Engaging volunteers in reflecting on their own practice creates a solid foundation of feedback that stimulates continuous growth and improvement. When the education team at the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) in Phoenix, Arizona, implemented a self-reflection program for the museum’s 120 tour guides in November 2013, we knew it would take some effort to manage the process and review the feedback. But the investment produced high-impact results, including actionable feedback, constructive conversation between paid staff and guides, and productive new ideas for both the volunteers and the museum.

As the volunteer corps that has led more than 100,000 K–12 school tour participants through the museum since it opened in 2010, the museum guides play a crucial role in furthering MIM’s mission. At first, the focus was on recruitment, training, and then getting out there and leading tours. During the first full school year (2011–2012) museum guides toured 25,000 students. Without their support, the education team would never have enjoyed such a strong start, leading to growth in succeeding years. By the 2013-2014 school year, MIM was welcoming more than 36,000 school tour participants.

To maintain growth, we needed to recruit and train more guides while simultaneously retaining the current group. We believed that volunteers’ self-reflections would be a window into the current state of the museum guide program. As we planned the process, we had three general goals:

• Increase retention. Feedback would help inform continuing education.

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Working with the American Alliance of Museums and Learning Times, AAMV is pleased to present the fourth in a series of webinars inspired by our book, *Transforming Museum Volunteering: A Practical Guide for Engaging 21st-Century Volunteers*, on January 28, 2015, from 2:00 to 3:30 EST. The webinar will focus on training—and what a big topic that is. For every type of volunteer and every type and size of museum, training can vary, and it can even be virtual.

Webinar presenters are Sandra Baker, volunteer program director at the Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, and Richard Harker, education and outreach manager at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Kennesaw State University, Georgia. Both are AAMV Board members and past contributors to this newsletter. I will also participate with some comments from my perspective as volunteer services manager at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, Philadelphia.

We’d like to design the content to represent multiple perspectives on best practices for training volunteers, so we welcome your creative ideas and strategies. What innovative things have you done to prepare new volunteers for their roles at your museum and to offer long-term volunteers the opportunity to keep learning and growing? To register and to learn more about the webinar, visit www.aam-us.org/resources/online-programs/training-museum-volunteers. AAMV members receive a discounted rate of $25; to obtain the discount code, please contact me at lvk26@drexel.edu.

Lois Kuter, AAMV President
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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.
Volunteers as Guest Bloggers

Storytelling is a great tool for recruiting, engaging, and appreciating volunteers. And one effective way to spread those stories is by inviting volunteers to write guest posts on your museum’s blog. The Indianapolis Museum of Art featured docent Nancy McMillan’s reflections on an Indiana road trip to prepare for an upcoming exhibition (http://bit.ly/1wtEmXk) and volunteer Pres Maxon’s description of the perfect art-filled view from his vantage point at the information desk (http://bit.ly/1tFGkhd). Tim Crane of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, explained why he volunteers and why helping visitors experience James Turrell’s Skyspace installation is his favorite assignment (http://bit.ly/1tFGkhd). And the Sidney Museum and Arts Association, Port Orchard, Washington, devotes an entire section of its blog to volunteer guest bloggers (http://bit.ly/1zRVfsj).

For an effective post, give the guest blogger a word limit and a clear assignment: Describe an experience in the museum that exemplifies your reasons for volunteering. Write about the community of volunteers and what it means to you. Reflect on something you have learned through volunteering. Keep the post short, heartfelt, and informal—and add a note at the end about how to learn more about volunteering with your museum.

Volunteer Engagement Is Everyone’s Job

Volunteer engagement is a museum-wide responsibility, writes Carolyn Noe in Museum Minute. “Volunteers interact with nearly every employee in a museum,” she says, and staff can use principles from museum visitor engagement to influence the quality of volunteers’ experiences:

• Meet volunteer expectations.
• Exceed volunteer expectations.
• Provide entry points to meet individual volunteers’ needs.
• Offer volunteers choices, control, feedback, and success.


How Nonprofits Measure Volunteer Impact

How do you measure up? A recent survey report by VolunteerMarch and Software Advice describes the metrics, indicators, and data collection methods nonprofits use to measure volunteers’ impact on their organizations’ outcomes. The key findings:

• Fifty-five percent of nonprofits collect data to measure the impact volunteers have on goals and outcomes.
• Nineteen percent increased recruitment and retention as a result.
• Lack of resources and tools hinders 34 percent of organizations from measuring volunteer impact.

