

Delivering Training to Museum Volunteers

Why provide formal training for your volunteers?

Museum volunteers usually appreciate on-the-job training, but this can often take up a lot of the volunteer manager's resources. Ideally all volunteers fulfilling a certain role should have a baseline set of knowledge by which they will deliver their services to the museum. Whilst training on-the-job is invaluable, there are several advantages to delivering training in groups.

The benefits to the museum and to the volunteer manager of delivering group training include the opportunity to step outside the usual context, to re-assess volunteers' skills and needs, and to establish confidence in the volunteers operating as a group with a minimum knowledge-set. It guarantees that all volunteers have received the basic training needed (especially, although rarely, if something ever does go wrong) for example in Health & Safety. Last, but by no means least, it can build volunteers' confidence, and refresh and motivate volunteers as a team working for the museum's benefit.

For the volunteers, the benefits of more formal group training include increasing their confidence in themselves, giving them something tangible to add to their CV, the opportunity to share their knowledge with other volunteers, giving them the space to reflect on their work, and to maintain their own motivation.

For both volunteers and staff, the usefulness of formal training also shouldn't be underestimated in terms of networking/teambuilding. Volunteers delivering specific days or shifts get a chance to meet others doing different shifts, and to share their issues.

Delivering Training to your volunteers:

The following guide aims to help museum staff, or volunteers who are managing other volunteers, to use the Museum of London Volunteer Training Bank even if they have no previous experience of delivering formal training. The guidance includes:

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Planning your training

What training do your volunteers need?

The first stage of planning any training for volunteers includes assessing existing volunteers' needs, and/or those of any new volunteers to be recruited. The needs assessment methods will vary according to the size of your volunteer involvement and whether you are aiming to train existing, new, or a mixture of volunteers.

Larger groups:

- **Training needs surveys:** this can be a time-effective way of assessing and recording the needs of all your volunteers, and of encouraging volunteers to follow-up on their own needs afterwards.
- **Induction / initial selection programme:** don't be scared of making an assessment a requirement of volunteering in your museum. At this early stage in the relationship between the museum and any volunteer, asking formal questions about existing skills and experience is common, but this is also a chance to set down requirements, for example that volunteers *have* to attend your training in order to fulfil specific roles.

If you are recruiting volunteers in batches of 5-20 at one time, and feel that you will have quite a high quality of applicants to choose from, this could offer an opportunity to run a half-day training *before* volunteer placements are fully confirmed. This is an opportunity to help both you and them assess their needs and expectations, and see how they actually work in a team or learning environment. You can follow the training with brief one-to-one conversations to confirm placements, or to refer them on to others. This often guarantees a more sustainable and better match between the museum and its volunteers.

- **Focus groups:** whether you have 15 or 200 volunteers, it can be useful to work with much smaller, representative groups in order to allow them to speak openly about their concerns and needs. It may actually be beneficial to get someone external to conduct these, so that volunteers who have formed a relationship with you can speak without worrying about offence, perhaps just by asking another member of staff, or even a specifically recruited volunteer or intern to step in.

Smaller numbers:

- **Induction / supervision-training plans:** with smaller numbers of volunteers, or where few volunteers can be brought together at the same time for training, it is important to include a regular assessment of training needs. Creating simple Personal Development plans / volunteering diary sheets for each volunteer will allow

you and them to think about what skills and experience they already have, what they are gaining on the job, and what they want to learn. Keeping this in their file, you can look back at it regularly together to see what has been achieved and what needs to be planned next. It's also very useful for those volunteers who want to add to their CV so that they have a proper record of both their general learning, their achievements at the museum, and what training they attended and when, which they can take with them when they leave.

- **Volunteer meetings / planning days:** if you bring together volunteers regularly (maybe every two months) in small teams or groups, use the time together to run through a skills survey with the group. You can also try building a brief training session into these events, even if only for half an hour.

Planning the content

The trainer's bank of courses in the Museum of London Volunteer Training Bank does a large part of the job for you. It's designed to be flexible, so that you can break it down into shorter sessions and adapt it to your group. But trying to fit a whole day's training session into two hours is likely to be counter-productive, so you will need to think about the content too.

The trainer's bible says that each attendee will only go away remembering three things. This doesn't mean that you only cover three new pieces of information – attendees interests will vary, and everyone will benefit from different parts. But it does mean that you need to think carefully about limiting and stressing the things that you really want them to remember long-term.

So when designing the content, think of a maximum of three key messages you want to get to the whole group, make sure you give these as "sound-bites" (i.e. memorable short statements) and return to them several times throughout the session, including your final summary.

