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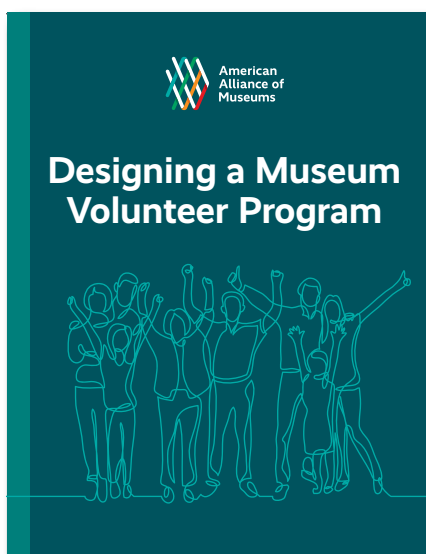
A stylized graphic featuring several hands in shades of yellow and orange, outlined in black. The hands are arranged in a way that they appear to be holding a central red heart. The background is a mix of brown and orange tones with abstract black outlines.

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Cover: ClipArt4U (Image #1296751 at VectorStock.com);
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MUSEUM (ISSN 0027-4089)

MARCH/APRIL 2024, VOLUME 102, NO. 2

PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY (J/F, M/A, M/J, J/A, S/O, N/D)

BY THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

2451 CRYSTAL DRIVE, SUITE 1005, ARLINGTON, VA 22202; 202-289-1818; FAX 202-289-6578; WWW.
AAM-US.ORG.

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Valuing Our Volunteers

While you may know me as the editor in chief of this magazine, I have another professional identity that is equally dear to me: museum volunteer. For decades now, even longer than the 30 years I recently celebrated at AAM, I have proudly worn this badge.

As it is for many, volunteering was my initial entry into the world of museums, paving the way for a career dedicated to supporting our field's ambitions and aspirations. I've worked across the spectrum of museum staff and leadership in the years since, and the unwavering spirit and invaluable contributions of my fellow volunteers have remained an enduring source of inspiration. That's why I am honored to introduce you to this issue of the magazine dedicated to the topic of volunteerism.

In diverse capacities, such as gallery guides, informational guides, and public programming support, volunteers often serve as museum ambassadors, the first point of contact to address visitors' questions, interests, and needs. In the process, they bridge the institution to the community, helping the public access the resources it needs to flourish. They are motivated to do this work for myriad reasons, including a passion for the museum and its subject matter, a wish for social connection, and a desire to give back. Even as volunteering has evolved over the years—increasingly accommodating diverse schedules, skill sets, and digital platforms—these timeless values have remained at the core.

Volunteer managers play a critical role as the architects of this engagement. By adapting to the shifting landscape of contemporary volunteer needs, they craft environments that continue to nurture a sense of purpose and impact while helping their museums attract and retain a diverse and skilled volunteer base. In doing so, they enhance the museum's overall effectiveness and sustainability, fostering a sense of community, strengthening organizational

resilience, and optimizing resource utilization. In some cases, the positive image this generates can attract greater support from donors, partners, and the next generation of museum volunteers.

However, as you will learn in these pages, volunteerism in museums is not without its hurdles. Volunteer managers today face challenges in areas such as recruitment, retention, diversity, and inclusion, leading to questions about the long-term sustainability of their programs. Furthermore, amid a movement to reexamine museum cultures and labor practices, some question whether traditional volunteer structures are compatible with equitable and inclusive values. Many museums are scrutinizing their programs for both sustainability and diversity, revisiting the ways they can best attract, deploy, and support volunteers.

This moment presents exciting opportunities for innovation and collaboration. Embracing change, nurturing a sense of community, and consistently aligning with the core values of purpose and social impact, museums can catalyze a new era of volunteerism—one that transcends boundaries and fosters enduring connections between volunteers, visitors, communities, and the museums that enrich their lives. Together, volunteers and museums can shape a future where the spirit of service and the preservation of culture converge for the betterment of society.

Let's give our volunteers a rousing round of applause this year during National Volunteer Week, April 21–27!



Answering hundreds of questions from visitors over the years as museum volunteers, Dean and his colleagues forged cherished friendships.

Dean Phelus is AAM's Senior Director of Special Projects and the Editor in Chief of *Museum* magazine.

Museum Volunteers

2X

Volunteers are **twice as likely** as other museum visitors to say that museums have helped them gain civic empowerment.

87%

Percentage of museum volunteers who have a college degree, compared with 34% of all US adults.

20%

Volunteers are **20% more likely** than other museum visitors to say museums support the quality of life in their community.

70

Median age of museum volunteers.

Sources: Data is based on responses from 5,340 museum volunteers who participated in the 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Sampling (AAM + Wilkening Consulting); US adult educational attainment data from US Census Bureau.

By the Numbers was compiled by Susie Wilkening, principal of Wilkening Consulting, wilkeningconsulting.com. Reach Susie at Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com.

