Recently, a friend posted an ‘80s educational safety video on Facebook, which gruesomely portrayed every which way you could maim and kill yourself in an industrial workplace. Fingers were crushed and chopped off in machinery, bodies were sandwiched under forklifts, and eyeballs were pierced by flying nails. The camp and gore made it more ridiculous than educational, but I can’t help but think about this video as I stand next to exhibit developer Mary Elizabeth Yarbrough in the Exploratorium workshop wearing safety goggles and headphones.

I am suddenly aware that we are surrounded by heavy machinery that could easily cut off all my limbs. It also strikes me at this moment that the Exploratorium, San Francisco’s interactive science museum that was founded 40 years ago by Frank Oppenheimer, is one of the coolest places I could imagine working in.

I’m jealous of kids who grew up in San Francisco and got to experience the Exploratorium with young eyes, but maybe what’s great about the museum is that it can take grown-ups back to those wonder years. At the Exploratorium you experience the exhibits through interaction and play, whether it be learning about your sense of touch by slithering and groping your way around the pitch black Tactile Dome or learning about vision by cutting into a cow’s eyeball.

For full disclosure, I’ve known Mary Elizabeth for several years. Back in the day, I wrote about her in the Bay Guardian, focusing on her work as a visual artist and musician. When I asked the museum to hook me up with an exhibit designer to shadow, it was a pleasant surprise when it turned out to be Mary Elizabeth.

I met up with Mary Elizabeth in the Exploratorium workshop, the heart and soul of the museum. It is here that the exhibits are created, from their inception as mere ideas to the final working, interactive structures. The shop is exactly how you’d imagine it - a large industrial space filled with a bazillion different things - from sawhorses, ladders and cabinets to tools, machines and computers. This place is Bill Nye’s wet dream. And if you don’t believe me, you can actually see for yourself.

After giving me a hello hug, Mary Elizabeth picks up a paint roller and starts attacking two large sheets of soundproof fiber wallboard with black paint. Rather than wear a smock, she delicately holds her gray cardigan closed over her blue and red striped shirt while she nimbly coats - visitors can look down into the workshop from the main staircase going up to the second floor.

Exhibiting Behavior - Behind Displays at San Francisco’s Exploratorium Continued on page 11
Knowing that I am unlikely to fulfill a resolution to correct a bad habit or radically change my lifestyle, I do not make New Year’s resolutions centered on “me.” But I would like to propose a few resolutions for us all to consider in the coming year. As AAMV members you can play a big part in helping AAMV grow. Through your participation in the AAMV network, you will not only strengthen the role AAMV can play in supporting effective museum volunteerism, but you will also gain a great deal personally as a volunteer or museum professional.

So consider the following resolutions for 2010:

**I will find at least one nominee for the new AAMV Volunteer of the Year Award.**
Surely you know someone (maybe yourself, if you are a volunteer!) who has done exceptional work for your museum. This is a great new way to bring national attention to the important role volunteers play in museums of all kinds. For more information about this new award and application materials, go to the AAMV website: www.aamv.org

**I will contribute more often to discussion on the AAMV member listserv.**
If you are not already signed up for the listserv, contact Linda Apple (L.Apple@mfa.org) to get signed up. I can assure you from personal experience that Linda can get the most computer-challenged among us up and running. Once you are on board, you will find some great exchanges of information coming to you by e-mail. I never fail to be impressed by the expertise we have to share with each other. And you can check out all the past messages by going to the website: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AAMVlist. To send a new message: AAMVlist@yahoogroups.com

**I will send in an article or news to the AAMV newsletter.**
We have moved from a print document to an electronic newsletter to save on costs and to give us more flexibility in expanding content. (Never fear, if you are not able to download a copy that comes to you by e-mail, we will make sure you get one the old-fashioned way!). We would love to hear from you. It can be a “quick tip” or a longer article.

**I will come to and/or participate in an AAMV workshop session.**
Come to the American Association of Museums annual meeting in May in Los Angeles for two AAMV sessions: “Talking Shop: Roundtable Discussion with Volunteer Managers” and “Docents and Creating a High Impact Volunteer and/or Docent Program.” If a trip to L.A. is just not in your future, consider getting engaged in an AAMV workshop at a regional or local conference. Keep an eye out for news on our website www.aamv.org and in our newsletter!

**I will recruit one new member for AAMV!**
Spread the word and help us build our professional organization. The more members we have, the wider the network of knowledge to be shared.

