Volunteers in small museums often take on challenges and pursue opportunities that help their museums thrive—or even survive. At the Stearns History Museum in St. Cloud, Minnesota, volunteers designed an innovative program to engage the community in a high-profile issue: fighting childhood obesity. Volunteers at the Shore Line Trolley Museum in Connecticut mobilized in response to Hurricane Irene, when the worst tidal flood in the museum’s 66-year-history caused devastating damage to historic transit vehicles in the collection.

Growing Healthy Habits
Guided by enthusiastic volunteers, children cultivated and tended a flourishing vegetable garden on the grounds of the Stearns History Museum while learning about the connection between healthy eating and strong bodies. Long-time volunteer Joyce Wittenhagen recruited gardening enthusiasts and other volunteers to plan educational programs around the traveling exhibition *The Working White House: Two Centuries of Tradition and Memories*. Their idea for a White House Children’s Garden was a natural fit with Let’s Move! Museums and Gardens, a national initiative launched by First Lady Michelle Obama to encourage museums and gardens to fight childhood obesity using interactive exhibits, outdoor spaces, gardens, and programs.

Volunteers spent six months developing a curriculum that incorporated science, gardening, nutrition, and exercise. In the spring, students started seedlings under lights in their elementary-school classrooms, while volunteers prepared the garden plot. Every Thursday morning from mid-June to mid-August, about 30 children worked and learned in the garden with volunteers, who also led physical activity, crafts, and reading.

A proud gardener at the Stearns History Museum enjoys the results.

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**VOL. 2011, NO. 3**
Letter from the President

There is never any real down time at museums for volunteers and the staff who work with them. Even in the slower fall months, there are always things to be done to prepare for new exhibits or events. Behind-the-scenes curatorial and office work never stops!

The AAMV Board has definitely been busy getting a new website up and running (www.aamv.org). Our new site offers the advantage of easier maintenance so we can keep information up to date. We hope to develop it so that it provides a wealth of information for you. Time and a limited budget have always been a challenge for the AAMV board in trying to expand the work we can do for our members. But we are excited about the coming year and hope that our new website will help us keep in better touch. And don’t forget to use our listserv to float an idea, ask a question, or contribute a great story. This is a really easy way to learn from colleagues and to share your own brilliant ideas.

AAMV Board members often are asked if we have an annual conference on museum volunteerism. While organizing such an event is currently beyond our budget and time capabilities, we have been working on building programs at the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums. We would love to work with anyone who is interested in being a part of sessions at AAM as well as at smaller local or regional conferences (see p. 3 for a 2012 calendar). And we would certainly appreciate hearing from anyone who is doing a presentation or workshop related to museum volunteerism at an upcoming conference so we can post this news on our website. We welcome your ideas and information; please contact Danielle Stephens, AAMV program director, dstephens@aspenartmuseum.org.

We welcome your ideas and contributions, too, in any other area where AAMV might support your work.

Lois Kuter
AAMV President, Volunteer Coordinator, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, kuter@ansp.org


This AAMV publication stimulates creative thinking about finding, training, supervising, and supporting volunteers in a changing environment. Purchase your copy for $29.95 at www.authorhouse.com, or visit the AAMV website at www.aamv.org for more information and a link to order the book.

AAMV Newsletter

Editor
Ellen Hirzy
ellenhirzy@gmail.com
202–544–3998

President
Lois Kuter, kuter@ansp.org

This newsletter is a quarterly publication of the American Association for Museum Volunteers, the nonprofit membership and service organization dedicated to the millions of volunteers in all categories of museums in the United States and to professionalism in museum volunteer program management. AAMV welcomes submissions of manuscripts for publication. Queries should be made to the President. Information about AAMV’s other services is available at www.AAMV.org.
**Heard on the AAMV Listserv**

**Q: Does your museum require volunteers to become members?**

Asking volunteers to join as members may depend on the demographics of your volunteer group. Our museum has an ever-changing group of about 400 to 450. Half are new each year, and 40 percent are teens as young as 14. Volunteers come from all neighborhoods of the city and surrounding area, and most do not have a lot of spare change. It has been my impression that the few who have the wealth to become donors do so on their own. For our museum, requiring memberships would serve no positive purpose and would probably be a financial burden for some of our volunteers.

