Richard J. W. Harker

Amidst the colonial architecture and beautiful city squares of Savannah, Georgia, volunteer program managers gathered during the Southeastern Museums Conference annual meeting in October for a roundtable discussion of current issues facing museum volunteer programs. Participants came from large, small, and in-between museums, and they included full-time volunteer managers, museum staffers who “only” manage volunteers as part of their jobs, and even some volunteers who manage volunteers. Yet the most striking outcome of the discussions and brainstorming that occurred was that most institutions, regardless of size or function, are facing similar concerns.

Many participants, including the facilitators, are constantly challenged with finding new ways to recruit volunteers. Whether they’re replacing older volunteers who are retiring or want to diversify a volunteer corps, where to go and how to encourage individuals to commit to our institutions is an ongoing concern. Although there is no one magic solution to this continuing process, the idea of appealing to college and university internship programs struck a chord. Even if a university does not have a history, public history, art education, or art department (all great places to find interested students who often need an internship), its career services or volunteer programs can be great places to make connections and seek advice about reaching out to students.

College-aged interns, however, do not come without their potential issues. Although we would like to think that interns are equipped with the skills and polish required to thrive in our institutions, often this is not the case. Some come prepared as if they are starting a new job, but others seem to have just rolled out of bed or are just collecting the course credits. To avoid potential problems during an internship, volunteer managers in Savannah recommended clear guidelines and instructions about tasks to be performed, a detailed work plan that highlights deadlines and institutional expectations for interns, and guidelines on dress code and professional behavior. Despite our best efforts, however, we will not be able to prevent every potential problem from rearing up during the time that we are mentoring and supervising interns. Be sure to keep an open line to the faculty member who is supervising the internship program, and don’t be afraid to include language that allows you to dismiss an intern in a volunteer agreement.

Firing volunteers is one of the hardest jobs handed down to us as volunteer managers. It becomes especially tricky when we do not have many volunteers to begin with or when an individual has worked with our institution for a long time. The consensus of our colleagues in Savannah was that museum staffers need to be able to “bite the bullet” in order to prevent volunteers who are unable to perform their tasks correctly from having a negative impact on the museum visitor’s experience. Naturally, this approach requires a level of sensitivity and might involve reaching out to a family member of an elderly volunteer. As one participant noted, “It is better to have no volunteers than a problematic volunteer!”

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Letter from the President

In interviewing college students for a six-month cooperative education position with the volunteer office at my museum, I often explain that volunteer management is a profession that requires a broad range of skills. They include writing of all styles for people from 14 through 80+; oral communication, from formal interviewing to answering telephone inquiries and having a casual conversation; and the ability to use technology effectively to manage database information and produce reports. As I describe to students the varied things they will do, I realize that volunteer management involves creativity, strong organizational skills, the ability to complete mundane office tasks, and the opportunity to learn something new every day. Even after 23 years as volunteer program manager at my museum, I find there are always new challenges and new ways to do things. More often than not, discovering a new and better way to improve my volunteer program comes from a conversation with museum colleagues who are more than happy to share an idea.

I was reminded how important networking is when I read the article by Richard Harker in this issue and when I participated in a webinar put together by AAMV board members for the American Alliance of Museums. While the December 11 webinar focused on “Recruiting, Selecting, and Placing Museum Volunteers,” the chat box where webinar participants type in questions and comments had an endless stream of information on every possible topic related to volunteers. This exchange of information, which runs parallel to the speakers’ presentation, makes the webinar a unique event where everyone is a participant. This was AAMV’s fourth webinar for AAM, and we will be continuing with other topics. Keep an eye out for a repeat performance in April of this webinar and future webinars on new topics that AAMV will be doing with AAM. Meanwhile, use the AAMV listserv (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/aamvlist/) to ask questions and share ideas with the network of AAMV members.

Lois Kuter, AAMV President
Volunteer Coordinator, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University,
Philadelphia, kuter@ansp.org
Volunteers Share Digital Interpretation Ideas

Skilled volunteers brought their expertise in programming, design, and online user experience to the Smithsonian American Art Museum in November for a weekend of experimentation with digital interpretation strategies. Volunteer teams put their heads together to help the museum begin creating a new digital experience for visitors to its visible storage facility, the Luce Foundation Center for American Art. Learn more about this innovative way to involve volunteers: http://eyelevel.si.edu/2013/11/hacking-the-museum.html.

Building institutional support for the volunteer program will help to mitigate many issues that could arise. If support is offered from all levels of your museum and all employees are given a stake in the importance of the volunteer program, making difficult decisions will become a lot easier. This is especially true for firing volunteers. If you have your director’s support and a clear set of guidelines and standards that have been vetted at all levels (including your board), then you and your colleagues will feel more empowered to tackle some of the more difficult issues that your program may face.

