

Why Members Should Volunteer with NCURA

Volunteers can, and do, make a lasting difference to NCURA through the sharing of their time and expertise in order to further the goals and values of the organization, both regionally and nationally. Why do members volunteer with NCURA and what do they receive in return? To learn the answer to these questions, we asked regional and national member volunteers, and here's what they shared with us.

I have been an NCURA member for four years. I volunteered to help at the FRA X Conference Registration Desk. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet new people while helping other members. I also helped attendees by explaining what was in their conference material packets and helped with directions to the different sessions. This was the first time that I volunteered to help at any conference and it made me feel really part of the NCURA family. In the past I felt like a bystander looking in, but this time I was able to get to know people on a first name basis. This led to actually having a non-business related lunch and becoming friends with other members. My advice to anyone considering volunteering with NCURA?—Try it, you'll like it!

Bob Stemple, Associate Manager for Research Finance, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

I have been a member of NCURA for most of the last 20 years. I am currently the Chair-Elect of Region VI and have also served as the site coordinator and track leader for regional meetings where I have been a presenter and moderator. I have volunteered at the Registration Desk, have served as a regional Member at Large, as the regional Elections Coordinator, and I have volunteered as a buddy for new members.

Volunteering has many benefits including networking with peers across regional and national boundaries that allows me to solve small and large problems with “bigger picture” information; builds external peer relationships both regionally and nationally; embeds mentorship and collaboration as a normal part of everyday business; and adds tremendous value to professional development for experienced and newer members. I've made career long friends that make meeting attendance feel like a colleague reunion.

Volunteering will help you to develop invaluable peer relationships, increase your professional experience with public speaking, prepare presentations, team work, make new friends, and you will have lots of fun. If you are unsure about volunteering, call one of the more experienced regional members or a regional officer and ask for a reference for a member to “buddy” with or shadow at a regional conference.

Debra Murphy, Director, Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, Arizona State University

I've been a member of NCURA on and off, mostly on, since about 1989 when I started in research administration as an entry level "grants specialist" in the Grants and Contracts Office at Dartmouth College. Although I left that position after one year, when I returned to Dartmouth for a department/center grant position, I rejoined, then remained a member of NCURA for most of my tenure at a nonprofit organization despite the fact that A-21 was no longer in my life and NCURA catered mostly to educational institutions. Nonetheless, I found the meetings useful and the network of colleagues invaluable for solving the problems I faced. It is within the past seven years working in university research administration that I considered volunteering.

Initially my goal was straightforward, I just wanted to do something useful for the organization and expand my contacts within the profession. I currently serve on the Evaluation Subcommittee of NCURA's Professional Development Committee. The first year of the Subcommittee, I discovered that serving on the Subcommittee was my best opportunity to keep my hand in evaluation, an area of expertise that I developed at a nonprofit focused on USAID work.

I have continued serving on the Evaluation Subcommittee. Last year I was the Evaluation Vice-Coordinator and this year I am beginning a two year term as the Evaluation Coordinator. Although the Subcommittee and my seat on the Professional Development Committee keeps me busy to say the least, my volunteer work is grounded in my interest to stay involved in evaluation. The camaraderie among volunteers is, of course, the "glue" that keeps me engaged when my "interests" tell me otherwise!

William "Bill" Ploog, Associate Director, Office of Sponsored Projects, Dartmouth College

Research Administration is a little known career in circles outside of research, and it's a tough job to describe to those who are not intimately involved. I'll never forget the first NCURA meeting I attended – FINALLY, people who spoke my language and understood my frustrations and victories!!! As I attended more NCURA events, the feeling of camaraderie and solidarity grew and I knew that I had to get involved and give back to the organization and its members. I have never regretted one second of it and look forward to seeing colleagues and friends at every NCURA event I attend. As an organization of professionals in a distinct profession, NCURA promotes self-growth and provides an opportunity to share and learn skills. Volunteering for NCURA simply magnifies those opportunities!

I have been a member of NCURA since 1995. I started my NCURA volunteer career as a member of the Program Committee for the Region II regional meeting. I have served on that committee every year since in various capacities including serving as Co-chair in 2007. Over the years, I have invited presenters and worked with them on the content of their presentations and have developed

session evaluation documentation. This year I am also serving on the Region II Meeting Charity Auction Sub-Committee for an auction to benefit the American Cancer Society which will be held during our meeting in Annapolis. In addition, my volunteer activities have included serving as a presenter, co-presenter, discussion group moderator and panel member for sessions at Region II meetings, at the NCURA Annual Meeting and at FRA. In 2003 and again in 2008, I served on the FRA Program Committee

I have served as an evaluator for sessions at the Region II level and the National level at both the Annual Meeting and FRA. I have volunteered at the registration desks of several meetings at both the Regional and National level and in 2008, worked as a volunteer at the FRA Booth during the 50th Annual Meeting.