Happy New Year,

Lois Kuter
AAMV President
Heard on the AAMV Member Listserv

The New Year is always a good time to take a look at the benefits you offer the volunteers in your museum. AAMV members shared their benefits for volunteers on the members-only listserv. As you’ll see, there’s a wide range offered to museum volunteers:

- 5 free passes for the first 50 hours each year
- Free museum membership or renewal for 100 hours
- Free membership for 40+ hours of service
- Lifetime membership for 1000 hours (usually service over 7-10 years)
- Discounted membership for volunteers; but no free membership
- Discounts on gift memberships volunteers purchase for others
- 10-20% discount in museum stores, which sometimes increases to 30% or 40% for special sales, such as holidays
- 10-20% discount in museum cafes
- Attendance at staff enrichment programs
- Free parking
- Bus passes
- Free admission on field trips to other sites
- 50% discount to any event the museum holds

Where does your museum’s “volunteer department” live on the organization chart? AAMV members share their reporting structure on the members-only listserv:

- Direct report to Executive Director
- Direct report to Chief Operating Officer
- Education Department
- External Affairs Department
- Human Resources Department
- Public Programs Department

Volunteer of the Year Nominations Due

In September, 2009, AAMV announced the creation of an annual Volunteer of the Year Award, a unique opportunity to nominate a deserving volunteer from your museum. This new national award recognizes the key role volunteers play in museums and cultural institutions and showcases outstanding achievement in volunteer service. The award will be presented at the 2010 AAM meeting in Los Angeles, CA. Application materials are available on AAMV’s website at www.aamv.org. The deadline for nomination materials to be received is March 1, 2010.


Transforming Museum Volunteering is more than 125 pages of practical information, sample forms, helpful resources, and a toolkit for engaging 21st Century volunteers. Its nine chapters cover everything from “Staffing the Volunteer Program” and “Measuring Success” to “Recruiting, Selecting, and Placing Museum Volunteers.” It also includes a chapter on “What’s Ahead for Museum Volunteer Programs,” with action steps for volunteer programs and program managers alike. And the section with sample forms contains valuable tools to increase your effectiveness. Get your copy today because you can’t manage without it! You can purchase your book at www.authorhouse.com for $29.95. Or visit the AAMV website at www.AAMV.org for more information and a link to purchase the book.
Motivating Volunteering in Tough Times

In the last issue of AAMV’s newsletter we explored whether volunteering in the U.S was increasing or decreasing. Now let’s look at the results of a new research study on corporate/employee volunteering. If you already have corporate volunteers or if you want to develop corporate volunteering relationships in the future, you’ll find this research very helpful. And, your fundraising staff members might be interested in the survey results too!

LBG Associates began developing this project in 2008-early 2009 as the effects of the painful recession continued to spread and more and more companies were forced to deal with its often dire consequences.

During that time, as they talked to corporate contributions and foundation professionals, they learned that not surprisingly they were increasingly looking to their employee volunteers to help offset declining contributions budgets. Soon, analysts and consultants everywhere began touting the importance of employee volunteering to help maintain a company’s community commitments, image, and visibility.

As the emphasis on volunteering grew, LBG Associates and LBG Research Institute wondered: How motivated are employees to volunteer during this recession?

They developed this research study to provide the answer to this question and much more. Their goal was to provide insight into employee attitudes toward volunteering motivation, recognition, and communication during these tough times. LBG created two online surveys, one for employees and one for volunteer program managers. The results are based on responses from 8,032 employees and 213 volunteer program managers from 36 companies, to surveys completed in June and July 2009.

Here are just a few of the survey results. The complete Executive Summary is available online at http://www.lbg-associates.com/publications/Volunteer_Executive%20Summary%20for%20Website.pdf.