—Lois Kuter, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, Philadelphia

We have discussed this issue many times here at the Ringling Museum. We offer a 10 percent discount to volunteers on the level of membership they choose, as well as a discount on gift memberships. One reason we haven’t made membership a requirement is we respect the fact that, with so many wonderful nonprofits in our community, volunteers will often give their time to one and support another financially.

—Hollie Corbitt, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida

We do not require Exploratorium volunteers to become members. In fact, we reward them with one after 40 hours of service, and we allow those who happen to be donors to gift the earned membership.

—Deirdre Araujo, Exploratorium, San Francisco

**Q: What title does your museum give to front-of-house volunteers and staff?**

Titles are important. They bring an attitude to a position, both for the visitor and for the person providing the service. I like the title concierge, like the people at a five-star hotel who make you feel so welcome and imbue you with total confidence that they can answer any question and handle any situation you throw at them. A teenager once told me, “I don’t just want to be a ticket taker.” I answered, “I have no ticket takers. What I have are directors of first impressions.” Frontline people set the tone, make the connections, troubleshoot, and problem solve, all in a flash and always with a smile. If we can borrow from the Latin to call our tour guides docents, we can steal from the French to call our greeters concierges.

—Sandra L. Baker, Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh

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**Calendar**

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| **Museums Advocacy Day** | http://speakupformuseums.org  
February 27–28, 2012  
Washington, DC |
| **American Association of Museums** | www.aam-us.org  
April 29–May 2, 2012  
Minneapolis–St. Paul, MN |
| **Association of Children’s Museums** | www.childrensmuseums.org  
May 10–12, 2012, Portland, OR |
| **American Public Gardens Association** | www.publicgardens.org  
June 19–22, 2012, Columbus, OH |
| **Mountain-Plains Museums Association (MPMA)** | www.mpma.net  
October 1–5, 2012  
Corpus Christi, TX |
| **American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)** | http://aaslh.org  
October 3–6, 2012  
Salt Lake City, UT |
| **Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC)** | www.astc.org  
October 13–16, 2012  
Columbus, OH |
| **Western Museums Association (WMA)** | http://westmuse.wordpress.com  
October 22–25, 2012  
Palm Springs, CA |
| **Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC)** | www.semcdirect.net  
November 7–9, 2012  
Williamsburg, VA |
### Around the Web

**Recent articles, blog posts, and websites about volunteering and volunteer program management**

**Tobi’s Nonprofit Management Blog**
http://tobijohnson.typepad.com/tobisblog/

Nonprofit consultant Tobi Johnson focuses on activating volunteers to improve your organization. Recent posts describe a volunteer training development cycle, comment on the importance of food at volunteer events, and list the biggest concerns prospective volunteers have before they sign up.

**Questioning Assumptions: The Ideal Employee: Volunteer Ratio**

Musing about the potential of volunteers on AAM’s Center for the Future of Museums blog, Elizabeth Merritt asks: “What if, in the future, museums asked not ‘How many volunteers do we need?’ but rather ‘How can we structure our operations to engage as many volunteers as possible in meaningful work?’”

**Volunteer Engagement: Strengthen Your Community Connection, Strengthen Your Organization**

Rebekah Lambert of the Arts Consulting Group says meaningful volunteer relations are about engagement: a people- and skills-based approach that involves volunteers as collaborators and colleagues.

**What Leaders of Volunteers Can Do to Gain Executive Attention**

Susan Ellis recommends a proactive approach to increasing management support for volunteer involvement.

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### Job Seekers as Volunteers Toolkit

Job seekers are one of the fastest-growing new groups of volunteers. As the unemployment rate holds steady at 9.1 percent and about 16 percent of Americans are considered underemployed because they can only find part-time work or are overqualified for their jobs, many nonprofits have had a steady stream of eager volunteers. This situation can be a mixed blessing for museums and other organizations, which may not be able to train, support, or even find positions for people whose motivations and availability may not be typical of regular volunteers.