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First Americans Museum, Oklahoma City, OK. © ERCO GmbH, www.ercoco.com, Photography: Ryan Linton



Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA. © ERCO GmbH, www.ercoco.com, Photography: Timothy Schenck

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Frist Art Museum

“Monuments and Myths: The America of Sculptors Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Daniel Chester French” explores the two artists’ intersecting careers. As friendly rivals in the Gilded Age, they transformed sculpture in the United States, producing dozens of the nation’s most recognizable public artworks—from Saint-Gaudens’s Diana atop New York City’s Madison Square Garden to French’s seated Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC.

Location: Nashville, TN

Dates: through May 27

Learn more: fristartmuseum.org/future-exhibitions

Haggerty Museum of Art

“Dynamic Range: Photographs by Bill Tennessen” includes 48 photographs by Tennessen that highlight Milwaukee’s Black community from the 1980s to the early 2000s. Tennessen is a self-taught photographer who began contributing photographs to the *Milwaukee Community Journal*, Wisconsin’s largest African American newspaper, in 1981.

Location: Milwaukee, WI

Dates: through May 12

Learn more: marquette.edu/haggerty-museum/tennessen.php

The Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State

The Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State will nearly double its footprint, offer improved accessibility, and debut a host of amenities when its new 73,000-square-foot building opens to the public on June 1, 2024. The state-of-the-art facility, located in The Arboretum at Penn State, will include 20 galleries, new educational and event spaces, a museum store and café, a sculpture path, and outdoor terraces.

Location: University Park, PA

Learn more: palmermuseum.psu.edu

What’s New at Your Museum?

Do you have a new temporary or permanent exhibition, education program, partnership/initiative, or building/wing? Tell us at bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM, and it might be featured in an upcoming issue.

Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Head of Victory* (detail), 1897–1902, Saint-Gaudens National Historical Park, Cornish, NH, courtesy of the American Federation of Arts; Bill Tennessen, *Juneteenth Day Celebration*, 1985, collection of the artist; photo by Erik Sohn

Photo by Jin S. Lee: Callida Rawles, *In His Image*, 2021, Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Marcia and Jonathan Sobel, courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin

National September 11 Memorial & Museum

Opened on the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the original World Trade Center, “Towers Rising” features artwork from the permanent collection. The works chronicle the ways artists envisioned the most iconic towers of lower Manhattan before and after 9/11.

Location: New York, NY

Dates: through October

Learn more: 911memorial.org/visit/museum/exhibitions



Dallas Museum of Art

“He Said/She Said: Contemporary Women Artists Interject” spotlights women artists from the 1970s to today, challenging the myth of the sole male genius and bringing together artworks, a majority of which are making their debut, from the museum’s and local collections. The women artists featured in the exhibition strategically appropriate the contributions of male artists to create space for new, more inclusive narratives.

Location: Dallas, TX

Dates: through July 21

Learn more: dma.org/art/exhibitions/he-said-she-said-contemporary-women-artists-interject

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Bruce Museum

“Hockney/Origins: Early Works from the Roy B. and Edith J. Simpson Collection” traces the early ambitions and evolution of a young David Hockney with a spotlight on works created between 1961 and 1980. The exhibition of 16 works, including oil and acrylic paintings, pressed paper pulp, crayon drawings, lithographs, and etchings, chronicles subjects and variations on themes that Hockney has consistently engaged with throughout his career.

Location: Greenwich, CT

Learn more: brucemuseum.org/whats-on/hockneyorigins-early-works-from-the-roy-b-and-edith-j-simpson-collection

Huntsville Museum of Art

“American Made” surveys two centuries of American creativity, beginning with Colonial-era portraits by masters such as Benjamin West, Thomas Sully, and Sarah Miriam Peale, and then highlighting mid-19th-century landscape painting by artists including Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Childe Hassam, and Mary Cassatt. The exhibition includes works that depict the United States from coast to coast, along with the American experience in Europe.

Location: Huntsville, AL

Dates: March 22–June 16

Learn more: hsvmuseum.org/american-made-march-22-june-16-2024/

Boston Children’s Museum

Boston Children’s Museum and energy company National Grid have begun a three-year partnership that will bring together after-school program educators each year to receive professional development opportunities, a stipend, and museum-led assistance creating hands-on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) learning opportunities for the children they serve. The collaboration began in early 2024 with a pilot program in the city of Lynn and will expand to additional gateway cities, creating statewide impact over the next three years.

Location: Boston, MA

Learn more: bostonchildrensmuseum.org/newsroom/news-release-october-18-2023/

David Hockney, *A Grand Procession of Dignitaries in the Semi-Egyptian Style*, 1961, Roy B. and Edith J. Simpson Collection © David Hockney; Robert Henri, *Chow Choy*, 1913, courtesy of the Thomas H. and Diane DeWitt Jacobsen PhD Foundation; Kathryn York

Kenny Rivero, *Olafs and Chancias*, 2021, collection of Michael Sherman © Kenny Rivero photograph by Ed Mumford, courtesy of the artist and Charles Moffett, New York; Ralph Coburn, *Aux Bermudes*, 1951–52, private collection, New York, courtesy David Hall Gallery, LLC

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

“Surrealism and Us: Caribbean and African Diasporic Artists Since 1940” is inspired by the history of Surrealism in the Caribbean with connections to notions of the Afrosurreal in the United States. Representing a global perspective, this exhibition includes over 50 works from the 1940s to the present day in a wide range of media, such as painting, sculpture, drawing, video, and installation.