Volunteering Motivation and Recognition

Personal Causes and the Economy Drive Decisions

Employees were asked to rate on a 1-5 scale (1-unimportant; 2-somewhat unimportant; 3-somewhat important; 4-important; 5-very important) the reasons they decide to volunteer in company-sponsored programs. For most employees, their primary motivator is the importance of a cause to them personally. The recession is also clearly influencing them. The top five motivators are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rate how important each of the following is when you decide to participate in company-sponsored volunteering programs</th>
<th>Average rating (1-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The cause is important to me personally</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organizations are experiencing economic hardship</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My volunteering results in a donation for the organization from my company</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cause is important to my company</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The charity came to the company to talk about what they do in the community</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued on page 5
Motivating Volunteering continued from page 4

Effects of the Economic Crisis on Volunteering

The economic crisis does not seem to have had a serious impact on employees’ willingness to volunteer. The majority give a 3 rating (“no impact”) to the factors shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rate the impact the economic crisis has had on:</th>
<th>1 Very Negative</th>
<th>2 Negative</th>
<th>3 No Impact</th>
<th>4 Positive</th>
<th>5 Very Positive</th>
<th>1-5 Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My willingness to volunteer on my own time for charities of my choice</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My willingness to participate in company-sponsored volunteering</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My willingness to participate in pro bono projects</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volunteering Communication

E-mail Is the Primary Way
Volunteering Events Get Communicated

E-mail is the main way employees find out about volunteering events, followed by word of mouth. Very few (5%) respondents say their company is using new methods to communicate volunteering events.

Top 5 ways employees find out about volunteering events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth (other colleagues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company intranet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin board postings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

LBG concluded that when it comes to motivating volunteering, what resonated with employees in 2007, or even last year, will not necessarily work today. The downturn has wrought serious changes in business, and it has taken a toll on employee trust and morale. Anxious, cynical, or depressed employees need much more support, reassurance, and information than they did in the past in order to feel comfortable participating in company-sponsored volunteering efforts. By encouraging, promoting, and supporting volunteerism in the right way, and engaging in two-way communication to ensure understanding, companies will have a far greater chance at successfully leveraging the beneficial opportunities that employee volunteering presents.
News You Can Use

New Online Resource for Templates and Tools
OurSharedResources.org, a new resource clearinghouse for the volunteer sector was unveiled at the Administrators of Volunteer Resources in British Columbia conference in November 2009. This free-to-use website is one where those who work in the field of volunteer management will be able to add useful resources and others in the field will be able to access them. Resources could be:
- Downloadable, real-world examples of forms, manuals or position descriptions
- Templates and tools for creating resources
- Tips, ideas and how-to articles

Rather than starting from scratch, volunteers and volunteer program managers will be able to search for resources similar to what they need, download an example or a template for it and then just modify it to meet their specific needs. Tips and how-to articles will also be available for reference in using the downloadable resources. All resources added to the clearinghouse will cite the contributor’s name. Anyone will be able to access these resources and download the files that their peers have added for the purpose of sharing them. With a free registration, those who make use of the resources will be able to comment back into the site on how it helped them.

Although there are websites out there that contain advice for those who manage volunteers, this is the first site to be built around the concept of peer-contributed content and the first to include downloadable examples in its focus.

Check it out and add your own documents for your colleagues to use!
Go to www.oursharedresources.org and register as a contributor.

Integrating Technology into a Volunteer Program
When you integrate new technology into your volunteer program, consider the following statistics from a survey published recently in the AARP Bulletin. 1,013 adults age 50 and older were asked, “Do you ever use the Internet to…”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Ages 50-64</th>
<th>65-plus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research information</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send/receive e-mail or instant messages</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy a product</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make travel reservations</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do banking</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read books, newspapers, magazines</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Important New Report from Minnesota
The Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) has released its report, The Status of Minnesota’s Volunteer Programs in a Shifting Environment. This survey of 280 nonprofit and governmental organizations was conducted by MAVA in September 2009. 60% of organizations reported an increased reliance on volunteers. MAVA furthers its reputation as one of the volunteerism field’s outstanding professional societies by the way they have responded to a critical issue and how they have presented the information. Hard facts – no whining – solid ideas. Get the report and more details at www.mavanetwork.org/shiftingenv.

New Volunteer Management Professional Association
The Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (AL!VE) is a national organization that supports and advocates for professionals in the field of volunteer management. Its membership is a diverse cross section of professionals who are managers, directors, trainers, consultants and others interested in and committed to the engagement of volunteers. As a member of AL!VE you will have access to professional training, networking opportunities and resources for anyone connected to the field of service and volunteer engagement. Learn more about AL!VE on its web site: www.volunteeralive.org.

Corporation for National and Community Services Grants Available
AmeriCorps State and National Grants FY 2010 provides approximately $363 million for new, re-competing, and continuation AmeriCorps State and National grants. The grant categories are: State Commission and National Competitive including Professional Corps and Fixed-Amount Grants; State and National EAP; States and Territories without Commissions; and Indian Tribes. Closing date: January 26, 2010. For more information visit www.nationalservice.gov.

