

Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

Volunteer Policy

Volunteerism

Volunteers can be broadly defined as those who work in some way to help others for no monetary reward. For local historical organizations, such as the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, volunteer activity focuses on preserving and interpreting the essential and aesthetic resources that make a neighborhood, city or state a special place to live. Volunteers are our greatest assets, and a well-managed program is essential to attract and retain volunteer support necessary in a climate of decreasing public and private financial resources.

Volunteers work because they want to, not because they have to. The motivations that prompt volunteers to devote their time and energy to a cause or organization are as varied as the spectrum of individuals involved. Any reason to volunteer is a good one, but awareness of the reasons why particular individuals offer help can prove advantageous and satisfying to both the volunteers and the organization.

- **Altruism.** Belief in a specific cause is often one element of the decision to act, but it is rarely the only one.
- **Self interest.** People usually expect to gain something other than financial reward. Perceived benefits might include social visibility, professional recognition or more tangible benefits of being associated with a well-recognized organization.
- **Social outlet.** The desire to meet people with similar interests or to fill free time with worthwhile activity.
- **Training and job experience.** Students, either independently or through intern or fellowship programs, find volunteer positions useful in building a record of experience.
- **Obligation.** Someone who has benefited from the work of an organization in the past may feel obliged to respond to a call for volunteers to participate in an upcoming project. Another, very different type of obligation comes from volunteers recruited through a court system's alternative sentencing program who must complete their assigned hours of service.

Understanding why people volunteer is important in establishing a reasonable expectation for the level and type of participation and in creating a mutually satisfactory volunteer position. Motivations can and do change, and individual volunteer patterns will change along with them.

Structure

The management structure for the volunteer program at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula is a combination of a centralized system at the initial level and a decentralized system at the implementation level.

Managing volunteers through a centralized system requires that a single staff member (the Secretary) acts as the volunteer coordinator and manages every aspect of

volunteer involvement from recruitment to assignment. The volunteer coordinator finds volunteers and places them in job slots according to their interest and the Museum's needs. All staff, volunteers and board members are encouraged to help recruit volunteers for any position within the Museum.

A decentralized volunteer management system then shifts the responsibility to the appropriate staff member for training and supervision.

There are eight main areas of volunteer need at the Historical Museum:

1. Friends Board of Directors. The Board of Directors solicits its own members. The staff may make recommendations, individuals may seek information, but the Board and/or the membership at the Annual Meeting make the final decision. Upon election, the new board member receives training from the Museum Director and the Friends Nominating and Executive Committees.
2. Reception and Sales Desk. The Secretary, with the assistance of the Museum Store Manager, is responsible for recruiting, training and evaluating people to staff the reception desk (to greet visitors to the Museum, to take admission fees, and to answer general Museum questions) and the sales desk (to act as a sales clerk for the Museum Store). The Secretary is responsible for scheduling all shifts at the desk.
3. Education. Once recruited and assigned to the Education Department, the Education Curator is responsible for training, scheduling and evaluating volunteer docents. These volunteers will give tours and programs at the Museum and programs at schools using Museum-developed tour scripts and resource kits.
4. Collections. Once recruited and assigned to the Collections Department, the Senior Curator is responsible for training, scheduling and evaluating these volunteers, who may be assigned to work in registration, preservation and storage.
5. Exhibits. Once recruited and assigned to Exhibits, the Senior Curator is responsible for training, scheduling and evaluating these volunteers, who may be assigned to do research, write exhibit scripts, paint, do carpentry and other aspects of exhibit production and installation.
6. Grounds Maintenance. Once recruited and assigned to Grounds Maintenance, the Senior Curator - in conjunction with the Director - will train schedule and oversee these volunteers. Jobs that might be involved in this area include: mowing, irrigation, minor carpentry, painting, moving objects and cleaning the grounds as needed.
7. Specific Projects. Once recruited and assigned to a specific project, the staff member in charge of that project will be responsible for training, scheduling, overseeing and evaluating these volunteers. Sample projects may include: constructing handicap ramps, cataloging library books and conducting workshops.
8. Ancillary Organizations. The Historical Museum is blessed with many groups that have specific interests at the Museum and are governed by separate contracts and agreements. These include: Missoula Iris Society, Missoula Model Railroad Club, Delta Kappa Gamma, Society of American Foresters, Fort Missoula Theatre Company, and Missoula Botanical Garden Society.

Recruitment:

Volunteer sources include: MEMBERS!, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, senior centers, corporations, groups with similar interests, state and federal job and volunteer programs, Eagle Scouts and youth groups, ancillary organizations, university students (interns, fellowships and volunteers), high schools (students and teachers), middle schools (students and teachers), media, churches, service clubs and organizations, and the public

The best recruiter is an enthusiastic, satisfied volunteer already involved with the Museum. His or her enthusiasm is infectious and springs from first-hand experience. As a volunteer the recruiter has more credibility than a paid staff person when asking others to provide free services. A volunteer recruiter can also tap friends and acquaintances.