I was fortunate enough to be elected as Treasurer for Region II in 2008 and currently serve on the National Board of Directors as the Region II elected Board Member.

I continue to look for new ways to volunteer! And for anyone considering volunteering, I recommend that you start at the regional level. Before you know it, you will have made countless friends and will be invited to serve in several capacities. Make your desire to help known and don't be intimidated by anything or anyone! If at first you don't succeed, keep trying. It's worth it!!!

Brenda Kavanaugh, Senior Research Administrator, Office of Research and Project Administration, University of Rochester

I first joined NCURA in 1992, and volunteering provides me with the opportunity to engage my fellow members and to assess and share ideas. The field of research administration is dynamic and complex and my volunteering in NCURA has enabled me to develop professional contacts that have greatly assisted my career and my success in my job. I've had the good fortune to present sessions and workshops at both the regional and national levels and to have the opportunity to serve as a Regional Chair in 2006. I currently serve as the Vice President of our national organization. I challenge you to say "YES" without hesitation when asked to participate in an NCURA volunteer activity. Regardless of the volunteer task, you never know who you may meet and what you can learn. Take advantage of a free opportunity that will pay dividends for years to come!

Dave Richardson, Assistant Vice President for Research and Director of Sponsored Programs, Pennsylvania State University

As a member of NCURA since 1997, I have had the pleasure of working in many different capacities within NCURA that resulted in increased knowledge, great friendships, and growth both personally and in my career. Teaching workshops, concurrent sessions and discussion groups on both the national and regional levels has been invaluable, as I always seemed to learn more through the

interaction with participants sharing their experiences. Serving as Treasurer of NCURA Region III, the co-chair of FRA X, participating on national and regional program committees, and my current role of serving on the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee has led to many close friendships, has given me great insight and knowledge of NCURA, and has expanded my knowledge base of Research Administration outside my own world. Having had the pleasure of assisting when needed for new member breakfasts, arranging dinner groups and volunteering whenever possible allowed me to meet so many wonderful people that I never would have met otherwise.

Volunteering with NCURA provides you so much more than you could ever imagine. The benefits you receive far outweigh the contributions. There are many different opportunities from behind the scenes to in front of the classroom. Talk with your regional officers, volunteer coordinator or others that volunteer to help you get started. Find a role that you are comfortable with and enjoy the ride!

Cathy Snyder, Associate Director, Office of Contract and Grant Accounting, Vanderbilt University

Although I have been a member of NCURA since 1998, I had not taken a proactive approach to volunteering in the organization until 2006. I had to make up for 'lost time' and give back the wealth of resources that NCURA has given me through the years. Volunteering has given me the opportunity to say thank you and to represent the next generation. Being a volunteer has and continues to be a rewarding personal experience. More importantly, it has presented me with challenges and opportunities to grow. I have learned to accept each new experience as a chance to discover more about myself.

My volunteer roles have included serving on the NCURA Pre-Award Neighborhood Committee, the Regional Advisory Committee, the Region VI Membership and Volunteer Committee and the Education and Professional Development Committee. I am an LDI (Leadership Development Institute) grad from the class of 2008, and I currently serve on the National Professional Development Committee. In addition, I've volunteered in various roles for our regional Spring Meeting and the National Annual Meeting.

My advice to an individual considering volunteering with NCURA is to first, consider what you want to get out of volunteering and to be honest. Second, is to choose your volunteer commitment accordingly. Third, be open minded and you just might discover the ideal fit. In the words of Maya Angelou, 'I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back'.

Rosemary Madnick, Director of Grants, Contracts and Compliance, Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science

I have been an active member of NCURA since 2000. Volunteering with NCURA was thrust upon me fairly quickly once I joined. A colleague in my office was supposed to do a presentation on NSF Fastlane at Region III's 2001 spring meeting. She was unable to make the meeting and asked that I attend and handle the presentation in her absence – both my first meeting and my first presentation all at one time! (Thanks Rosemary, for that opportunity!)