Learn and Serve America Higher Education FY 2010 provides approximately $7.3 million to be awarded to an estimated seven to nine individual institutions ranging from approximately $85,000 to $200,000 annually for a project period of up to three years, and an estimated seven to eleven consortia ranging from approximately $200,000 to $500,000 for a project period up to three years. The purpose of the Learn and Serve American Higher Education program is to support institutions of higher education that use innovative service-learning programming to meet the needs of local communities. Closing date is March 9, 2010. For more information visit the CNCS website: www.nationalservice.gov.
Call for AAMV Nominations

The American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV) calls on all members to nominate the leaders for the only organization dedicated to the advocacy for volunteer program managers and volunteers in museums. We need you to consider your colleagues, whether staff or volunteers, or perhaps yourself as a future leader of AAMV. Good organizations are only as good as their leadership – help us reach a bright future!

Terms begin after the annual meeting of the AAMV membership, held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums in Los Angeles May 23-26, 2010.

The following positions are open for terms ending May 2013:

**Vice President**

**Western Regional Director** (AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, UT, WA)

**Director at Large**

*Regional Directors work with AAMV State Representatives in their region, developing activities and programs, maintaining contact with regional museum associations, and generally working with the AAMV Board, assisting with programs, membership recruitment and other projects.*

**Guidelines**

- Nominators must be current members of AAMV.
- When nominating a colleague, get permission before submitting his/her name.
- Nominate yourself! Don’t be modest; we need you (if you are uncomfortable nominating yourself, ask a colleague to nominate you).

If you have questions about the open positions, please fax, e-mail, or call any member of the Nominating Committee. Their contact information is listed on this page.

**Requirements to Serve as a Board Member**

- All positions serve a three-year term beginning in May 2010. Board members may serve for two consecutive terms in any one position on the Board.
- Board members attend two (2) meetings annually – one in the fall (usually in Washington, DC) and another during the AAM annual meeting in the spring. Board members are expected to provide their own funding to attend these meetings, unless their institution is willing to fund their participation.
- AAMV seeks broad geographic representation on its Board of Directors.

Nominees will receive a letter indicating that they have been nominated and giving a brief description and history of AAMV. A letter of honor will be sent to the director of each nominee’s museum/institution after election.

Please mail or e-mail your nominations to Wendy Evans, Chair, Nominating Committee, no later than February 1, 2010. Thank you!!

**2009 Nominating Committee Members:**

**Wendy Evans**  
_Nominating Committee Chairman_  
973 Satterlee  
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304  
Phone: 248-646-0031  
Email: wendyevans@wayne.edu

**Deb Fuller**  
Phone: 860-767-1782  
Fax: 860-767-1612  
Email: Jfull1@mindspring.com

**Maria Christus**  
Phone: 312-542-2411  
Fax: 312-322-2257  
Email: mchristus@adlerplanetarium.org

Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAMV Nominations Due</td>
<td>February 1, 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAMV Volunteer of the Year Award Nominations Due</td>
<td>March 1, 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Association of Museums (AAM)</td>
<td>May 23-26, 2010</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain-Plains Museums Association (MPMA)</td>
<td>September 13-17, 2010</td>
<td>Rapid City, SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Midwest Museums (AMM)</td>
<td>October 6-9, 2010</td>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC)</td>
<td>October 12-15, 2010</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Museums Association (WMA)</td>
<td>October 18-21, 2010</td>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums (MAAM)</td>
<td>October 24-27, 2010</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England Museum Association (NEMA)</td>
<td>November 3-5, 2010</td>
<td>Springfield, MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No Price Increase for Stamps in 2010

We’ll continue to pay 44 cents for first-class stamps in 2010, and the price to mail catalogues and magazines will also stay the same, according to an internal Postal Service memo. “Simply stated, there will not be a price increase for market dominant products including First-Class Mail, Standard Mail, periodicals and single-piece Parcel Post,” Postmaster General John E. Potter said in a memo to postal staff members.
Ten Ways to Volunteer on Your Own Schedule

No matter how many items I check off my list, undoubtedly, the list continues to grow. I’m always running out of time, so offering my time feels downright daunting. But with a little creativity and research, I’m finding that it is possible to give back. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities out there. It’s just a matter of finding one that I like—and fits my schedule.