Read the full report here: http://bit.ly/1FUfZ6K.
Frequent-Volunteering Incentives

Adapted from a recent conversation on the AAMV Listserv:

Q: I’m looking into implementing a multilevel incentive program for our volunteers based on hours of service. I’d like to bring docents and other volunteers together and make volunteering a more rewarding experience. Do you have a similar program at your institution?

A: Volunteer-only lectures open to all active and retired volunteers, giving those who have been involved for 30 or more years a way to connect even if they aren’t physically capable of a full volunteer shift.
— Paula Allen, Pittock Mansion, Portland, OR

A: Special departmental awards for service “above and beyond”—a Golden Sea Turtle award from Aquariums, a Golden Sponge award from Animal Care for cleaning up after the animals, and Awesome Possum, Skillful Skunk, and more from Volunteer Services. Volunteers really seem to enjoy it!
— Shandran J. Thornburgh, Virginia Living Museum, Newport News

A: Jeweled logo pins with precious stones that indicate the number of hours speak to our appreciation every time they wear it. The pins signal to staff that this is a “veteran,” someone who has paid their dues.

They also invite inquiries from visitors who notice and ask, giving volunteers the opportunity to show their pride and promote the volunteer experience.
— Sandra L. Baker, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh

A: We’re looking at implementing a “frequent volunteering” program—a card to be punched every time a person volunteers. After 10 times, they’ll get a free beverage in our café. The beauty of this is that those who are here often will be rewarded more frequently, and those who can only provide us with our expected amount of volunteer help will still get a reward. We have learned that for those who are here less often because of work or family obligations, frequency-based incentives can make them feel less valued or acknowledged. As one of our volunteers said to me, “No matter how frequently someone can volunteer, we all contribute and add value.”
— Paula Rampe, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco

Do you have a challenge to resolve, a strategy to suggest, or a success story to share? Visit the AAMV listserv and join in the conversation with your colleagues. If you’re an AAMV member and haven’t subscribed to the listserv, contact Steve Dugan, s.dugan@homesteadmuseum.org.

Vantage Point Resource Centre

Engaging skilled volunteers—making the transition “from traditional volunteers who work with their hearts and hands to today’s volunteers who want to work with their hearts and heads”—is one research focus of Vantage Point, a Canadian nonprofit working in the areas of governance, leadership, planning, and people engagement. An online Resource Centre (http://bit.ly/12pMoD9) features publications, discussion papers, tools, and templates on volunteer “people processes.”

Are Unpaid Interns Legal?

Regular use of unpaid interns could have implications for a museum that hasn’t explored the legal requirements carefully. Bethany L. Hawkins shares what she learned about the issue on the American Association for State and Local History website. Nonprofits must classify unpaid interns as volunteers, not interns, according to the National Council of Nonprofits, and paying summer interns stipends could cause problems. “This is a sticky issue that requires more research if you regularly use interns at your organization,” Hawkins says. She offers links to helpful resources. Read the full article here: http://bit.ly/1zzWjU5.
topics, which would feed guides’ desire for learning and for continuing to volunteer.

- Address issues related to tour practices. The candid nature of the self-reflection process would allow us to lay out the expectations for a given tour, creating a platform for dealing with issues.

- Assess volunteer interest. From an extremely practical angle, the self-reflection process would help determine a guide’s active status. (In 2013, more than 150 guides had been trained, but only about 70 were leading tours on a regular basis.) By not completing a self-reflection, a guide was indicating that he or she was not interested in continuing.

We asked guides to reflect on one specific tour instead of completing a survey about their overall touring experiences. This focus would give us feedback that was actionable and that could be traced back to real events or interactions. Museum guide mentors—experienced guides who pilot new programs and mentor guides-in-training—volunteered to complete the self-reflection first. This preliminary step allowed us to share some examples of feedback with other guides and have a group of guides who could create buy-in among the rest.

In a free-response section, they were asked to summarize their pre- and post-tour actions and give a brief summary of what they covered in each gallery. Then they rated themselves on a five-point scale in the following areas: voice, eye contact, body language, content accuracy, timing, and use of technology (guides incorporate audio in their tours using small amplifiers). Last, they were asked to list their perceived strengths and challenges for this particular tour and to describe any additional education or tools that would support them in the future.

At first there was pushback from museum guides. The most frequent objection was that self-reflection had its place in the business world but not in the volunteer world. Some were also concerned about not living up to the expectations of paid staff. Guides feared that by not rating themselves at the highest possible level, they were basically admitting that they were doing a “bad job.” I met individually with everyone who voiced a concern. Not all of those conversations were easy, but honest feedback was one of the goals of the self-reflection process. I listened, took notes, reiterated the program goals, and encouraged them to include this feedback in the self-reflection.

