidating the exam for a group or individual, revoking a certificate, or no action.

All candidates subject to such actions will be notified by email and written notice of any decision and provided an opportunity to respond in accordance with an appeal procedure established by CCVA.

Statement of Nondiscrimination Policy

CCVA does not discriminate among applicants on the basis of age, gender, race, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation or marital status. The CVA credentialing program is open to salaried and non-salaried individuals in the field of volunteer resource management.

SECTION 5: TAKING THE EXAM CONT'D

EXAM SCORING PROCESS

The CVA Exam is based on current psychometric and testing standards. The test has been developed to be as valid and reliable as possible and is based on generally accepted best practices in volunteer administration.

Candidates will not have access to the test or to specific questions after the exam is taken, nor will they be told which questions they answered correctly. The CVA exam is scored using the criterion-referenced standard. This is regarded as current best practice for all certification exams. The criterion-referenced standard means that everyone who scores at the passing score or higher will pass, and everyone who scores lower than the passing score will fail. It is the opposite of grading on a curve. In other words, it doesn't matter if you test with the most able group or the least able group – you must meet the criterion to pass (or passing score). The passing score is based on the set of questions on a specific test. The passing score for the CVA Exam will be communicated to all candidates after the application deadlines have passed for both April and October.

After the 2-week testing window closes, CVA proctors review all the test results to confirm that the scores are valid and final. CCVA is concerned with reporting only valid scores. On rare occasions, circumstances may invalidate test scores. CCVA retains the right to cancel or withhold any exam scores. Invalid scores fall into two categories:

- a) Doubts may be raised by the examination proctor or another candidate of suspected misconduct or cheating by a candidate. Candidates are expected to cooperate with any investigation to determine if the score is invalid.
- b) In rare instances, there may be a problem with the examination materials or the test site.

Such situations will be investigated and a determination made. In addition, CCVA may cancel or invalidate any candidate's score if, upon investigation, violation of the testing procedures is established.

SECTION 5: TAKING THE EXAM CONT'D...

NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

When a candidate completes their exam, they will confirm that they are finished with the exam. Candidates will not receive a preliminary score. At the end of the exam session, CCVA will proctor all exams.

Official results of a pass or fail will be sent to all candidates via email within 15 days after the exam window closes. Please note that CCVA does not provide any information or feedback about topics or content missed on the CVA exam.

Candidates who pass the CVA exam will be awarded the credential and receive their digital badge and electronic certificate.

Candidates who do not pass the exam may retake the exam in the next testing window by paying the discounted re-test fee. There is no limit to the number of times you can re-test as long as you do so in the next exam window. After that, retesting will require payment of the full registration fee.