Here are a few ideas if you’re interested in volunteering but have a busy schedule.

1. Know Thyself and Ask Yourself
   • How much time do I really have?
   • Am I super social or want to be alone, or both?
   • Stay local or travel?
   • Do I want to work offsite, at home, or both?
   • Who do I want to serve and why?
   • Will I create my own opportunity or volunteer with an established group?
   • What do I want to get in return from the experience? (The answer might be simple: it just feels good.)

2. Be Realistic about Your Time and Improvise
   The more you enjoy what you’re doing, the less it will feel like “time.” That said, certain kinds of volunteer opportunities may require more time than others. Some organizations require their volunteers to come to meetings once a month, yet much can be done offsite at your own home on your own schedule. For example, I have a friend who works for a state park nonprofit, which only requires him to be at a meeting once a month for two hours. Most of the work he does is at home by phone and email, so he volunteers at his leisure. But if you’re interested in teaching kids to read, it might mean volunteering onsite at a school, once a week, during the work day. If you can’t commit to it, think more broadly about literacy; start a book swap at your local church, community center, or school. Or start a book drive for underserved classroom libraries, foster homes, prisons, mental health facilities, and homeless shelters. Or simply read to someone you know.

3. Think Local
   Check out local bulletin boards and ask family, colleagues, and friends how you might contribute. Networking will help you find those once-a-year events that interest you. Local libraries, hospitals, schools, homeless shelters, social service agencies, youth centers, food banks, political headquarters, nature centers, parks, and nonprofits are probably nearby and may need volunteers only once a month or a few times a year.

4. Do Your Research
   A search on databases like Idealist.org or VolunteerMatch.org can yield amazing results, or can provide ideas that you can then decide to pursue locally. Handy with a hammer or just willing to learn? On VolunteerMatch.org, I found many volunteer jobs that last one week in places like New Orleans. Or consider joining an established organization like Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org). They estimate that 1,000 volunteers are needed per week to keep up with their construction pace in the Gulf Coast. Check out your local library, too, for specific volunteer opportunities. If you’re willing to go abroad, books such as World Volunteers (3rd Edition): The World Guide to Humanitarian and Development Volunteering, offer short- and long-term projects.

5. Volunteer on Vacation
   Give back to a place you’ve visited, meet travelers like yourself, or just do something you like to do anyway. Instead of just seeing the coral reefs in the Caribbean—help protect them! Books such as Volunteer: A Traveler’s Guide to Making a Difference Around the World (Lonely Planet General Reference) will get you focused.

6. Volunteer on Company Time
   Increasingly companies are giving back and recruiting their employees to donate time—all on the company’s dime. Make a Difference Day (www.usaweekend.com/diffday/) takes place on the fourth Saturday of every October in the U.S. (though several multinational corporations as well as the U.S. military stationed overseas volunteer time as well). Volunteers who are noticed for outstanding work receive awards, charitable donations, and media coverage in USA WEEKEND Magazine during National Volunteer Week in April.

continued on page 9
Ten Ways continued from page 8

7. **Keep It Simple**
There is a young man in my town who volunteers his time finding old bikes and repairing them for area nonprofits, community centers, foster homes, and after-school programs. He then throws a party once a year at a local bar to raise money for needy children.

8. **Make an Impact When You Truly Can**
So many of us have unpredictable schedules and think it’s just not possible to commit any time at all. But Charity Guide (www.charityguide.org) recognizes this and offers what they call a Volunteer on Demand approach. You can choose your project based on how much time you have to give. Fifteen minutes?

One hour? They have a job for you. Their site is chock full of creative ideas for those truly strapped for time.

9. **Volunteer to Meet More People**
For many of us, it’s not all about going to heaven. You might not have a lot of extra time, but you do want to socialize. Volunteering is one way to meet new friends, date, or network. One Brick (www.onebrick.org) recognizes that some volunteers prefer a more social and flexible volunteer environment. Events are usually three to four hours, and afterward volunteers meet up at restaurants or cafes where they get to know other volunteers.

10. **Give Advice from Your Armchair**
Virtual volunteering has taken off. If you can’t be there, be virtually there. Many organizations look for those with experience in social entrepreneurship; research, writing, fundraising, or marketing; mentoring youth and sharing wisdom online; and promoting legislation. They also look for professionals in law, journalism, public health, and medicine. Organizations such as Naburr.com, Ashoka.org, icouldbe.org, Operation Hope, Lawyers Without Borders, and Red Cross Virtual Journalists Program, are just the tip of the virtual volunteering iceberg.