Location: Fort Worth, TX

Dates: March 10–July 28

Learn more: themodern.org/exhibition/surrealism-and-us-caribbean-and-african-diasporic-artists-1940



Grey Art Museum

“Americans in Paris: Artists Working in Postwar France, 1946–1962,” featuring more than 130 paintings, sculptures, photographs, films, textiles, and works on paper, is the first major exhibition to examine the historical impact of the expatriate art scene in Paris after World War II. Loans from a wide range of collections—public and private, from the US and abroad—provide a fresh perspective on a moment of creative ferment often overshadowed by the contemporaneous ascendancy of the New York City art scene.

Location: New York, NY

Dates: through July 20

Learn more: greyartgallery.nyu.edu/exhibition/americans-in-paris

MEET US IN BALTIMORE!



The **American Association for Museum Volunteers** is going to AAM's 2024 Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo

Join us at the following sessions to network and share resources with other volunteer leaders

Volunteer Managers Networking Lunch (AAMV)

Cost: \$40 / Person
Pre-registration required - sign up through the AAM event portal

FRIDAY
MAY 17
12:30 - 2PM

AAM Educational Session: Volunteers Gone Wild! And What To Do About It

FRIDAY
MAY 17
2 - 3PM

AAM Educational Session: Volunteers and Aging

SATURDAY
MAY 18
11:30AM - 12:30PM

Visit us at aamv.org for updates and to learn more about all that we do at AAMV



Milwaukee Art Museum

“Idris Khan: Repeat After Me” is the first US museum exhibition devoted to the work of the acclaimed British artist. Spanning more than 20 years of Khan’s career and a variety of mediums, including painting, sculpture, and video, the exhibition will debut a new series of abstract watercolor compositions that encapsulate the essence of iconic paintings from art history.

Location: Milwaukee, WI

Dates: April 5–Aug. 11

Learn more: mam.org

University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art

In a Time of Witness is a compilation of 31 extraordinary authors who created original poems and short stories in response to artworks in the Stanley Museum of Art collection. Alumni of the university’s renowned writing programs—the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, International Writing Program, and Literary Translation Program—these writers are among the most celebrated of our time, including former US poets laureate and groundbreaking fiction writers.

Location: Iowa City, IA

Learn more: stanleymuseum.uiowa.edu/in-a-time-of-witness

Muskegon Museum of Art

“Visions: 16 Detroit Artists” features 16 contemporary Detroit artists whose work highlights the strength and vibrancy of the Detroit art community. From jazz-inspired collages to large-scale portraits, photography to photorealism, these works of art reveal the unique and diverse stories within the art communities of Detroit.

Location: Muskegon, MI

Dates: through April 28

Learn more: muskegonartmuseum.org/exhibitions

Idris Kahn, *The Seasons Turn*, 2021, courtesy of the artist; Sean Kelly, *New York*, and Victoria Miro © Idris Khan; courtesy of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art; Richard Wilson, *Grass is Greener*



Year-round, hundreds of volunteers make our Alliance possible.

We want to express our gratitude to all who help to strengthen our field by volunteering their valuable time and knowledge. In the **past year** alone, AAM volunteers have:



**American
Alliance of
Museums**

- spent **17,500** hours conducting peer review work for Excellence programs,
- contributed over **180** pieces of thought leadership, from blog posts and articles to tipsheets and guidelines,
- reviewed nearly **400** AAM 2024 session proposals,
- organized **dozens** of virtual and in-person events at the Annual Meeting to help people connect,
- and so much more!

From all of us at AAM...

Thank you

to the Alliance volunteers and the many others volunteering passionately in the museum field!

Are you interested in becoming an Alliance volunteer?

Log in to Museum Junction to complete your volunteer profile, browse volunteer opportunities, and apply for volunteer positions. New opportunities are regularly posted throughout the year!

Visit: bit.ly/volunteer-for-AAM

Learn more about our investment in the museum community, including volunteer opportunities: bit.ly/museum-community-investment.



In Defense of Volunteerism

Volunteers play a vital role for museums, and museums need to prioritize their volunteer programs.

By Chris Morehead

Museums are more than mere repositories for art, history, and culture; they are dynamic institutions that thrive on the passion and commitment of those who are called to put into action the mission, vision, and values for the communities they serve. Many of these people are museum volunteers who support a

wide range of responsibilities necessary for the preservation, interpretation, sharing, and promotion of the collections within their care. Numerous museums were founded by volunteers, and some are run wholly by volunteers.

In recent years, many volunteer program leaders have been asked to justify their programs, and the

financial or other support they receive, through data that highlights their impact on the institution and the communities they serve. While statistical evidence is important, it often falls short in conveying the profound and far-reaching effects of volunteerism. Nonetheless, let us delve into some noteworthy figures:



Jeffrey Isaac Greenberg 13+/Alamy Stock Photo

- One in four Americans regularly volunteers, contributing an annual equivalent of \$184 billion in donated time, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service and the National Conference on Citizenship.
- The Global Trends in Giving Report states that 85 percent of volunteers donate to the nonprofits they volunteer for, yet only 55 percent of organizations evaluate the impact of volunteers, according to nonprofit software management research firm Software Advise.
- In a national survey commissioned by UnitedHealth Group, 96 percent of volunteers said that volunteering enriches their sense of purpose in life.