For me, there are two main reasons why I volunteer with NCURA: (1) The professional development and resources that NCURA offers to its membership are of such high caliber and quality, I want to be able to play a role, even in a small way, in the success of NCURA and its programming. As an organization driven by membership, NCURA cannot succeed without active members.

(2) As a graduate of the Leadership Development Institute (LDI), I strongly believe that I owe both a debt of gratitude and service to NCURA because the organization made an investment into my professional development by including me in the LDI Class of 2005. Would I still be a volunteer if I had not participated in LDI? ABSOLUTELY (see #1 above).

I have served NCURA in numerous capacities at both the regional and national levels. Highlights of this service include serving as Chair of Region III (2008/2009); serving as the first Region III Volunteer Coordinator (2005 through 2007); volunteering at the registration desk and in the hospitality suite at regional and national meetings; serving on regional committees; presenting/co-presenting sessions; and currently serving as Co-chair of the NCURA 51st Annual Meeting. I think I have served in almost all capacities at the regional level except for audio-visual support, and I think people have been wise to keep me away from the computers/projectors (I have a tendency to cause computers to crash unexpectedly...).

When I was Chair of Region III, I sent out e-mails to new/returning members providing them with updates/information about the region and welcoming them. Michelle Powell, who was Chair of Region III before me, always ended her e-mails with a sentence that I "appropriated" for my messages: *"Remember, your NCURA experience is what you make of it!"* Can you reap the benefits of all that NCURA has to offer without volunteering? More than likely, but why would you want to? There are so many opportunities available and, in some cases, the need is so great, the opportunity to volunteer has never been better! My advice to those interested in volunteering is to start by assisting at the registration/information desk or in the hospitality suite at either a regional or national meeting. Volunteers at the registration desk provide the first impressions of NCURA and/or a specific region, but even better, when you volunteer at the national meeting, it provides a great opportunity to work closely with colleagues from all NCURA regions, as well as with staff of the NCURA national office. Volunteering in your regional hospitality suite allows you to get

to know your NCURA colleagues in a relaxed setting, while also getting you started on your volunteering path with NCURA! The best thing about volunteering for NCURA – if neither opportunity mentioned above is of interest to you, there are many more to choose from (presenting, regional/national committees, session evaluator, etc). The possibilities are endless, so take the leap – you will not regret it!

Tony Ventimiglia, Contract Administrator III, Office of Sponsored Programs, Auburn University

I have been a member of NCURA since 1995. I volunteer at NCURA for many reasons. One of those is the more I volunteer, the more I understand how the organization works and its dependence on volunteers to function and prosper. Volunteering also allows me to meet more of the members and develop long lasting professional and personal relationships. The greatest benefit to volunteering, however, is to encourage others to volunteer and, thus, increasing the volunteer base of the organization and mentoring newcomers. NCURA is only as good as its membership and, most especially, its volunteers.

I have served NCURA at both the regional and national levels. At the regional level, I have served from a moderator at a regional meeting to the chair and secretary/treasurer of the region. I have chaired several regional committees (including the Finance Committee and the By Laws Committee) and served as a member on several program committees, awards committee, hospitality committee, and on the finance committee. On a national level, I have served on the Finance Committee, on a national Program Committee, and currently serve on the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee. I have also volunteered at the national Annual Meeting to assist in registration, hospitality, and at the NCURA Gear Store.

My advice to anyone considering volunteering in the NCURA organization? DO IT! You will gain so much more (personally and professionally) than you will ever give. Not only will you expand your knowledge base quickly and make contacts that can serve you in your profession, you will meet the most interesting people and form lifelong friendships. The members are the lifeblood of this organization and once you take ownership by becoming an active member, the rewards are immeasurable.

Deb Newton, Director, Pre-Award Services, University of Tulsa

I have been an NCURA member for 25 years. Over the years I have actively volunteered both at the regional and national levels -- and found this to be an enriching and rewarding experience. Volunteering has provided me an avenue to give back to the organization and profession, and has also been integral to my personal growth and professional development. The network of colleagues that I have developed have supported me over time and proven invaluable to my ability

as a research administrator. I volunteer because I care about the organization, the membership and the profession.