**Engaging and Supporting Job Seekers as Volunteers**, a new online toolkit from the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration, shares ideas and resources for designing experiences that benefit both volunteers and organizations. This toolkit excerpt lists nine essential steps for meeting the challenge.

**Promising Practices for Engaging Job Seekers as Volunteers**

1. Assess your readiness to engage job seekers as volunteers.
2. Be prepared to present a case statement of the value the extra volunteer power will bring. Expect that everyone in the organization might not be enthusiastic about involving job seekers as volunteers.
3. Understand the varied motivations of job seekers for volunteering and the expectations of workforce centers, schools and organizations that refer job seekers for volunteering.
4. In designing how job seekers are involved as volunteers, build in strategies to address the main challenge of job seekers as volunteers at all steps of the process – their time availability may change suddenly if they find employment.
5. Develop recruitment messages that appeal to the motivation of job seekers for volunteering.
6. When interviewing job seekers for volunteering, offer a formal interview to assist with gaining interview experience. Ask questions on their motivation for volunteering to better understand their expectations.
7. The “win-win” for the organization and volunteer happens when there is truly a good fit of the volunteer in the position.
8. Be ready to offer extra support to meet expectations of the volunteer or referring organization.
9. Be ready to provide recommendations on the work done and to refer the job seekers to the tools developed by MAVA on how to put the volunteer work on a resume and discuss in an interview.

Visit the toolkit website here: www.mavanetwork.org/jobseekers.
Here are the first things to think about:

Liability Basics for Children Volunteers

As a kid, I sorted food donations for Lithuanian refugees because my mother was a leader in the Seattle Lithuanian Community. I sold Camp Fire Girls’ mints because, well, I had to. I interned at the Seattle Aquarium where I wore a badge that said, “Ask me! I know everything!” And I interned at Children’s Hospital because I hoped it would make my college applications look better.

But somewhere along the way, something must have clicked, because by the time I finished law school, I asked my corporate law firm employer, “Could you wait six months while I intern at Amnesty International?” And a few years later when I quit corporate law, the first thing I did was a volunteer internship at Northwest Immigrant Rights Project.

If my experience is a guide, a childhood experience as a volunteer can lead to a lifelong commitment to giving back. And if kids are among your clients or constituents, then getting them involved is a natural. But you’ll want to be sure you’ve got basic protections in place.

Liability Basics for Children Volunteers

Here are the first things to think about:

• Screening process: If you don’t already have a screening process in place for adults who will be working directly with children, or will be driving them around, now’s the time to start one.

• Accident-prevention procedures: If the kids will be doing anything remotely risky, then you’ll want to give explicit accident-prevention strategies in your trainings and written materials, and be ready to enforce compliance. For example, if long-sleeved shirts are advisable when the kids are working with animals, then you’ll have to not only give advance notice of this, but turn kids away who are improperly dressed, or at least have a spare sweatshirt on hand for them to borrow.

• Liability insurance: Make sure your liability insurance covers the activities planned within your volunteer program. Review your policy and talk to your insurance provider.

• Parental consent: When children younger than 18 are involved, you’ll also need to get written parental consent. Your permission form will document not only the parent’s permission for the child to partake in your activity, but should also contain a promise that the parent will not sue your organization in the event that the child is injured as a result of the carelessness of your volunteers or participants. Note that the effectiveness of parental waivers is a fraught topic in the law; when challenged, some waivers do not hold up—their effectiveness depends on the law in your state and the way the waiver was written.

Attached to this article is a sample parental waiver; click here, http://www.blueavocado.org/sites/default/files/Nolo%20Parental%20Release.pdf to download it for free. It’s impossible to create a sample waiver that does the trick for all states for every type of activity. But this form can give you and your attorney something to start with… and I do suggest you hire a competent lawyer for advice and drafting help.

Scaring Parents?

You’ll see that the sample waiver lays out a whole host of possible risks, from broken bones to death. Will you be scaring parents by doing the same within your form? Don’t worry: Most parents would rather know what’s possible than be surprised later, and will understand that this type of language is legally required. In fact, the more specific a waiver is regarding the actual risks that the child, student, or other volunteer will be exposed to, the more likely a court is to uphold its validity.