Despite dwindling budgets for volunteer programs, museums are increasingly reliant on volunteers for daily operations. Volunteers often serve as the welcoming faces that greet visitors, provide information, and offer guest assistance, making them the crucial first point of contact for museumgoers. As we know, first impressions are the most significant, and we rightfully entrust this responsibility to enthusiastic volunteers.

Volunteerism plays a pivotal role in the life of museums, and cultural institutions must support these dedicated volunteers, their programs, and the leaders who

steward these vital teams. Failure to do so will lead to yet another barrier separating museums from the communities they strive to serve.

The Volunteer Paradox

Today, volunteerism professionals are finding themselves in a paradoxical state. Some museum leaders recognize the value of their volunteer corps and are evolving their volunteer programs in step with the organization. At the same time, many museums are facing the reality that they have built volunteer programs that are widely inaccessible to the diverse communities they serve. Museums are navigating equity conversations in which they are turning a critical eye toward their decades-old models of volunteerism. Oftentimes in the name of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) efforts, volunteer managers are asked to diversify their volunteer corps without the training or resources that will make this work sustainable.

These volunteer managers, receiving limited support from their institutions, have no other option than to crowdsource solutions and resources from one another. Organizations like the American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV), Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (AL!VE), VolunteerMatch, VolunteerPro, and local volunteer manager support organizations like the Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA), Central Indiana Association of Volunteer

Administration (CIAVA), and Directors of Volunteers in Agencies (DOVIA) Colorado, among others, have played crucial roles in providing volunteer program leaders with much needed resources and educational opportunities for personal and professional development. These resources, in addition to national conferences such as the Points of Light Conference, have contributed to a volunteerism renaissance completely supported by grassroots efforts.

Volunteerism not only benefits the institution but also the individuals and their communities. For example, research has shown that volunteering can improve mental and physical health. However, despite these positive trends and mutual benefits, many museum volunteer managers do not feel adequately supported by their organizations or their leadership. They often feel overworked and under-resourced, which challenges even the most dedicated.

What is causing this disconnect? Some institutions may unwittingly establish volunteer programs for the wrong reasons, focusing on metrics rather than the program's heart—its mission, values, and vision. Without a seasoned and professionally trained volunteer manager, programs may lack a core purpose. Updates and changes that are made without considering key motivations of volunteers can leave both leadership and volunteer managers frustrated about a program's ineffectiveness.



Institutions that are clinging to the romanticized legacy of volunteerism are not investing in what volunteerism needs to be now and in the future. This is a fundamental challenge.

The Benefits of the Programmatic Model

In the past decade, many institutions have positioned volunteerism as a source of financial relief—volunteers provide x number of hours at y value per hour for a total contribution of z dollars per year. Financial phrases like “return on investment” have made their way into conversations about volunteer program funding.

The capitalization of volunteerism in museums is a dangerous and slippery slope that incentivizes volunteer efforts that cross the line into paid staff territory. This tension undermines the critical roles of both staff and volunteers while threatening the goodwill of volunteers.

However, an alternative perspective exists: that volunteer programs are a critical and impactful community engagement strategy. This programmatic model of volunteerism does not center on what can be extracted from volunteers, but rather on how volunteers and institutions can mutually benefit from the relationship. Programs, like volunteers, can economically benefit an organization. However, programs serve primarily as drivers of the institution’s mission, and volunteer corps are at their best when they can bring the institution’s mission to life.



These different approaches also play a role in the success or failure of a volunteer program’s DEAI initiatives. Many institutions focus too narrowly on diversifying their volunteer program through recruitment strategies rather than creating an inclusive environment that safely welcomes diversity.

The financially driven volunteerism model will never be able to adequately address equity issues in museums, and any efforts to use DEAI training to “fix” this inherently broken model will only lead to a program’s collapse. The programmatic model acknowledges the importance of DEAI initiatives as tools that equip volunteers to personally learn and grow while fostering a more inclusive environment that welcomes all community members to a space that may previously have been inaccessible to them.

Forbes recently published an article by Jean Accius, “Rekindling the American Spirit: Volunteerism in a Post-Pandemic World,” about volunteerism in which purpose is the guiding force in our lives, compelling us to pursue our passions and make a meaningful impact on the world. Similarly, museums thrive on volunteers who share a

passion for their work and subject matter. “When the pandemic forced us to confront mortality and vulnerability, many of us began to question the true purpose of our lives,” Accius writes. “In this context, volunteerism takes on a special significance. It provides a clear pathway to infuse life with meaning and a sense of fulfillment.”

In a world where volunteerism is indispensable to museums, it is mind-boggling that budget cuts to volunteer programs, or threats to eliminate them entirely, persist. Museum leaders must recognize the essential role of volunteers and the staff that lead their work and provide them with the support and resources they need to continue enriching their institutions. Volunteers infuse cultural institutions with passion, dedication, and a sense of purpose. It’s high time for museums and society to rekindle the spirit of volunteerism and prioritize its significance in shaping our cultural landscape.