I am currently chairing the Professional Development Committee (PDC). The PDC is comprised of hardworking and energetic volunteers who are in the midst of tackling a number of NCURA Presidential Charges to enhance our programming efforts and delivery mechanisms. I am also chairing the NCURA-EARMA International Fellowship Working Group with another exciting group of volunteers. We are in the midst of developing a very promising beta test for this international effort. I have also had the honor of serving on the Board of Directors. I am active in my region and just finished serving as a Track Leader for our 2009 Regional Meeting, presenting sessions and working at the registration desk - a great way to meet new members and see old friends. I have served as the Region VII chair and a member-at-large. I have seen many aspects of the organization and believe there is a place for all of us to be involved in our community of research administrators

My advice to anyone considering volunteering with NCURA is to go for it!!! Let your colleagues and regional officers know that you want to help -- you will be warmly embraced. Come forth and identify yourself for activities and positions that you are interested in -- there are so many opportunities at both the regional and national level. I am confident that you will find this to be a wonderful experience.

Denise Wallen, Director, Faculty Research Support Services, University of New Mexico

I have been an NCURA member for 4 years. Some reasons that I volunteer are to meet people in my profession, and I recognize that NCURA is a service/volunteer organization that relies on volunteers to complete many logistical items. NCURA provides a great forum for networking and just having discussions with peers about specific research administration topics. It's invaluable, in my opinion, when you consider how many ideas and collaborative efforts come about from networking. I believe that we cannot live only for ourselves - there are 1000's of fibers that connect us with our fellow peers. NCURA helps foster a collective approach.

At the regional level, I serve on the Board of Region IV as an At-large member. I also volunteer as the Awards Committee Chair. In the past, I have volunteered on the Evaluations Committee, at the regional hospitality suite and at the Registration Desk. There are other areas that are exciting, such as the Communications Committee and A/V team. I have not participated in those, but have friends who do and they mention how rewarding those are, as well.

My advice to anyone considering volunteering with NCURA is to just get involved. There are two ways of spreading light. One is to be the candle. The other is to be the mirror that reflects it. Take the first step and contact someone and try out a committee to see if you like it. Most volunteer

opportunities will be welcoming and you can gain experience about the organization itself before finding a spot that fits you best.

David Ngo, Effort Administrator and ECRT Manager, University of Wisconsin-Madison

I've been an NCURA member since November 1991. I had just started working in the graduate studies and research office that July. My experience with grants was limited to having worked with faculty researchers in a supportive role in the economics department. Our first real research director, who started one month after me in August 1991, encouraged me to apply for a regional travel award, which I received. I was so warmly welcomed by regional members during the regional business meeting and in the hospitality suite at the annual meeting that I wanted to get plugged in and give back. I remember being totally amazed that there were other people who did what I did (pre-award) and that we were all looking for guidance and best practices. Connecting with a group of people who spoke the same professional language and faced the same challenges I faced was very encouraging.

I volunteer because it is a great way to meet people and conveys the message to my boss and his boss (the provost) that NCURA is not only important to my professional development but helps ensure that we as an institution are keeping up with changes in the grants arena. I have always believed that my participation has been a good investment for the university.

I am currently the Chair of Region VI. One of my responsibilities this year was to lead the Regions VI and VII Program Committee in developing the program for our joint regional spring meeting in Santa Fe. Last year I recruited vendors to sponsor our regional meeting in Portland, Oregon. Before then I had served on the Regions VI and VII Program Committee for several years as a volunteer. I also served a term as an elected member of the Region VI Advisory Committee. I volunteered to present a concurrent session at a regional meeting and led a discussion group at the national meeting and will do so again at the 51st Annual Meeting.

NCURA is a dynamic organization fueled by committed volunteers. I believe volunteering enables one to meet terrific people and get the most out of one's membership. It also provides challenging, rewarding professional development opportunities while working with others in one's profession. In my case, I don't have a lot of interactions otherwise with research administrators. For me, volunteering with NCURA has been personally and professionally rewarding.

Julie Guggino, Associate Director, Research and Sponsored Programs, Central Washington University

I have been a member of NCURA for three years. As the one-person Director of the Academic & Government Grants Office at a small liberal arts college, I need to keep current in the field on issues ranging from electronic submission to

federal policies and programs. The NCURA conferences are the sole venue for me to accomplish this, with the regional conferences being the most convenient.

So far, I have served in two ways. I participated in the Working Group for the new NCURA International Research Management Fellow Program, and this helped me to keep updated on one of the newest areas in the field: international research administration. I am also on the Mid-Atlantic Region II Program and Volunteer Committees for our April 2009 conference. By participating on these committees, I have gained a better understanding of the current and general issues in the field, and I have become acquainted with many colleagues in my region.