Adapted from an article by Kathleen J. King at www.divinecaroline.com/22347/39337-ten-ways-volunteer-own-schedule.
Risk Management Culture and Your Volunteers

We’ve been obsessed with “culture” in recent weeks. At a conference I attended in Toronto in mid-August, Nancy Axelrod, governance guru and founding President of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center told an audience of nonprofit CEOs that “culture trumps strategy.” Nancy’s comments reminded me that no matter how carefully a nonprofit’s leaders construct risk management policies, a culture that ignores volunteer discontent or takes volunteer views for granted will lessen the effectiveness of even the most thoughtful approach to managing risk.

A respected colleague, Linda L. Graff, explains a four-step process for creating a “risk aware culture” in her terrific book titled *Best of All: The Quick Reference Guide to Effective Volunteer Involvement.*

How to Create a Risk-Aware Culture in Your Organization

- **Communicate:** Create opportunities to talk about risk. Help volunteers understand that risk is a normal part of doing business. Help them to become conscious of risks in their day-to-day environment. Encourage identification and reporting of risks wherever volunteers work throughout the organization. Make sure that employees feel comfortable reporting risks related to volunteer involvement. Communicate that risk management creates a safer working environment for all.

- **Educate:** Enhance risk identification skills through ongoing training, case conferences, in-service sessions, supervisory meetings, performance reviews, etc. Help volunteers to understand the full range of risk control options available in their own area of the workplace, including the small things that everybody can do to increase safety. Help them to know what issues should be reported, and to whom.

- **Appreciate:** Reward everyone who identifies and reports risks. Make risk management a competency area and build it into the volunteer performance management system. Announce successes, publicly acknowledge and reward volunteers’ efforts to make the workplace and the organization’s services safer for everyone. Attention to risk management and good risk reduction ideas could become the basis of a special annual volunteer recognition award.

- **Implement:** People need to see that their efforts bring results. Follow up on all suggestions. Implement risk control strategies and report back to the risk identifier on actions that have been taken.

In our forthcoming book, *No Surprises: Harmonizing Risk and Reward in Volunteer Management—5th Edition,* we explore numerous facets of volunteer service and risk. From the work required to recruit, screen and train volunteers to the deployment of volunteers as key staff in a nonprofit’s programs, recognizing and managing the risks associated with volunteer service is critical to ensuring mission fulfillment.

In the section on volunteer screening, we explore the importance of reference checks. The book includes the following suggested questions to ask a reference for a volunteer position.

**General questions:**
- In what capacity have you known the applicant and for how long?
- Would you rehire the applicant? If not, why not?
- How does the candidate handle frustration and criticism while on the job?
- Was the candidate punctual and reliable?
- Please describe any examples of instances where the candidate did not meet your expectations.

**Questions for applicants who will be working with vulnerable clients (e.g., children, the elderly or persons with disabilities):**
- When and where have you observed the candidate working with young children/the elderly/persons with disabilities?
- What is the candidate’s philosophy about discipline?
- In your opinion are there any reasons why placing our vulnerable clients in the care of the applicant would expose our clients to undue risk or harm?
- Would you place your own child or elderly parent in the care of this applicant?

**Question for applicants for mentoring positions:**
- Would you be comfortable having the applicant assigned to mentor someone in your family?

**Author:** Melanie L. Herman, Executive Director, Nonprofit Risk Management Center. For more information or to order your copy of the brand-new edition of *No Surprises,* visit: [http://nonprofitrisk.org/store/no-surprises.shtml](http://nonprofitrisk.org/store/no-surprises.shtml).
each board with a layer of paint. These are going to be replacement walls for an exhibit she had developed that was currently on display called 'Out Quiet Yourself.'

In between strokes, she lays down the roller and suddenly is doing something else: Checking another project, showing me machinery in the woodshop, tinkering with a heap of materials for another exhibit-to-be, talking with a co-worker, and reminding herself to put up a ‘Wet Paint’ sign for the boards. It becomes ridiculously obvious that this is the sort of workplace where multitasking isn’t just an attribute, but a necessary skill - Mary Elizabeth admits, ‘This place fosters ADD.’