Chris Morehead, CVA, is the President of the American Association for Museum Volunteers. Reach him at president@aamv.org.



Center for the Future
of Museums

THE FIRST HORIZON:

Understanding the State of Voluntary Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations Today

Download your free copy of this report from the Center for the Future of Museums to explore an overview and timeline of recent developments in reparative practice, and use the report's worksheet to begin framing your thoughts on the evolution of this practice. **The report is designed to help the museum sector:**

- » identify shortcomings of museums' current practices for redress,
- » envision preferred futures for museums' relationships with descendant communities, and
- » navigate the changes required to reach those alternatives.

Visit bit.ly/reparative-practices to download the report, learn more about AAM's recently launched project, The Next Horizon of Museum Practice: Voluntary Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations, and discover more about what's to come and opportunities to get involved.

This report and the Voluntary Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations project are generously supported by:

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A Renewal in the Rebuilding

Docent programs that evolve with the times will continue to serve their museums and communities well.

By Michelle Carpenter



A Phoenix Art Museum docent in action.

Twenty-three years ago, I sat in the second row of a docent training class unsure of what I had signed up for. As a new docent recruit at Phoenix Art Museum in Arizona, I had embarked on a rigorous two-year program that would prepare me to offer museum tours and give community and school talks. We applied extensive art history lessons, research, and tour practice to complete a series of milestones. Upon “graduating,” a docent was qualified to tour students from grade school through high school in addition to adult visitors. We were being trained to do it all.

Sharing information—a lot of it—was a key element of every tour. Developing presentation skills and (often rhetorical) questions built our touring chops, allowing us to find the balance between providing relevant content and helping visitors relate to an object.

Over the past 15 years, however, touring shifted from a focus on what the docent has to say to what the audience wants to know. Today, there is no doubt that touring is a craft that requires knowledge, planning, attunement, and a big dose of “follow the group’s lead.”

All photos courtesy of Phoenix Art Museum

The evolution has continued, gradually and seemingly all at once. The COVID-19 pandemic halted and, in many museums, decimated department staff and docent corps. Those who remained worked together to reach audiences who could no longer come to them. Docents strategized, organized, and skilled-up to deliver virtual programs that had not previously existed. Study groups, “shareathons,” peer-to-peer online tours, and Zoom continuing education programs kept many docents engaged and ready when the doors reopened. Organizations such as the National Docent Symposium Council (NDSC) fostered a sense of community through regional virtual roundtable conversations, webinars, and a docent Facebook group with more than 1,600 participants.

As institutions continue to recover from the pandemic, every aspect of the museum ecosystem is being examined, including the role of volunteer educators. While some museums have chosen to discontinue their docent programs, others have launched such programs for the first time. During this period of rebuilding, a renewal is occurring that I believe will make room for a new generation of docents.

How the NDSC Helps

The notion that docents can learn from one another was behind the NDSC’s creation. Founded 40 years ago with a mission to promote continuous improvement in docent practice, the NDSC supports a biennial docent conference

that continues to this day. The High Museum of Art in Atlanta will host several hundred docents this November. The organization has also stepped fully into the digital realm, offering website resources, touring handbooks, and webinars such as “The Evolving Docent,” “Diversifying the Docent Corps,” and “Reconsidering Visitor Engagement.”

As a volunteer-led council of 30 members, we are active docents in our institutions. We learn about what is happening with docents in small towns and big cities across the US and Canada. And we experience firsthand how the pandemic and social justice issues impact our own roles and practices. It is a unique vantage point that does not produce easy answers and solutions but helps us recenter our focus and priorities.

Directors on the NDSC serve in various roles, including representing the six regions of the US, as delineated by AAM, and Canada. These regional directors host periodic virtual conversations via Zoom to get a read on museum and docent trends. (See the “Identifying Docent Trends” sidebar on p. 20 for a synopsis of a recent roundtable hosted by the



Phoenix Art Museum docents tour student and adult groups, and offer daily public tours.

Western Region of the National Docent Symposium Council.)

The Evolution Continues

In an effort to diversify the docent corps, traditional training methods are giving way to hybrid programs that offer a focused, flexible approach to volunteerism. While a fifth grade class requires a docent who is available on a week-day, many tours, “ask me” shifts, hands-on activities, and special events present other opportunities to serve.

At Phoenix Art Museum, a new training program launched two years ago combines 8- to 12-week modules, a blend of in-person and online learning, and varied class times and days that allow trainees to choose their path to earning a docent badge. All docents have access to continuing education programs, whether attending in

RESOURCES

National Docent Symposium Council
nationaldocents.org

2024 National Docent Symposium in Atlanta
high.org/docent-symposium-home

NDSC Facebook
facebook.com/NationalDocentSymposiumCouncil

National Docents Forum Facebook Group
facebook.com/groups/NationalDocentsForum



person twice a month, viewing class recordings, or participating in periodic weeknight and weekend programs. I support, and am encouraged by, these changes to increase diversity and inclusivity in our, and other, docent corps. There is more to do, but we are moving in the right direction.