Using humour, or sparking visual imagination, or even giving the group a shock are surprisingly useful tools for embedding memories, so making your key messages into a controversial statement or turning them into a good story can be useful. For example, try sitting in a corner reading a book with your back to the group when they come back from a coffee break, then asking them what they thought and felt about that!

A common mistake for inexperienced trainers and speakers is to try to cram too much information into a session, however short or long it is. The parts that attendees actually tend to value and remember most are where they have an opportunity to come up with the answers themselves, and to interact with the trainer and each other. So however short the session is, plan the content then take a large chunk of it out again! Give the time over to small group work instead. You will find that the group sessions are often the ones scoring highest in evaluations, and it has the additional benefit of giving networking and team-building opportunities.

How do I get volunteers to attend training?

Promoting the Training

Some established volunteers may feel they do not require formal training. Unfortunately, often these may include some of the volunteers you particularly feel would benefit from it! And of course, as volunteers, they are perfectly entitled just to say no or not turn up for it. Although your training opportunities may only be internal, it is therefore still important to think carefully about how you market the training to your volunteers.

Some general messages may work for even the most reluctant volunteers. Highlight the benefits of the training to them and to the museum, ask for their support in developing good team-work between different volunteer roles or newer and older volunteers. And if necessary, don't be afraid to get tough and say that you are introducing training that is compulsory for certain roles at the museum.

Another key to ensuring attendance and engagement in your training is to take a little time away from the day-to-day tasks to think in more depth about your volunteers' individual motivations, especially those who may be training-resistant. Each volunteer usually has several levels of motivation, even though they may not always be willing to state these in public. The following exercise will take only ten minutes to help you start thinking about motivation from a fresh angle. Look at the following case studies and jot down:

- **at least five possible motivations the person has for volunteering**
- **five things that might therefore attract them to the training.**

Motivations may be positive, e.g. pride in a privileged relationship with museum objects, or negative, e.g. getting time away from a retired partner!

Once you have pinned these down, spend five minutes brainstorming what information about your training might therefore attract those motivations, and what practical considerations you may have to provide access to their needs.

Other tips for attracting your volunteers to the training include:

- Encouraging them by highlighting what benefits/outcomes they will get from attending - e.g. *"by the end of the day you will be able to/ will have learnt..."*
- respecting/acknowledging their existing skills & commitment – e.g. *"as valued staff we want to offer you the opportunity to extend your existing knowledge"* or *"to add to the skills you bring, learn how to..."*
- making sure you include practical details e.g. timing, venue, expenses – e.g. *"a short two hour briefing and specially written case studies on Saturday 15th May from 11-1pm, followed by an optional buffet lunch from 1-2pm in the Adams gallery where you can meet other volunteers"*
- Any other bonuses to attending: e.g. free lunch, certificates, nice venue, meeting senior members of staff, meeting other volunteers

- Highlight their motivations: e.g. the exclusivity of getting expert guest speakers, the opportunity to share their own knowledge, asking long-standing volunteers to help by speaking for ten minutes themselves.

Practical Issues and Training Delivery

Training environment and layout

In order to deliver group training you will need an appropriate space. If you are not lucky enough to have your own training room, often local voluntary sector organisations may have a room to hire cheaply – check with your local Council for Voluntary Services (often called Voluntary / Community Action then the borough/town name). Alternatively, there may be other local museums or libraries with whom you could do a deal (see the section on sharing resources).

Do think about how the room should be set up – often a more informal set up will be more effective, for example a horseshoe of chairs. But if you are delivering object handling training, or they need to write anything down, a “cafe” style with four or five volunteers around several small tables, may be more appropriate. Little touches like a jug of water or bowl of sweets on the tables can go a long way to making people relax and chat.

Rather annoyingly, evaluations of training days often end up with more comments about lunch and how comfortable the seats were, rather than the content! So an interesting (not necessarily expensive) and definitely not a heavy, lunch is a good investment.

Keeping people’s attention

If you’re doing longer training sessions, make sure there is enough air and light, and that it’s not too hot etc, otherwise they will drift off – and build in lots of short breaks as many volunteers may not have had to focus this intensely for years. A 10-15 minute break after the first hour, lunch after another hour and a half, and another break an hour after lunch, seems to be a good pattern.

Do try to vary the methods you use to keep peoples’ attention and energy up – some writing, some listening, and some group discussion. Even with the shortest training session, having different parts when you are talking, parts with them guessing answers, and parts with them working in pairs or groups, will be more effective.

It’s also important that you move around, sit and stand, whilst delivering the training rather than sitting behind the barrier of a table or desk. Varying the tone of your voice, using your hands a bit more than usual and making sure you catch different people’s eye around the room are all good techniques to keep volunteers focused. Although that may not come naturally at first, and you do have to remember you’re teaching adults *not* kids, it may help to think about it a bit like acting – you are their trainer just for that hour/day, so be brave – their response will be rewarding.