Recruitment of volunteers should be done in the same way as for paid staff. Volunteer application forms must provide sufficient information for the applicant to determine his/her level of interest, information regarding availability and area of interest, and enough information about the prospective volunteer so staff may be able to properly evaluate and assign the volunteer to the right position. It is realized that different people have different strengths and interests and every effort must be made to maximize these; it is also realized that some people may not be appropriate for certain positions depending upon interest, background and experience. We must be as clear as possible in describing the kinds of skills required, the time commitment involved, the job to be done and any other relevant expectations prospective volunteers should consider before committing themselves to work for the Museum. Asking people personally to participate in specific tasks or events will elicit a better response than a general call for volunteers. People should be invited to volunteer.

Response to volunteer interest should be prompt.

A well-run recruitment campaign will generate interest in the Museum from a wide range of potential volunteers. The next step is to match the skills and interests of these new volunteers with compatible job assignments. Besides reviewing the job description with the potential volunteer, his or her special interests and skills must be determined.

Planning volunteer activities should involve all staff and board members who will work with volunteers and ensure that volunteers are viewed as an asset to the Museum instead of a threat to the paid staff. Job descriptions for volunteer slots are essential and should include:

- Title or other name identification of the job
- Name and title of the person to whom the volunteer reports
- Summary of the duties
- Time commitment expected, expressed either as average number of hours per week or month or by designating specific times, plus minimum length of time the volunteer should commit to the job
- Qualifications, including skills or previous experience
- Training that the Museum will provide.

Training

With the possible exception of volunteers who participate only in a large-scale special event, training is a long-term proposition beginning with an orientation.

Orientation must convey to volunteers that they are representatives of the Museum in all their actions and contacts, both internal and external. An overview of the Museum's mission, goals and objectives is essential, and each volunteer should be presented with a copy of the Volunteer Manual. Policies and procedures, emphasizing those most likely to affect the work of volunteers, must be reviewed. Training should include how assignments fit in with the total Museum. Depending on the volunteer job, training can take place in groups over varying periods of time, on a one-to-one basis, on the job or in a classroom. It can involve outside reading, technical skill training, role playing, observing experienced volunteers or attending meetings.

Developing good volunteers doesn't stop with the initial orientation and training sessions. Consideration must be given to sending volunteers to seminars and lectures that address topics in their work area and include them in staff training sessions and meetings where topics that affect their work will be discussed.

Ensuring Performance/Evaluation

Nothing is more embarrassing or frustrating to an active volunteer than being the last to know. We must keep volunteers informed about what is going on in the Museum. Volunteers particularly need timely information on policy and procedural changes that directly or indirectly affect their work. We can't change the rules without letting them know.

Communication works in both directions. Volunteers should report to an immediate supervisor, such as a program staff person, a volunteer coordinator, a committee chairman or president of the board, to let that person know about their progress and problems and the amount of time invested in the project. The supervisor, on the other hand, must provide the information necessary to get the job done and be accessible to answer questions and help with problems as they arise. Evaluation is an on-going process; written evaluations and a formal evaluation meeting between volunteer and supervisor are very valuable and may be developed by the supervisor and volunteer to insure a process that benefits all; the timing of these evaluations is dependent upon the nature of the volunteer position and job assignment, but should be no less than annual.

The most effective technique for motivating most volunteers is recognizing them. Every opportunity should be taken to acknowledge a volunteer's service - birthdays, get-well occasions, picnics, Volunteer Month, discounts, appreciation days, etc.

Terminating volunteers

A volunteer may be mismatched with the job or the Museum, personality conflicts can develop, outside circumstances may prevent the volunteer from fulfilling his obligations or a volunteer may consistently exceed the limits of her authority or misrepresent Museum policy. For these and other reasons, situations do arise where a volunteer is doing more harm than good.

It is a difficult and unpleasant task to terminate the Museum's relationship with a volunteer. If supervisory conferences, admonishments and other reasonable and diplomatic efforts to improve the situation fail, the Museum must be honest with the volunteer. We must try to offer options within the Museum or suggest that other

organizations might be a better match for his skills. The volunteer may even welcome a chance to exit gracefully.

The Museum, on the other hand, must be prepared to listen to constructive criticism from a “failed” volunteer, particularly if the program has not been carefully structured and thoughtfully managed.

Budgeting

The Historical Museum benefits by indicating volunteer time in its budget, including salaries for volunteer workers under expenses which are then offset by indicating the volunteers’ time and salaries as donated services under revenue. This not only demonstrates the value of volunteer time but is also useful in promoting the volunteer program internally. In addition, it provides an invaluable tool to leverage requests from outside sources.

A related budgetary issue is insurance coverage and the volunteers are covered by Missoula County and the Friends of the Historical Museum’s insurance policies.

Conclusion

As the Historical Museum becomes increasingly imaginative in the face of shrinking financial resources, the range of volunteer activities grows. While some volunteer jobs may become more exotic, the rules of planning, training and motivation still apply.

The need for volunteers to help achieve the goals of the Historical Museum continues to increase. Efficient and effective programs to attract and manage those volunteers must be tailored to the human, environmental and financial resources of the Museum. To reap the benefits of volunteer involvement, the Historical Museum has only to create the framework to stimulate and reward that desire.

Drafted 10/28/98, R. M. Brown

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