Docent programs, along with the institutions they serve, must continually evolve in order to stay relevant. Over the past century, the docent has shifted from expert to facilitator, and in the future our role will further progress to keep

our audience front and center. I am learning and growing in my docent practice as much today as when I started two decades ago.

Jane Chu, former National Endowment for the Arts chair, was the keynote speaker at the 2022 National Docent Symposium. In her speech, she said she sees docents as innovators, serving a vital role during one of the most important times to be an educator in several generations. Despite the challenges museums have experienced as a result of the pandemic, now, more than ever, people are

yearning for meaning and belonging. Chu encouraged docents to connect to people outside of the arts and have conversations that celebrate the distinctiveness of cultures and styles. Embrace the “messy message,” she challenged, as we navigate through uncertainty together. I couldn’t agree more.



Michelle Carpenter is a Docent at Phoenix Art Museum in Arizona and the President of the National Docent Symposium Council.

IDENTIFYING DOCENT TRENDS

In June 2023, the Western Region of the National Docent Symposium Council hosted a roundtable titled “Reimagining Docent Training.” Over 50 docents attended, representing 21 museums from six states. Given that museums and their docent organizations across the region were in the process of adapting and replenishing their docent corps, the topic struck a chord.

Registrants were asked in advance to consider the following questions: What changes, if any, has your museum or docent organization made in training new docents? Was training initiated and led by docents or by the museum?

Docents came prepared to participate and identified the following trends:

- Recruitment is now aimed at a younger, more diverse group.
- Delivery and timing of training must change to accommodate a more diverse group of trainees. These changes include self-guided materials, self-scheduled online training, training on weekends or in the evenings, and shorter training periods.
- Docent training today is more often initiated by museum staff—a change from the past when docent organizations were more autonomous.
- Training is more inquiry based, focused on open-ended questioning techniques meant to produce conversation in the galleries and empower the visitor.
- Training programs include a mentorship component, with more experienced docents pairing with new trainees for further learning.
- Training includes important information on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and anti-racist elements.
- In addition to offering training on basic skills, museums are giving new trainees opportunities to specialize in certain aspects of the collections rather than becoming generalists.

Museum Junction community.aam-us.org

The online gathering hub for museum professionals.

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- » Adjust your **digest** frequency to get the updates you want, when you want.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Join like-minded colleagues to share research, ideas, and insights—helping to grow fellow museum professionals' capacity to make data-driven decisions.

CEOs & DIRECTORS

Where museum leaders can connect with one another to share resources, insights, or expertise on topics like museum workplaces to strategic plans, leadership development, and more.

COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP

Ask questions, share ideas, and get feedback from colleagues on a range of collections care and management issues, plus, share relevant professional development opportunities.

DEAI LEADERS

Are you responsible for managing DEAI efforts as a primary function of your role? Join peers who are leading diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) work.

DEVELOPMENT, FUNDRAISING, AND PHILANTHROPY

From giving to grant-writing, fundraising and more—connect with fellow fundraising & development pros on the topics that matter to you.

DIGITAL CONTENT & TECHNOLOGY

If you're involved in digital content and technology that is being harnessed to help support a museum's public mission, this space is for you.

EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION

Join a vibrant community of diverse educators from across the field to connect with one another and discuss current standards, practices, and trends in museum education.

FUTURE OF MUSEUMS

Your place to share news and discuss the implications of current trends, projections, innovations, and research. Discussions also build on work from our Center for the Future of Museums.

FINANCE, ACCOUNTING, & AUDIT

If you work in museum finance, accounting, audit, compliance, and risk management, then join to exchange experiences that can spark innovative ideas to excel in these vital roles.

HISTORIC HOUSES AND SITES

One of the largest types of museums in the country are historic house museums and historic sites—connect here for discussions, insights, and practices with fellow professionals.

INDEPENDENT MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

For consultants, freelancers, and contractors who offer valuable expertise to museums across specialties—or those looking to connect with them!

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

A space for LGBTQ+ museum professionals to connect, share resources and experiences, problem-solve, and collaborate. All are welcome to join, including allies!

MUSEUM STUDIES

Where higher education professionals who are teaching the next group of museum professionals can dive into topics ranging from course content to publications, internships, and more!

PUBLIC PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Everyone is welcome to discuss virtual, in-person, or hybrid events; member-only vs. public programs; effective event sizes; and other topics within this area of public engagement.

SUSTAINABLE EXHIBITION MATERIALS

Support the health of humans, society, ecosystems, and the climate by exploring sustainable exhibitions with peers, or ask advice from each other.



American
Alliance of
Museums

Interested in supporting these communities or creating a new one? We're looking for **volunteer moderators** to help these communities thrive!

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bit.ly/museum-community-investment



RETHINKING THE STATUS QUO

What does museum
volunteer retention look
like in a post-pandemic
world?

By Jenny Woods, Brandi Shawn-Chaparro,
and Abbey Earich

Stillman Rogers/Alamy Stock Photo



The pandemic has brought incredible changes to our world over the past four years, including a potentially concerning trend in museum volunteerism. Museums are reporting challenges with recruiting new volunteers along with decreasing retention rates for existing volunteers.