Training Tools

Many courses run to “train-the-trainers” focus a lot on games and motivational exercises. These can be especially useful when working with groups who don’t know each other, who don’t know you, are nervous of training, or to keep the energy up when it flags, for example after lunch. However, the style and amount of these used will depend very much on the specific group you are training, and there are so many available resources giving details of exercises that I will not go into great detail here. A simple web-search on “training introduction / warm-up exercises” will bring up hundreds of sites, with lots of ideas to adapt and use.

A few examples of introduction or warm-up exercises adapted to museum volunteers are given in Appendix B of this document.

Don’t hesitate to use them or design your own – however silly they may seem, they do get people’s adrenaline going, break the atmosphere if it’s getting low-key, and get rid of the inhibitions of the attendees. If you really can’t bear them, do at least include a basic “round robin” at the beginning of the session to focus the group. This can be as simple as asking people to give their name, role and 1 thing that made them smile this week, going around the group one by one. It’ll also give you as a trainer a chance to assess who is shy, too loud or a useful support, so that you can adapt your delivery to the group accordingly throughout the day.

If you’re a whizz at PowerPoint great, but using handouts and/or a flipchart are really just as effective, and often more reliable. Often the parts that are most popular in evaluations are those where the participants get at least 30-60 minutes to do group exercises, case studies etc, then feed back to the other groups, so leave enough time for this to be a main focus of the day if possible. Many of the courses here in the Training Bank have all these materials included.

Using a mixture of all the above is ideal – it’s surprising how short even the most serious adult student’s attention span can be. A good aim is to get them to speak as much as you do, offering their own ideas and expertise, as they will remember far more of the content, feel valued and more confident. After delivering the best training sessions you may find you’ve learnt as much as the participants, which you can use again in later sessions.

Balancing Resources

Unless you are lucky enough to have secured funding for a specific volunteer training programme, your time and museum resources are likely to be under considerable pressure, and running training sessions may seem like yet another stress. But there are ways to limit the additional resources needed. It is useful to consider (or highlight to your managers) the cost/time benefits of the following:

- **Recruiting and training in groups** – long-term this will take less time than one-to-one ad-hoc training. It will create a standard level of knowledge across a volunteer group, form team-work and motivate volunteers. It will also reassure managers, funders and even insurers that the museum takes all precautions to make sure volunteers are equipped for the job.
- **Timing** – if you can catch volunteers early in their stay with you, you can stop bad habits forming. You can re-motivate and reward longer-term volunteers. Is there a quieter time of year for the museum, when volunteers may be more available too? More specifically, delivering training at a time of day that suits the volunteers you most need to attend is vital. Two hours on a Saturday morning may be a far better use of your time if ten attend, than four hours on a weekday with only four attendees.
- **Size of groups** – if you only have a few volunteers to train, could you link up with another museum for the training, sharing the planning, costs and time? In general areas of training like Disability Awareness and Customer Care, it doesn't have to be a museum whose collection is similar, just a similar size and type of operation.
- **Funding** – you could consider making a funding application specifically to cover extra resources for volunteer training and development. Even a small extra fund of £500-£1,000 could reduce your pressures by allowing you to buy in catering, use an already set-up training venue or buying in an external trainer or administrative support.

It may also be worth looking at funding sources outside the norm, including small local independent charitable trusts. This is more likely to appeal to the funder if you can focus the application on the volunteers' needs not just the museum's – for example training to allow more local unemployed people to get involved, or tying it into inter-generational or multi-cultural initiatives. Also, don't forget to highlight the needs and benefits of training to those setting your annual budgets, who may not have considered this as part of the museum's essential costs.

- **Utilising other staff and the volunteers themselves** – delivering formal training may offer opportunities for your own and others' career development. Ask other staff, including those from other museums, or amateur experts such as "Friends" of the museum. Or would a volunteer with knowledge and skills in the area of training be able to help deliver it with a little support? This could be someone you recruit specifically to volunteer to deliver training, or an existing senior volunteer looking for new challenges.

- ***Sharing / swapping facilities and expertise*** – all museums face the same challenges in resourcing areas such as volunteer training. Would a larger museum have a couple of places on its training for your volunteers? Could you offer a training room for another museum's volunteers if some of yours can attend too? Could you go and give a talk for someone else if they come and give a talk for you?

One surprise outcome of the Museum of London's Volunteer Management Project's central training for volunteers in London was how much the volunteers valued meeting volunteers from other museums. Many ended up visiting each others' museums, sharing problems and sparking off new ideas, so the benefits could be far-reaching.

