

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR NPS VOLUNTEERS

The overwhelming majority of C&O Canal volunteers have had their program and formal role with the Park put on hold as Maryland and the country work their way through a pandemic. This could be a time to turn to formal learning opportunities to strengthen skills and knowledge, and to help us perform at an even higher level when we return to our positions with the Park. Here are two sources for courses and other learning tools that are accessible to volunteers:

Opportunity 1 - [proValens Learning](#): A unit of Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands.

Founded in 1993 by a former NPS director, the Eppley Institute is dedicated to meeting the education and knowledge needs of park, recreation, public health, and public land organizations. proValens Learning is Eppley's online learning portal accessible to volunteers and professionals alike. To get started, simply point your web browser at provalenslearning.com, and click on "courses." You will find over 200 choices; many are free. Fee based courses and certificate programs start at \$9 per course.

Here is a sampling of available free courses:

- Of interest to every NPS volunteer: Introduction to the National Park Service: History of the NPS *and* Active Shooter: What You Can Do.
- For History Buffs: Causes of the Civil War
- For those helping in administrative positions: Budget and Revenue Generation
- For those supervising or organizing other volunteers: Great Meetings with Great Outcomes.
- For those helping in maintenance: Managing Park Assets: Asset Prioritization
- For those helping with interpretation: Foundations of Interpretation *and* Civil War to Civil Rights Interpretation: Best Practices for Heritage Interpreters

Opportunity 2 - [Common Learning Portal](#): National Park Service

The Common Learning Portal (CLP) is one of the online training resources of the NPS, accessible at mylearning.nps.gov. It is a "one stop shop for educational resources to help you improve your performance." It offers courses as well as instructional videos, checklists and manuals, "how to" lessons, structured collaborative learning communities, and mentoring. The CLP is not open to the public. If a volunteer is interested in gaining access, they should approach their NPS employee supervisor for sponsorship and assistance in opening an account.

All content on CLP is free. Some of the material is provided through partner organizations, including proValens Learning. For example, the History of the NPS and Active Shooter courses mentioned above can be accessed through CLP.

Here is a sampling of CLP instructional videos:

- For those interested in maintenance: When Rust Settles, Convert It *and* An Axe to Grind (grinding axes and axe work)
- For those working in visitor centers and other areas with cultural resources: Cultural Resources and Covid-19 (how virus persists on surfaces and how you can effectively deactivate while preserving valuable resources)
- For those working on websites and social media: Checking Your Website's Gas Tank

Here is a sampling of CLP online courses:

- For any volunteer: Presidential Trivia Quiz *and* Providing Telephone Customer Service
- For those helping with Interpretation: Interpreting Climate Change Virtual Course
- For those interested in natural resources: Orientation to NPS Natural Resource Management

Here is a sampling of collaborative learning groups that you could join:

- Social Media Laboratory
- Spectrum Awareness Commons (helping parks to be autism friendly)
- Interpretation and Education Chat Room

I've found that NPS volunteers are an interesting and interested bunch: curious and eager to learn more about the world around them. I've given several walking tours of the village of Four Locks (MM 109), attempting to bring the businesses and farms, the buildings, and the people back to life for a short time. This showcases their connection and importance to the overall Chesapeake and Ohio Canal operation. One such tour was for volunteers from Williamsport. Not surprising was the depth of knowledge this group had about the Canal in general, but their comments and questions, and the many answers to my queries exemplified the desire for learning mentioned above.

I believe it is just this sort of person – the typical VIP (Volunteer-in-Parks) – that would enjoy tapping into the opportunities presented through proValens Learning and Common Learning Portal. What are you waiting for?

Lowell Markey, Cumberland Bike Patrol Member and Volunteer Ranger



Figure 1: Williamsport volunteers at Four Locks