

# Getting Involved and Giving Back in HIM

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*By Sarah Sheber*

From local opportunities to national groups, volunteering is a way for health information management (HIM) professionals to engage with their community and work to advance the profession. With opportunities suited to any professional level, from a student getting ready to enter the work force to industry veterans, there truly is something for everyone when it comes to making the choice to get involved as a volunteer in HIM. What's more, volunteer work can be a fulfilling and exciting road to gaining the skills and experience you need to take the next step in your career.

Volunteers cite many reasons for why they decide to get involved, from the desire to make a difference to building their resume, meeting new people, exercising skills they don't get to use often in their job, and even socializing while volunteering with friends.

Vong Miphouvieng, MHA, RHIA, corporate director, operations and regulatory compliance, health information management services at Texas Health Resources, started volunteering soon after graduating from his HIM program. He was inspired in part by the HIM professionals who mentored him as he was beginning his career. "Along my journey as a student, many HIM professionals mentored me and I wanted to give back. By joining my local [HIM] association, I was able to give my time and volunteer at our local workshops," he said.

## Giving and Getting through Volunteering

As a volunteer, HIM professionals are able to "give back to the profession utilizing their knowledge and expertise to help their colleagues gain skills and knowledge," said Carolyn Guyton-Ringbloom, MBA, CAE, senior director, volunteer leadership development at AHIMA. In addition, it provides the volunteer "with critical leadership skills that are important in one's professional life as well as providing networking opportunities," she said.

"Getting involved in your professional association offers benefits for both you and for the profession," said JoAnn V. Coleman, MPA, CAE, manager, volunteer leadership development at AHIMA.

Some of the benefits professionals can gain once they begin working as a volunteer include:

- Recognition as a leader committed to the profession
- The opportunity to network with peers and strengthening professional networks
- Exposure to innovative ideas that can be utilized on the job
- Opportunities to enhance technology skills
- Opportunities to participate in public speaking and authorship roles
- Gaining a new perspective on the HIM field (on the state or national level)
- The ability to make a difference in the profession

Meanwhile, volunteering helps the profession by working to advance practice standards, influence legislation, contribute to continuing education development, enhance the public's awareness of HIM, and recruit new professionals.

"Volunteering is my way of giving back to the community that has provided me with both guidance and increased knowledge," said Kristen A. Piccirillo, RHIA, CCS, NASM-CPT, 2017 chair of the Engage Advisory Committee and an Engage facilitator and mentor at AHIMA. "HIM is a very diverse industry with professionals across the healthcare continuum. I hope that I can unite and strengthen the community so that we can work towards a common mission and vision. Teamwork is important in promoting health information technology and industry initiatives, and as a volunteer I hope to provide resources to achieve these goals," Piccirillo said.

While volunteers' efforts certainly help to advance the HIM profession, serving as a volunteer has individual benefits for those who decide to get involved as well. "Volunteering advances one's career by helping develop skills and knowledge that one might want in his/her job," Guyton-Ringbloom said. There is the added benefit of working with others out in the field beyond the contacts in your daily work. "Your skills, knowledge, and talents are on display," she said.

"Volunteering has allowed me to connect to many different HIM professionals across the country that I would not have had an opportunity to meet," Miphouvieng said. Those relationships have helped him to progress quickly through his career and gave him the opportunity "to collaborate with others to take my department to the next level and become the HIM department of the future, today," he said.

Piccirillo also confirms that volunteering helps to build both experience and a professional network. "HIM can be a tough career to break into and being engaged and connected with AHIMA members not only gets your foot through the door, but helps you to build your professional profile and emerge as a leader," she said.

## Volunteer Opportunities with AHIMA

For members looking to get more involved with AHIMA, opportunities include several positions at the national level such as the Board of Directors, the Nominating Committee, Commissioners for CCHIIM, Practice Council members, awards committees, the Professional Ethics Committee, and Engage Community Facilitators. Members can also volunteer their expertise and add to their resume by authoring articles for the *Journal of AHIMA* magazine and website, such as Coding Notes articles and guest blog posts. For a list of opportunities and to apply, visit the [Engage Volunteer Center](#).

For HIM professionals that want to get involved with volunteer opportunities but don't feel ready to commit to something on the national level with AHIMA, consider the following ideas:

- Review state- and regional-level opportunities with your local Component State Association (CSA); positions include officer roles as well as committee members and coordinators, student liaison, annual meeting volunteers, and advocacy volunteers
- Volunteer to serve on committees and help with projects relevant to HIM within your organization/facility (i.e., electronic health records or information governance projects)
- Volunteer to work with other groups on issues with overlap with HIM
- Consider participating in Toastmasters (toastmasters.org) to help develop speaking and communication skills
- Participate in organizations related to AHIMA, such as HIMSS or HFMA
- Volunteer to help with a project or general work with a local area or state health information exchange organization
- Explore opportunities using social media, writing for newsletters, or writing articles (such as for *Journal of AHIMA*)

Coleman suggested beginning at the state level for first-time volunteers and looking for opportunities within the local CSA, HIM organizations, and school programs. Networking with other CSA members and attending state advocacy and annual meetings is also a good place to start, Coleman said. Even something as simple as getting involved in the Engage Communities can be a first step.

Perhaps at its heart, volunteering is an opportunity to connect with fellow HIM professionals and to build the HIM community. Of his many volunteering roles, Miphouvieng cited his experience at the Student Academy during AHIMA's 2015 Annual Convention and Exhibit as one of his favorites.

"I was able to share my experience and knowledge with so many young and eager future HIM Professionals," Miphouvieng said. One of the students even became his mentee, and went on to become the 2016 AHIMA Triumph Student Award recipient. "It was great to have been a part of that and had the opportunity to pay it forward," he said.

Piccirillo also works as a mentor, helping HIM professionals who are taking their AHIMA certification exams. "Certification exams can be scary and intimidating, and it helps to have a cheerleader on the sidelines. Seeing these individuals succeed and making an impact on their own careers is very rewarding," Piccirillo said.

For more information on volunteering, visit AHIMA's Volunteers web page at [www.ahima.org/volunteers](http://www.ahima.org/volunteers).

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