

### SPOTLIGHT: ASSESSMENT

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#### *AAM Webinar: Museums and Internships*

By: Barbara Jasperson

AAM's recent webinar on internships offered informative and challenging insights into best practices for high-quality internships, as well as into larger issues and ethical problems that their administration can raise. Seen as crucial pathways to professional careers, internships are certainly woven into the fabric of many schools' curricula and cultural organizations, and are more popular than ever. One participant directing a small museum concisely explained her commitment to internships: to giving back, to the value that interns bring to the field, and to the development of interns' careers as a way of cultivating the next generation of museum professionals. All participants' work interfaces with internships, and they shared their perspectives and offered advice to museums whose goal is to offer robust, manageable intern programs.

Currently, according to the Federal Department of Labor (Fact sheet #71) there are six criteria that define an internship as experiential learning and distinguish it from employment. These criteria apply only to for-profit organizations, but will likely be evaluated in the future with reference to non-profit organizations. In any case, the criteria are useful now for any organization that wishes to ensure its internships function in the true spirit for which they are intended. Their main points are that internships exist primarily for the educational benefit of the intern, that interns do not replace staff positions, and that interns are not employees. Webinar presenters pointed out that ambiguity can arise in distinguishing interns from both employees and volunteers, and that they are neither. It was advised that organizations give thought to how they will explicitly distinguish the

categories, and that internship agreements be put in writing to ensure clear understanding among all stakeholders.

Perhaps of even more use than the government's criteria were those set forth by Omar Eaton-Martinez of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. To my mind, his program's infrastructure and goals are a blueprint for high-quality, effective, and mutually beneficial internships: internship (projects) should be fruitful and productive; the museum provides orientation and structure; mutual understanding of stakeholders' goals and expectations is established; interns inject themselves into the culture of the museum; mentoring is a core component of the internship; and finally, the intern, ideally, leaves with a professional vision for him/herself.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) offers its own outline of this form of experiential learning: “(Internships) integrate knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. They give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.” This view has much in common with the Smithsonian’s.

Though the presenters did not distinguish between graduate and undergraduate interns, I have found that because they are often at quite different levels of intellectual development and capability, their internship experiences should be designed accordingly. Whatever the level of the intern, projects should be real-world and useful to the organization. It is acknowledged that both the Federal guidelines and the Smithsonian’s high standards can present challenges for small and medium-sized museums, staff resources may be limited, making it hard to accomplish such goals. Funds to pay interns who cannot afford to work for free may be limited or non-existent. Though non-profit organizations are currently not required to pay interns, it was generally advised that a reasonable stipend be offered

towards offsetting of costs associated with an internship (covering uniforms, meals, housing in expensive cities, transportation, etc.) A stipend offers both practical support as well as respect for the intern’s contribution in a culture sometimes perceived as expecting its community to work for “love” rather than for fair remuneration. There was some discussion of how money might be raised in innovative ways, both to fund interns and to pay museums for the extra resources that might be needed to support an intern properly. The best-practice need for financial support on both sides, if not addressed, can lead to ethical quandaries, not the least of which is limiting internships to the affluent, thereby excluding those who must spend their time working for compensation, and thus hindering diversity efforts. Tying an internship to school credit and school curriculum may ease some of this quandary, and was recommended, in any case.

I’ve summarized in a very general way the takeaways for me of this fascinating panel discussion. Many questions were raised that I lack space to discuss here.

But the greatest concern focused on equity (the expense of internships and how that impacts both smaller museums and non-affluent interns trying to enter the field) and the crafting of worthwhile internship

programs. Panelists were optimistic about future institutionalizing of internships and new streams of financial support (with creative efforts by schools and museums and even municipalities themselves as a recent New York Times article notes). They also urged museums to give careful thought to their internship programs, perhaps offering them only when they feel able to do so with mindfulness and full focused support of the intern as a valuable and uniquely niched member of the museum community. My own view of this suggestion is that it is a good one, but in the absence of ideal conditions, museums should still move forward with internships to the best of their ability if they are eager to share the internship experience with a particularly appropriate candidate.

Though structure and planning is certainly best-practice, for smaller institutions especially, a flexible, improvised experience can be serendipitous.