A number of participants suggested that using volunteers to train other volunteers (under the guidance of the volunteer manager) is a successful way of imparting institutional values as well as building esprit de corps among volunteers. Peer evaluation is also an effective way to help volunteers improve and understand their strengths and weaknesses. This is especially true of volunteer docents who are often unaware of their effectiveness until they are filmed and shown their tours or until another docent offers them constructive feedback.

Ultimately a volunteer program relies on a significant amount of energy on your part to recognize volunteers. By hosting a volunteer appreciation day, a holiday luncheon, monthly book clubs, or social events and by encouraging the entire staff to simply say “thank you,” you will continue to create an atmosphere that rewards volunteers’ generosity and energy and encourages them to continue giving their time and skills to your museum.

Getting together with such a diverse group of colleagues involved in museum volunteer management not only emphasized some of the similar issues that our institutions are facing today, but also provided a sounding board for individual issues to be discussed and resolved. If you have an issue that you want to talk about with your colleagues, join and contribute to the AAMV listserv (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AAMVlist/), where these kinds of discussions are happening every week. One of the strengths of our organization is its ability to bring us together to troubleshoot, brainstorm, and encourage each other to strive continually for higher standards in our field.

Richard J. W. Harker is education and outreach manager at the Kennesaw State University Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Kennesaw, Georgia, and serves on the AAMV Board as Southeast Regional Director.
### Preventing Volunteer Burnout

The VolunteerMatch blog *Engaging Volunteers* (http://blogs.volunteermatch.org/engagingvolunteers) is full of useful tips and best practices for volunteer program managers. Recent topics include developing a volunteer program budget, creating a positive image for your volunteer program, and avoiding volunteer attrition through burnout. Guest post author Rob Ortiz offers these suggestions:

1. Explain volunteer responsibilities and time commitments up front.
2. Don’t over- or underschedule volunteers. Assign the right number of volunteers to do the job.
3. Be approachable. Show interest in your volunteers' lives outside the museum.
4. Recognize volunteers consistently in small ways throughout the year, not just at one annual event.
5. Try matching volunteers with new responsibilities after they’ve held the same position for a while.
6. Create a variety of appealing volunteer positions that allow volunteers to serve the museum’s mission in different ways.

Read the blog post here: http://blogs.volunteermatch.org/engagingvolunteers/2013/12/02/6-ways-nonprofits-can-prevent-volunteer-burnout/.

### Preserving Memories from Older Volunteers

"I think my hardest lesson in the early years of volunteer management was losing a treasured volunteer’s stories. I now work hard at matching frail volunteers with an oral historian who can stroll through the museum with them and take notes on their perceptions, inside scoops, and backstories. At times, having video and audio of them reminiscing has been particularly nice for friends and relatives at memorial services. My last epiphany was to have these folks with us to see the finished product and feel the love."—Deirdre Araujo, Manager of Volunteer Services, Exploratorium, San Francisco

How do you capture volunteers’ memories and preserve the history of volunteering in your museum? Share your thoughts on the AAMV members-only listserv at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AAMVlist. Read more about celebrating the history of volunteers in this article by Susan Ellis: http://www.energizesinc.com/hot/2013/13dec.php.

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| **National Volunteer Week**  
www.handsonnetwork.org  
April 6–13 |
| **Association of Children's Museums (ACM)**  
www.childrensmuseums.org  
May 14–16, Phoenix, AZ |
| **American Alliance of Museums (AAM)**  
www.aam-us.org  
May 18–21, Seattle, WA |
| **Association of Midwest Museums (AMM)**  
www.midwestmuseums.org  
July 14–17, St. Louis, MO |
| **Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA)**  
www.aza.org  
September 12–18, Orlando, FL |
| **American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)**  
http://aaslh.org  
September 17–20, St. Paul, MN |
| **Mountain-Plains Museums Association (MPMA)**  
www.mpma.net  
September 28–October 2, Aspen, CO |
| **Western Museums Association (WMA)**  
www.westmuse.org  
October 5–8, Las Vegas, NV |
| **Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC)**  
www.astc.org  
October 18–21, Raleigh, NC |
| **Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC)**  
www.semcdirect.net  
October 20–22, Knoxville, TN |
| **New England Museum Association (NEMA)**  
www.nemanet.org  
November 19–21, Boston/Cambridge, MA |
Do We Need Insurance for Our Volunteers?

Chuck Hewitt

Volunteer immunity laws are common, but they almost always contain a provision that the volunteer’s immunity only applies to claims that exceed the insurance policy limits carried by the nonprofit. That means both the nonprofit and/or its volunteers need to have coverage available to provide a defense to lawsuits that have a monetary value that is less than the policy limits—and almost all of them fall within that category (e.g., a fender bender with minor property damage or injury). In addition, volunteer immunity laws do not prevent claims against the nonprofit brought by one of its volunteers.

Some (Unfortunately True) Worst-Case Scenarios

What can happen, really? A lot, actually. Here are some claims scenarios culled from over 20 years of data at the Nonprofits Insurance Alliance Group (http://www.insurancefornonprofits.org/).