It is critical for grants administrators at smaller institutions to attend NCURA conferences and network with colleagues, especially in their own regions, so that we can gain information and make connections with colleagues, and as a result thrive at our home institutions. NCURA activities and events have increased my knowledge to the extent that I am able to take to the level of excellence the grant-making at my college.

Gil Harootunian, Director, Office of Academic & Government Grants, McDaniel College

I started my research administration career in September, 1994 as a National Institutes of Health grants administrator. When hired, I was told that I would be attending a training meeting in Washington D.C., but didn't really have any idea about NCURA. I heard about the workshops, the concurrent sessions, the party, and hospitality suite – explanations did not do justice to the event. I arrived at the Hyatt looking forward to a dull convention; instead, I found a very friendly group of people, very interested in their chosen profession, willing to share what they knew, and wanting members to succeed. I haven't missed an Annual Meeting since.

What have I learned from attending NCURA events? There are two methods for becoming a successful research administrator; through experience and through training. Experience comes only with time but training is self-motivating. Gather all the information you can from NCURA, (information, ideas, theories and concepts), all the things that you need to be successful, combine with a network of trusted people and your success possibilities increase immeasurably. Becoming part of the organization, as a volunteer, increases experiences and advances training.

Research administration is a support function. Support functions are often considered an unwarranted bureaucracy, a required additional step, a burden against perceived efficiency or an unavoidable nuisance by the very people who are being supported. No matter how management packages support functions, many end users refuse to see the importance of that function. NCURA membership helps alleviate the stress which comes as a result of providing support. By actively participating in NCURA, you develop a network of like-

minded people who can become an asset in coping with the stress. Members provide the reassurance, the back-up, the knowledge base and the creditability for the research administrator to recognize their value to the research enterprise. Volunteering expands this needed network.

My first volunteer opportunity was at the welcome desk of a regional meeting. By working the desk, I saw and met the speakers and attendees which helped me develop acquaintances. During the meeting I felt more comfortable asking questions during the session, approaching attendees and speakers during breaks and parking myself at worthwhile seats during meals. I think it was fortuitous that the regional meeting was smaller than the national meeting and therefore easier to build that confidence I needed to gather more information than what I would have received by merely attending the sessions.

When I was first asked to present at a regional workshop concurrent session, I learned that preparation for a session is one of the best methods for developing clearer, more concise and exact information about a topic which I initially thought I really understood. Also, by teaming with another well prepared member, you are even more attuned to the session. Further, questions and comments from the attendees in the room force you to reflect deeper and more thoroughly about any topic. I believe that I have learned more by being a presenter than by using any other learning opportunity.

I have continued along a volunteer path because my professional life expands with the knowledge I gain. I'm personally involved in my profession, better prepared to do my job, more in tune with current issues and willing to hear other thoughts and comments from other members of the research administration community both those with experience and those who are relatively new. I have been a member of regional conference committees, co-chair for workshops at a national meeting, co-chair of the pre-award conference, a member of various national committees and a member of the Board of Directors. I have presented at regional and national meetings, been on NCURA television and have written articles for the NCURA newsletter. My most rewarding volunteer experience was participating as a member of the group who wrote the on-line course for Federal Contracting. Each of these experiences has had their own professional advantages, not to mention the close friends I have made.

I encourage everyone to volunteer. First, find an opportunity to volunteer preferably working with a member who is already recognized as a NCURA volunteer. The experienced volunteer can become a mentor and someone to recommend you for further and more responsible positions. Secondly, be reliable, responsive and eager; you only have one opportunity to make a first impression. Third, volunteer at a variety of levels; there is no rule that says you need to start at the regional level. Take what comes your way. Fourth, make a plan; determine what sort of things you enjoy and more importantly where do you have ability. This will give you a direction in pursuing volunteer opportunities.

Fifth, don't be too busy to volunteer; there are always opportunities, sometimes they take your personal time, but make time. Remember if you are looking toward career enhancement, the long-term will provide the improved opportunities. Finally don't get discouraged. If at first you don't succeed...

I find that volunteering for NCURA helps me professionally by being as knowledgeable as possible, keeps my direction by interacting with like-minded people with similar issues and interests and it is a rewarding experience working with motivated people who have a common objective of promoting the value of research administration.

Bo Bogdanski, Assistant Director, Sponsored Programs, Colorado State University