## ***Ways to Give Back to Volunteers & Interns***

- Appreciation Parties
- Monthly/Annual Awards
- Highlighting Service on Website or Newsletter
- Giving Volunteers the Big Picture: How their service benefits the larger institution
- Volunteer Field Trips (See Pg. 4)

# Academy of Natural Sciences Recognizes Volunteers in a Unique Way

By: Brandon Medina

As the Assistant for Volunteer Services, I am constantly learning from my supervisor how to manage a volunteer office every single day. There are many different variables that determine whether or not a volunteer program will be a failure or a success. One of the more important factors, which will unconsciously be on the minds of every volunteer, is whether or not they are being recognized for the hard work they are contributing to the institution. Though the volunteers all have different motivations for volunteering, such as self-satisfaction or required community service hours, the consensus is that everyone, regardless of their status in the hierarchy of the institution, would like to be given a literal or metaphorical “pat on the back”. Many volunteer offices offer volunteers a yearly celebration of sorts. Other volunteer offices give volunteers prizes or awards for continued commitment. Though these methods work perfectly in their own regard, we have to consider those that may not be at that museum, aquarium, or zoo for a long period of time.

During the course of a year the Academy of Natural Sciences has, on average, 350 to 400 volunteers, half of which have contributed more than 100 hours. So where does this leave the other half? We decided on an initiative to fix this dilemma called the “volunteer bulletin board project”.



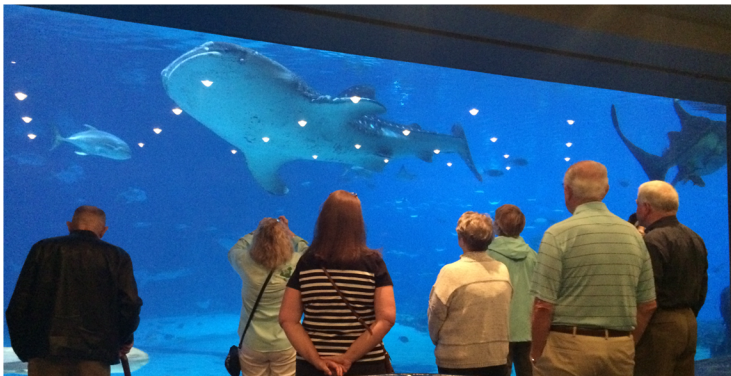
This bulletin board features new and veteran volunteers. We continuously and vigorously strive to recognize the hard-work and commitment of all those who give us their free time, even for a short span. The board helps to realize that mission by featuring profiles of individual volunteers, with a picture included. The profile itself has things like the volunteer’s inspiration for volunteering, what they hope to accomplish, various interests, and much more. Since my desk is conveniently located in the corner of the volunteer room, I get the first hand scoop on the direct effect the bulletin board has on those who come into the office. There are those that simply walk past the board without giving it much thought, but there are even greater numbers who stop during their lunch to check out profiles of themselves and their friends. In addition, this allows them to see other volunteers who they may never have gotten to know about otherwise simply because they don’t work the same day that they do.

This initiative has only just gotten off the ground, so it will continue to evolve and grow as new and veteran volunteers come and go. Though this particular method may not be a “one size fits all” for every institution, we hope that it inspires other volunteer programs struggling to find an effective way to recognize volunteers through creative and fun ways. When the volunteer feels appreciated for the work they do it helps build a sense of community and boosts morale. We continue to receive positive feedback from volunteers who love working here and appreciate the small things like the volunteer profiles. We just hope that in the long run, initiatives like this will make volunteers happy and encourage them to stay here longer than they might have initially intended.

# CREATIVE IDEAS

## Volunteer Field Trips on a Budget

By: Samantha Roberts



Ever wish you could show your volunteers you appreciate their dedication, improve their sense of comradery, and teach them something at the same time? Think that you can't take your volunteers on a field trip at little to no cost to your shoestring budget? Try again! You are just as resourceful and dedicated as your volunteers, and this is how you can do it.

Work with other volunteer managers in your area. We all have something to offer. Contact the other volunteer managers in your area and see if they are willing to give your volunteers free admission and a tour in exchange for the same experience for their volunteers at your museum. If you need to limit the size of the group, use it as an incentive program (Volunteers with over x hours this year get to sign up first), or let them sign up first come first serve.

