

Professional Reflection Essay for CVA Renewal by Faiza Venzant, CVA

Topic B: Based on your experience over the past 5 years, what advice would you give to new professionals in our field? What do you believe is most important for them to remember in order to be effective in their work?

There is a famous line from the movie, Field of Dreams, "If you build it, they will come." It's simply not true. If it was, volunteer recruitment would not be the consistent challenge that it is and our volunteer base and our profession worldwide would be diverse in thought and representation. **My advice to new professionals in our field and also my more experienced colleagues is to plan, partner and help communities prosper with the intention to be inclusive, equitable and allow everyone to access volunteer opportunities.** Beyond this, do your part to advocate and act upon more diversity amongst leaders of volunteers. Think about that famous movie line as you work towards this change but with a twist - *If you build it, the people you build it for will come.*

I love the field of volunteer engagement and have the utmost respect for my colleagues who choose to do this work. Personally, I owe much of my personal and professional development to this sector and still, as a woman of colour, I'm compelled to **call us out**. We have huge gaps within our community. The latest [Volunteer Management Progress Report](#) details that 87% of respondents identified as female and 84% identified as White/Caucasian/European. As leaders of volunteers we're not a diverse group of people. We know that when there is a lack of diversity innovation can be slow, solutions tend to be homogeneous and let's face it, we lead by what we know. And if we all have similar experiences, we'll continue to lead in a very steady, consistent way.

I'd also like to ***call us in***. Here's why I am hopeful and why I commit to lift my colleagues up and invest in our profession – when you voice a concern in this community, there are always people willing to listen, willing to learn and wanting to understand and act. That's what we're good at and that's how we mobilize communities every day in our work.

As a leader of volunteers, **commit to practicing inclusion**. Commit to a lifelong journey of curiosity to **consider and involve** other perspectives and experiences. What we can learn from people who are not like us is infinite. Make these discoveries habitual and champion this commitment. When it comes to conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion, we can be hesitant and fearful of saying the wrong thing, using the wrong words and being offensive. Making these mistakes is the only way we can move towards a more equitable world. We will make mistakes. We can also acknowledge them, apologize and move forward. As a result of our own privilege, we don't know what we don't know, and people get left out of the solutions we try to create with our limited experiences. Let's stop leaving people behind and remember – *If you build it, the people you build it for will come.*