So Why Have Kids as Volunteers?

There are important roles for kids to play as volunteers, whether to help on their own projects (like raising money for their soccer team) or to help others. And such activities are good for kids, too. If you have adult volunteers with children, think of activities they can do with their children -- maybe passing out water bottles at a walk-a-thon, or staffing a table at a street fair.

Margo, a parent, told me of her daughter’s sales of Girl Scout cookies and items for school fundraisers: “In addition to learning how to make change and use basic math, one of the most important things she learned was how to take ‘No’ for an answer.” And another life lesson I learned from my own childhood volunteer work: Rich people don’t necessarily buy more mints.

Sample Parental Waivers from Museums

Children’s Museum of Bozeman

Heard Museum

Oregon Museum of Science and Industry

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Ilona Bray J.D.
Volunteers Making a Difference continued from page 1

sessions. Community partnerships brought local professionals to the museum, including a chiropractor who led children in stretching exercises and a nutritionist who talked about healthy food choices. The program reached nearly 400 children from diverse communities throughout central Minnesota.

Director Charlene Akers has high praise for the museum’s volunteers, who did everything from research on White House history to the heavy lifting involved in tilling the soil. This year’s garden was so successful that the museum is committed to making it a regular initiative, with plans for a World War II victory garden and a Native American herb garden.

For more information about how to participate in Let’s Move!, along with examples of how the initiative works in museums and gardens, go to www.imls.gov/letsmove. To learn more about the Stearns History Museum, go to www.stearns-museum.org.

Rescuing History
Hurricane Irene whipped through New England and upstate New York at the end of August, leaving flooded museum buildings and water-damaged collections in its wake. Water levels at the Shore Line Trolley Museum in the coastal city of East Haven, Connecticut, peaked at 8.3 feet above sea level. In the days before the storm, volunteers worked long hours moving some trolley cars to higher ground, but more than 90—most of the collection—were flooded with salt water. The car barns had only minor damage, while artifacts and archives were unaffected. As the water receded, volunteers began the recovery process with an assessment of each submerged vehicle. Some volunteers tested motors and began moving cars inside, while others cleaned out debris, cut fallen trees, and repaired the main trolley line and signals. Thanks to volunteer efforts, the museum reopened on September 3 with limited public programs. Several cars have been repaired, but the work ahead is challenging: each one will take an estimated 100 hours to repair.

Before the hurricane, the museum had launched a major capital campaign called Elevating the Collection, with a goal of $2 million to build two new car buildings that are 13 feet above sea level. General manager Wayne Sandford says the flood makes the need even more evident. He hopes that extensive press coverage lends visibility to the fundraising effort. The museum has two paid staff members and about 1,000 volunteers who are involved in every aspect of programs and operations. Sandford notes that in addition to repairing damaged trolleys, “volunteers are reaching out the people they know who might be interested in the campaign.”

To learn more about Shore Line Trolley Museum volunteers, go to www.bera.org/volunteer.html.
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

Membership Benefits …

- Participation in a vibrant Members-Only listserv
- Quarterly newsletter
- Access to information to create and sustain a museum volunteer program
- 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
- Advance notice of AAMV publications, such as Transforming Museum Volunteering, plus workshops, presentations, and meetings

What is AAMV?

Name ___________________________ Institutional Affiliation ___________________________ Date __________

Mailing Address ___________________________

Phone ___________________________ Fax ___________________________ E-mail ___________________________

Volunteer □ Staff □ Title (if staff) ___________________________ Department ___________________________

Check here if you would like to be added to the listserv □

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

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<td>$100</td>
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Make checks payable to AAMV. (Membership by PayPal is available online at www.aamv.org)

If you have any questions about your membership send an email to Lois Kuter at kuter@ansp.org.

*Allows 3 individuals from same institution access to AAMV listserv

**Individual membership plus $65 deductible contribution

Send membership applications to: AAMV, P. O. Box 9494, Washington, DC 20016