A volunteer on agency business ran a stop sign and hit a vehicle whose driver wound up paralyzed from the neck down. The volunteer’s own personal coverage had lapsed, so the agency’s auto coverage became primary and the claim was settled for the $2,000,000 in available limits.

Volunteers were clearing a field and one of them, while using a chainsaw, sent a flying object into the eye of another volunteer. The sight in that individual’s eye was lost and the claim settled for more than $1 million.

A volunteer sexually abused multiple children over a four-year period. The nonprofit had not provided adequate supervision and was held responsible for $4,000,000 in claims.

A volunteer claimed that the nonprofit had discriminated against him because of his sexual orientation. The claim settled for $750,000, most of which was for plaintiff attorney fees.

A volunteer slipped and fell on the nonprofit’s floor and fractured her hip. She sued the landlord who turned out to be an additional insured on the nonprofit’s insurance policy. The claim settled for $550,000, which included a Medicare lien.

Average Cost of Claims

The examples above may represent the headliners, but even the average costs of claims are still not negligible for most nonprofits. Here are the average costs of claims brought by or against volunteers:

- General Liability: $12,000
- Auto Liability (with injury): $6,000
- Social Service Professional: $62,000
- Improper Sexual Conduct: $78,000

And even when a claim does not have merit, someone has to defend the volunteer and the nonprofit.

How You Can Protect Your Volunteers

So by now you probably realize the answer to your question (Should I be doing something?) is yes. Obviously, it is important to have appropriate insurance in place to cover the nonprofit’s various exposures (auto, premises liability, professional, sexual misconduct). Make sure that these policies include volunteers as additional insureds. This not only has the benefit of protecting volunteers if they are sued, but also makes your organization more attractive to volunteers who know they have insurance coverage in place while doing their volunteer work.

In addition, make sure the activities your volunteers engage in are as safe for them as they are for the general public. This risk management approach minimizes the adverse effects of losses that do occur, demonstrates your due diligence, makes your nonprofit an attractive “risk,” and can, in some circumstances, meet funder/insurer minimum requirements.

Finally, consider Volunteer/Participant accident insurance if your organization is large enough. This will typically provide excess insurance over group insurance (if there is any) on a no-fault basis. Also, some states allow volunteers to be covered under workers’ compensation policies. This would provide no-fault insurance coverage for injuries to the volunteer incurred while volunteering. Check with your insurance broker or agent to see if this type of coverage is right for your organization.

This article is reprinted with permission from Blue Avocado, a practical and readable online magazine for nonprofits. Subscribe free by contacting the editor or visiting www.blueavocado.org. Chuck Hewitt is claims technical director at the Nonprofits Insurance Alliance Group. He has held executive positions with Liberty Mutual, Western Employers, Industrial Indemnity and Zenith Insurance Companies.
Ideas for Maximizing Mission with Collections Volunteers

Volunteers can be valuable partners with museum staff in collections management. This list of actual tasks and projects, developed by panelists at an American Alliance of Museums 2013 annual meeting session, shows the range of possibilities for involving trained volunteers in this important mission-based work.

**Education Collections**
- Pack and unpack objects for classes or off-site programs.
- Repair broken objects.
- Catalog objects and do condition reports.
- Research and identify objects.
- Rehouse objects.
- Write catalog cards.
- Clean and monitor hands-on Discovery Stations.
- Move objects within collections.
- Conduct a visual inventory.
- Set up a usable access database.
- Sort large donations of natural history materials and group like materials together for later ID and processing.
- Take photographs of objects.
- Pack and move collection into a new facility.
- Scan field notebooks, old catalog cards, and other materials and put them into a searchable database.
- Prepare natural history collections: fluid collections, drying, pinning, drilling skulls for wiring together, cleaning bones, etc.
- Put together subject-themed boxes for classes.
- Label objects.

**Museum Collections**
- Catalog objects.
- Perform data entry.
- Scan donor records.
- Reconcile scanned donor records with database and paper records.
- Conduct location inventories.
- Make padded hangers for hanging clothing and cover racks of hanging clothing with fabric.
- Help grant consultants access portions of the collection.
- Provide storage assistance: Move containers, move and rebuild shelves, move objects, design and build new storage solutions.
- Conduct and transcribe oral history interviews.
- Provide assistance for collection documentation projects, including logistics, interviews, photography, and public relations.
- Help prepare exhibit cases for installation.
- Create object mounts.
- Perform light construction tasks.
- Move cases and help install wall mounts.
- Dry-mount labels.
- Enlarge and dry-mount photographs.
- Frame flat textiles and paper items.
- Curate small exhibits.
- Write and/or edit label copy.
- Edit audio components for exhibits and install audio equipment.
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

Become an AAMV Member Today!

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

- Individual $35 □
- Volunteer Group* $75 □
- Sponsor ** $100 □
- Additional Contribution $ ______ □

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