12 key training tips:

1. **Think about start and end times** – Think about telling the group that training will start at 10am with the intention of starting at 10.30am if you know the group don't tend to turn up on time. Ending on time is also important to people, especially those volunteering their time, so don't underestimate the time needed – better to end early by surprise!
2. **Prepare and Set up early** – museum volunteers do tend to turn up early, and it's hard to prepare yourself for the session with others there. Especially if using IT.
3. **Room layouts** – think about the effect of the room layout on the style of training you are delivering. Move things around during a refreshment break if it isn't working.
4. **Begin with a flexible exercise for early arrivals** – Some museum volunteers are very keen and do tend to arrive very early, then get frustrated having to wait for the others. A light written quiz to be done in pairs as people arrive can work well.
5. **Assess group during a warm-up exercise** – note those who are shy and loud, or have needs you weren't aware of, so that you can give extra encouragement/ control them for the rest of the day.
6. **Manage louder and quieter volunteers** – do encourage everyone to speak during the day, and be firm but supportive to those who dominate by thanking them and moving on to someone else quickly.
7. **Vary the activities & methods of communication** – people have very different learning styles and needs, so varying your body language, types of materials used, and content is vital. For example, if you know many have English as a second language, or any issues with concentration, give written handouts / PowerPoint at the same time as speaking so they have the re-assurance of both to follow.
8. **Use real examples & your experience** – trainees will respect you as a trainer and remember the examples better if you are also very engaged with the content. Share your passions and your problems.
9. **Flexibility** – if people are flagging, give them another coffee break, if they are loving an exercise, give it extra time and cut something else.
10. **Give them and yourself enough space** –leave groups alone during breaks, so they can come back jointly afterwards if there is a problem, and to give your voice a rest!
11. **Key messages** – think carefully about these in advance, stick to three maximum, and make them into often repeated sound-bites.

Remember you are training adults! Adult training is different from working with children – you need to be particularly self-aware of this if you are more used to working with groups of young museum visitors. Do try to treat people as equals, engaging with their responsibility to the group. Asking everyone to suggest ground-rules at the beginning of the day and reminding everyone of them if the need arises can be a useful tool.

Appendix A - Ice-breakers / Refreshers / Teambuilding Exercises

Either Or

This is an exercise for helping larger groups of people to get to know each other better.

Get the group to stand in the middle of a large space. Then ask an either-or question and request the group to split up according to how they would answer the question. For example, you could ask them whether they prefer a sweet or savoury treat and then request that the people who have a 'sweet tooth' to go to one end of the room – and the people who have a 'savoury tooth' to go to the opposite end of the room. Ask another either-or question, but this time ask the people to congregate at the sides of the room so that everyone has to change position.

Choose a set of either-or questions that are relevant to the event and let the exercise continue until feel that the participants are starting to get to know each other.

Time Capsule

This is a good exercise for practising reaching consensus and for team members to understand each others' values.

Have each member of the team list five items that they feel should be included in a time capsule that will be opened by another civilisation in five thousand years' time. Each member of the team should then explain the reasons for their choice. The team then reaches consensus on which five objects should be included in the time capsule. Ask each team to write their final choice of items on a flipchart and discuss and defend their choices with the whole group.

Short Intro Sessions

Alphabet Search

Divide the participants into small groups. Instructions: Search your person (or the museum / a room in the collection) for objects that you have on you or with you ranging from A-Z. Make a list. First group to get all 26 letters represented wins.

If done as a small group lends itself well to a small team building exercise as the group works together through the alphabet.

Always Better with Two

Pair people up together. Ask them to spend two minutes each talking about themselves. At the end of four minutes we will come back together as a group and you will introduce each other. Ask them to tell the persons name, their position and how many years experience they have in the industry. For example: How many years they have been in Customer Service? All participants get to hear about other participants from of a third party instead of hearing from the person themselves. Depending on the session content, it is fun to add up all the years experience in the room and close with something like "Combined, we have 100 years of customer service experience."

Dinner Partners

Pair people up together. Ask them to spend 2 ½ minutes each talking about themselves. Ask them if they could have dinner with anyone, alive or dead, who would it be and why. Tell them that at the end of five minutes we will come back together as a group and you will introduce each other. Ask them to tell the persons name, their position and their dinner partner.

Five Things in Common

Split the group up into pairs. Each pair will have 30 seconds to find five things they have in common. At the end of the 30 seconds, put two pairs together and give the foursome a minute to find something all four participants have in common. Finally, each group can present the list of things they have in common. You can use this activity to form groups.

- ***There are hundreds more of these free on the internet – just Google “free training icebreakers”.***

Written by Lynne Gillett (lgconsultancy@yahoo.co.uk) on behalf of the Museum of London Volunteer Management Project. This guidance has been developed to be used in conjunction with the training modules in the Museum of London Volunteer Training Bank.