Mary Elizabeth started working at the museum as a volunteer intern in the workshop in 2001 while she was a grad student at the California College of the Arts. Although she didn’t have a science background, her welding knowledge landed her the internship. She eventually became a museum tech helping to build the exhibits, and finally became an exhibit developer, or person who creates and shepherds an exhibit from beginning to end.

While the boards are drying, Mary Elizabeth takes me upstairs to see some of the exhibits that she created, including the aforementioned ‘Out Quiet Yourself,’ an exhibit in which visitors try to walk across a path of gravel as quietly as they can. A computer records and displays how much noise participants make while walking upon the gravel, and even tells them to start over, if they make too much noise. We watch as spry rug-rats alternate between tiptoeing and running across the gravel.

Mary Elizabeth points out the worn out paint on the walls near the edges of the gravel path. I ask, ‘Why are the walls worn?’ Before she can answer, I see it in action. A kid shimmies along the edge of the walls, not even touching the path below so as not to disturb the gravel below. Cheater! Part of Mary Elizabeth’s job is learning from watching people interact with her inventions, and watching people destroy it. ‘You need to break it in 50 million ways so it’s as bulletproof as possible,’ she says.

We visit another one of her creations, the ‘Sonic Storytelling’ booth, a soundproof room where visitors recreate and record radio dramas using props like a miniature door you can slam, two boards you slap together to mimic a gunshot, and so on. Mary Elizabeth had to figure out ways to safely secure the props so they could be easily accessible, and so they wouldn’t get broken or stolen. She took note of the small things that you and I might not think about - like making sure the height of the tabletop is wheelchair accessible and hiding unsightly cords, bolts, and expensive microphones.

When it comes to museum exhibits, she says, ‘the less ingredients, the better’ so that people will keep their attention on the point of the display instead of finding ways to break or dismantle it. She is mostly successful, but we laugh at how thrashed the prop door is - its doorknob is mangled and banged-up, and the blue paint is seriously scratched-up as if a mini Jack Torrance had been trying to axe his way through. She admits that it can be difficult to watch kids recklessly break the things she so carefully and lovingly builds, but really, it’s just part of the job.

Mary Elizabeth’s work-in-progress is a huge project for a new exhibition called ‘Geometry Playground.’ One of the many components in it will be Space Cubes, gigantic structures that visitors can walk through to tactically experience geometry. Mary Elizabeth is currently working with small-scale prototypes, but she’s already thinking about the life-size version and how she’ll create it without any possibility that a person can injure himself or die while climbing on or in it. It’s all fun and games until someone’s head gets stuck in a geometric structure.

The longer I spend with Mary Elizabeth, the more I realize that Spider-man is right - with great power comes great responsibility. Sure they have cool jobs, but exhibits developers actually have to consider the possibility that people can get hurt, and even die, on their inventions, not to mention get hurt themselves. As we walk around the woodshop, I notice several precautionary notices, from a jokey staff-made Rodney Dangerfield sign, to a no-beating-around-the-bush skull and crossbones caveat.

When I ask if she’s ever been seriously hurt she knocks on wood and shows me the belt sander that once almost shredded her thumb. I realize that Mary Elizabeth can’t be inattentive or sloppy, even for a second. It seems ironic, but also makes sense, that a job creating fun exhibits for children can be so dangerous. Thankfully, by the time I part ways with Mary Elizabeth, all our fingers and toes are still intact.


Photos: Courtesy of Amy Snyder/Exploratorium
What is AAMV?

There are more than one million volunteers and volunteer program managers in all categories of museums in the United States. Founded in 1979, the American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV) is America’s only national association dedicated to the paid and unpaid museum staff who work together. AAMV is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

Who are AAMV Members?

We are volunteers, docents, and paid museum staff who bring a wealth of experience and ideas in promoting volunteerism in museums and in starting or improving museum volunteer programs. We welcome members from zoos and aquariums, botanical gardens, historic houses, and other cultural organizations with an educational mission.

What does AAMV do?

- Promotes professional standards of volunteerism
- Provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and information
- Offers opportunities for continuing education through panel discussion and workshops at local, regional and national conferences
- Encourages volunteers and volunteer managers to become familiar with project and programs both locally and nationally
- Informs and supports museums and volunteerism in advocacy for legislation at local and national levels
- Accomplishes these goals in cooperation with museum directors, staff and boards of trustees

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- Opportunities to take part in workshops and presentations at state, regional, and national meetings
- Access to state and regional representatives as well as a nationwide network of volunteer management professionals and experienced volunteers
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