Implementation took more than three months, beginning in November 2013. By the close of February 2014 about 65 guides had turned in self-reflections. We sent three reminder emails, and the education team individually reminded about 15 guides who were regularly giving tours but had not responded to the emails. About five more guides—who had either been volunteering in other roles or who had taken some time away from the museum—got in touch to re-engage as museum guides as a result of the self-reflection emails. Just one actively touring guide deliberately did not complete the process and dropped out of the museum guide program. Feedback from the guides had several major themes. The two we chose to tackle first were the lack of confidence in working with older and younger students and the tendency to disassociate content delivery from engagement techniques.

Since we most often see students in grades 4-6, it wasn’t surprising that guides felt unequipped to deal with those in the early elementary, middle school, and high school grades. In fall 2014, we offered continuing education dedicated to working with middle- and high-school students. As a result of teacher feedback (gained through educator surveys we distribute digitally after field trips), we are launching a new tour option geared to the highest grade levels (middle school and high school). Folded into guides’ training...
Volunteer Self-Reflection continued from page 5

will be practical techniques for engaging this group. We have also added an early childhood specialist to the education team. She has created a resource list for museum guides, highlighting sections that apply to museum learning. We plan to incorporate this material into future sessions of the initial training as well as into the continuing education that museum guides receive.

One piece of the puzzle that the self-reflections revealed was that many guides were not unifying content and engagement techniques. To some, sharing content and facts took place in one moment, while providing opportunities for discussion took place in another. Guides commented on the challenges of the short timeframe and varied ages and learning styles.

“It was hard to fit everything in—conversation [i.e., engagement], exhibits [content], time on their own—in just two hours,” said one guide. Another observed, “I always deliver vetted content. . . . Despite our training, I am not confident I use the best engagement techniques for different ages or different learning styles.”

In the last two years, we have emphasized interactive tour techniques. Involving students during tours is an expectation. As Arizona moves into College and Career Readiness Standards (Common Core Standards), students must contribute to discussions, collaborate with each other, and articulate their own ideas in the classroom. We should foster that type of environment on museum field trips, too. We have emphasized that guides are more than just volunteers in a museum; they are museum educators with a skillset. In general, guides have met this expectation with a mixture of enthusiasm, nervousness, and sometimes frustration. After all, the teacher-student dynamic looked very different when most of our guides were school-aged.

Looking forward, it might be tempting for the staff to feel overwhelmed with this new list of goals for museum guide training. But a culture of constant evolution is central to MIM, and this core value keeps us on track. The self-reflection process is just as much an opportunity for growth within the education team as it is for individual museum guides. This statement in the MIM Museum Guide Education Program Goals & Outcomes reflects that idea and provides the groundwork for the self-reflection program: “The museum guide provides and accepts ongoing feedback about their MIM museum guide experience with the Education Team.” For other museums that choose to implement self-reflection, remember that the mirror must go both ways. As guides must be open and receptive to feedback, so must volunteer managers be flexible in addressing it, even if—and especially if—the reflections reveal significant opportunities. From the start, the intention should be to improve the program from all angles. Establishing the expectation of continual evaluation and practice—while not always an easy thing to do—will make the self-reflection process more effective.

And because I can’t not brag about our museum guides: To our delight, many identified their desire for continuing education and love of learning as their greatest strength:

• “One can always improve . . . . That is the hardest ‘assignment’ of all.”
• “I love to learn. I love to teach. I love to share.”
• “A strength I see is my interest in and my love of learning new things and ideas that I can impart to the public.”
• “I think I will always want to improve on content knowledge and adjust it to the current tour.”
• “We can always learn more.”

I see this as the foundation on which we can stand for many, many school years to come.

Tips for Successful Self-Reflection

• Pilot the process with a small group of volunteers.
• Focus the self-reflection on a moment in time.
• Respect and address volunteers’ discomfort with the process.
• Synthesize feedback, finding themes.
• Create a plan for addressing themes in future trainings.
• If needed, work with individual volunteers on their feedback.

Niki Norris, museum guide and curriculum coordinator at the Musical Instrument Museum, Phoenix, oversees the training and content related to guided tours and educator resources and professional development. She recruits for, manages, and implements the museum guide training and mentor program (a volunteer-led mentor program). She is active in the Arizona museum community as president of the Greater Phoenix Emerging Museum Professionals network and participates on the Museum Association of Arizona’s annual conference planning committee. She graduated from Arizona State University with concurrent bachelor’s degrees in history and biology.
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

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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

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