Set the date, time, and location, and organize the carpool. You don't have to rent a bus, ask for volunteers to drive! By filling each car, your volunteers can spend time with their friends, or even someone they haven't met before. Make sure you think about the logistics of your field trip when you set the location. Can your field trip location include a guided tour and still have room for the volunteers to explore on their own? Will your field trip last a half day or all day? How long will it take to get to there from your museum? Can volunteers purchase or bring lunch if they need to? If your field trip site doesn't have a good place to eat, you can pick a restaurant nearby to meet after the excursion, or exclude it from your trip if the day is short enough. Most volunteers don't have a problem buying their own meal; it means they can eat what they want.

Have fun and learn something!

Often, volunteers are leading the tours at the field trip, and your volunteers can learn something by observing them. Give your volunteers "continuing education" hours for attending the fieldtrip, but make sure they tell you something they learned first! At the end of the day, ask everyone what they liked about the trip, location, and timing, and take it into consideration for next time. See if you can plan a field trip at least twice a year, as an extra reward to look forward to. Also, make sure you're prepared to steal the show when a group of volunteers takes a trip to your museum; you want to show their institution how much your group appreciated being welcomed to visit for free!

### Ways to go Above and Beyond:

- *Get an in-kind donation of breakfast, lunch, or snacks.*  
*Even if it's just cookies from Publix, an extra treat is a nice way to end the day.*
- *Carpool*  
*Even if you pay for parking, 8-10 cars for a carpool will still cost less than renting a bus for the day.*
- *Do a pre-visit and create an activity*  
*Create a short scavenger hunt, questionnaire, or ask volunteers to submit their favorite pictures from the visit for your next newsletter. Better yet, use an activity the institution already has in place for groups.*



*Fernbank Museum Volunteer Field Trip to the Georgia Aquarium*

*Samantha Roberts  
Events, Member, and Visitor Services Coordinator  
Abrams-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts  
University of Alabama at Birmingham*

# UPCOMING EVENTS AND NEWS

## *Evaluating Volunteers and the Volunteer Program*

Live 90-minute webinar

Wednesday, January 25, 2017

2:00 - 3:30 p.m. (Eastern)

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) is presenting a webinar on January 25, Evaluating Volunteers and the Volunteer Program. This program is being presented in collaboration with the American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV) and the AAM Leadership and Management Network (LMN), one of 22 Professional Networks of the American Alliance of Museums.

In conjunction with this webinar, we would love to have you host a local "Watch and Talk" event at your museum. This is a great opportunity to connect with and learn from local colleagues!

There is no cost to host or attend a local "Watch and Talk" event, which consists of:

- 30 minutes of pre-webcast check-in and networking
- 90-minute live webcast
- 60 minutes post-webcast facilitated discussion or activity (AAM will provide discussion questions)

**AAMV members receive reduced Webinar registration.** Contact Richard Harker (rharker@kennesaw.edu) for the discount code before registering.

## *2017 Annual Meeting and MuseumExpo*

St. Louis, Missouri

May 7-10

AAMV is proud to announce three sessions at next years annual conference, in addition to hosting a luncheon, and our participation in the Marketplace of Ideas.

### **Sessions:**

#### **Risk Management**

Lois Kuter, Volunteer Services Manager, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University

#### **It's Critical—Evaluating Museum Volunteers**

Marne Bariso, Volunteer and Intern Manager, Chicago History Museum

#### **Internships for Small Museums**

Richard Harker, Education and Outreach Manager, Museum of History and Holocaust Education

## *Check Out Our New Website!*

Brand new members-only content:

- "Volunteer Voices" Podcast Series
- Complete Archive of Newsletters
- Sample Documents from Volunteer Programs

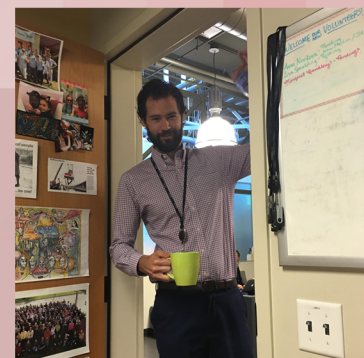
*Look for more details on the Exploratorium's International Interns in our next issue!*



Julia Relat is a grad student intern from Spain



Rabea Kroth is a grad student in Arts Education from Germany



Juan Matienzo from Mexico Working on his MBA at Cornell Summer Marketing Intern