Most museums in the United States rely on volunteers to fulfill crucial roles. In many cases, volunteers outnumber paid staff, meaning a decline in volunteerism could significantly affect museum operations. Museums need to plan for and adapt to these changes in volunteerism to avoid drastic or even catastrophic impacts.

What Does the Data Say?

Volunteering has been declining across many sectors, not just in museums, over the past decade. However, this trend has accelerated notably in recent years. A recent AmeriCorps survey, in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau, found that formal volunteering dropped an unprecedented 7 percentage points—from 30 percent of the population in 2019 to 23 percent in 2021.

Research shows that organizations have had trouble bringing their volunteers back after temporary pauses due to COVID, are having trouble finding new volunteers to fill their needs, and are struggling to keep their volunteers onboard. Surveys from the field—in museums and other nonprofits—illustrate what’s happening on the ground.

In a 2022 survey from the American Association for Museum Volunteers, half of the respondents reported that their current volunteer numbers are

less than 60 percent of their pre-pandemic numbers. The “2023 Volunteer Management Progress Report” from Volunteer Pro echoes these concerns, with 79 percent of respondents saying they have fewer volunteers than before the pandemic. Additionally, the survey found that volunteer recruitment has become a top challenge, with a significant jump in the number of respondents listing it as their top challenge. Furthermore, one-third of organizations reported retaining volunteers for less than one year. The Volunteer Pro report also finds that the Annual Volunteer Retention Rate—the percentage of currently active volunteers who were active 12 months ago—has slipped to 51–60 percent, compared to 62–65 percent in 2010–2018.

What’s Going On?

While the data undeniably points to a decline in volunteerism, the reasons for this drop are less clear. There are undoubtedly multiple factors leading to these changes, but the following three are having a long-term impact on volunteerism: generational shifts, an economic downturn, and a change in the value of time.

As the data shows, museums are struggling to return to their pre-pandemic volunteer numbers. Museums that before 2020 had volunteers who skewed toward the baby boomer and silent/traditionalist generations (those born before 1964) face challenges getting those volunteers to return. A significant number of older volunteers who took necessary precautions during COVID-19 and stayed home have opted not to return to their previous museum roles. These former roles may no longer fit their needs: they might be too far from home, too public-facing, or too challenging as the volunteer ages.

During economic downturns, volunteerism also takes a hit. The data indicates that this dip is related to a decrease in people’s ability to volunteer due to financial constraints coupled with organizations’ increased need for volunteers due to their own funding cuts.

While there are commonalities in the volunteer management field, museums present specific challenges and opportunities. Unlike organizations whose primary function is to provide life-saving support services, museums and their missions can fall into a



American Association for Museum Volunteers
AAMV.org

Volunteer Pro, “2023 Volunteer Management Progress Report”
volpro.net/volunteer-management-progress-report

AmeriCorps, “Volunteering and Civic Life in America”
americorps.gov/about/our-impact/volunteering-civic-life

Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement,
“2023 Post-Pandemic Volunteerism”
mavanetwork.org/shiftingenv



“luxury” category for some people. While museum people see their institutions fulfilling vital educational roles, those in survival mode may see otherwise, making volunteer recruitment and retention more challenging. In considering the future of museum volunteer programs, it’s important to keep in mind where museums sit in the hierarchy of needs and what motivates individuals to volunteer their time—and where. These factors inform potential museum volunteers’ decision-making.

Additionally, museums are frequently perceived as affluent, even if this is not the case. Institutions that boast multimillion dollar budgets or are located in communities where individuals are struggling with financial hardship might find it particularly difficult to demonstrate their need for volunteers. Museums must consider whether they are perceived as deserving of that volunteer labor, recognizing that this contribution is not free for the institution or the volunteer. Potential

volunteers looking to do good in the world prefer to support organizations whose missions align with their beliefs and values, an increasingly important factor when deciding where to dedicate their time.

What Can Museums Do?

So, how can museums address this abrupt shift? We need to adapt—and quickly. Museum volunteer programs need to comprehensively assess volunteer roles, support structures, and retention methods. They may even need to reconsider how they are measuring success.

It is safe to say that the pandemic pause on life has changed society. It changed our values, our capacities, our work style, and maybe our health or finances. And it seems to have also changed how people volunteer. New volunteers seem to be seeking more flexibility, more skilled roles, and less long-term commitment.

IDEAS FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE

Whether building from scratch or working with an existing cohort, here are some suggestions for creating a volunteer program that promotes inclusion and belonging, is equitable, and serves the mission of your museum. A well-structured program doesn't displace staff but instead enhances their work and extends their reach by responsibly placing volunteers in fulfilling and useful roles.

- Rethink when training is offered. A mix of weekend and virtual options in addition to typical workday hours can increase access.
- Streamline onboarding and pare down training and overall commitment to make the best use of volunteer time, prioritizing quality over quantity.
- Create or revise roles to closely support the mission of the institution. Embrace short-term commitments and ensure volunteers understand their impact.
- Consider creating family volunteering opportunities to ensure that people with young children can participate.
- Involve volunteers in your institution's efforts to build and maintain an inclusive community.
- Acknowledge the value of every volunteer, even if they don't stay for years.
- Respect volunteers and advocate for their training, development, and recognition.

The Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement's report on post-pandemic volunteerism supports these observations; 42 percent of its survey respondents in 2022 indicated increased interest in short-term volunteerism in the past year. The survey also found that organizations that reported having the right amount or more volunteers than needed were more likely to have offered increased flexibility for volunteers. Fewer organizations that reported being short on volunteers had employed that strategy.

Further, many museums with longstanding volunteer programs have implemented minimal or no changes to their program structures or processes. While many volunteer managers have made technological changes—from analog to digital—to how they manage and deliver information, program models and systems have remained the same. This stasis may contribute to feelings of frustration among volunteers and could potentially prevent museums from attracting more diverse volunteers. At the very least, it's possible that volunteer priorities have changed significantly post-pandemic. The organization's mission, for example, may no longer appeal to them or align with their values.

Museums may need to improve how they communicate the positive impact they have in communities.

To create a volunteer program that attracts participants, museums might reconsider their organizational structures and assignments. Providing more flexible training opportunities and involving volunteers in creating positions that best serve the visitor could enhance the value of volunteering. Aligning with the institution's mission can be an excellent starting point that connects with a new generation of volunteers. That does not necessarily mean tailoring positions to a particular generation but instead addressing the collective need for more flexibility and a greater focus on recognizing volunteer contributions that resonate across generations.

Museums should also revisit their traditional metrics for success for their volunteer programs. Long-accepted metrics focused on the longevity of volunteer service, celebrating those who serve at museums for decades and contribute thousands of hours, may be outdated. Trends indicate that people don't necessarily want, or find themselves able, to stay in one place for years. Some museums are building volunteer programs that are addressing issues of equity, and they are adapting systems to make it easier to volunteer. They are focusing on the quality of volunteer contributions rather than the number of hours donated.



Neil McAllister/Alamy Stock Photo

Museums might also consider staying engaged with volunteers after they leave a museum. Even if they stay in a position for a short time, volunteers are still a museum's best ambassadors and can help share the organization's mission within their community. A volunteer could also transition into a paid staff role, adding another dimension to their connection with the institution. This shift will require museums to reevaluate how success is measured, moving away from metrics focused on long-term retention and emphasizing the broader impact of volunteerism on community engagement.

The data and the lived experiences of volunteer managers over the past few years suggest that the

changes in how people volunteer are not temporary but a new reality. Museums will need to shift their volunteer programs and expectations to meet these new volunteer norms.

Jenny Woods is Past President of the American Association for Museum Volunteers. **Brandi Shawn-Chaparro** is Senior Manager, Volunteer Programs, at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles. **Abbey Earich** is Deputy Director for the Office of Visitor Services at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC.



PRIDE OF PLACE

The Quincy Valley Historical Society & Museum is a community jewel that runs mainly on volunteer power.

By Tracy Ovenell

On a warm Saturday morning this past July, nine volunteers assembled in the Heritage Barn at the Quincy Valley Historical Society & Museum (QVHSM). Over coffee and donuts, the group discussed the laundry list of chores that awaited them: the furnace in the Reiman-Simmons House was due for a filter change, the vegetable garden needed attention, a post at the Pioneer Church required touch-up paint, and someone would have to wrestle with internet connectivity issues.



The new Heritage Barn at Quincy Valley Historical Society & Museum is a multipurpose event space and archive that also houses exhibits on farms and farmworkers.





Community members carry flags from their country of origin for QVHSM's Ceremony of Oneness during the Celebration of Cultures festival.

The volunteers, dubbed years ago the Manly Men & Wonder Women, have met on the first Saturday of each month since the museum's inception in 2001 to maintain and improve its structures and grounds. People come and go in this crew, but there are consistently between eight and 12 people on a scheduled working day.

The Manly Men & Wonder Women volunteers belong to an extended family of helpers who serve the QVHSM. Since its beginning, the museum has been privately funded and primarily run by volunteers.

Creation Story

The museum sits on a busy thoroughfare in Quincy, Washington, a small town located in the middle of the state. The area is notable for its agriculture, cloud computing data centers, and tourism—strange bedfellows that share the benefits of the nearby Columbia River. Quincy was born as a railroad camp during the advancement of the Great Northern Railway in the late 1800s. The construction of Grand Coulee Dam in the early 20th century led to the development of the Columbia Basin Reclamation Project, which brought water to the area's fertile desert soil and transformed the region into a farming capital.

Nearby, the Gorge Amphitheater attracts popular musical acts and thousands of visitors each summer. The Columbia River is a recreational draw, and the area is a geological wonder shaped by ancient glaciations and floods. Microsoft and other tech companies benefit from cheap hydroelectricity to power their data centers. Despite its proximity to business and entertainment giants and extensive recreation options, the town of Quincy has remained relatively small, with an estimated 2023 population of 8,700.

Garland "Gar" Pilliar, a longtime Quincy resident and a building code officer for the city of Quincy, was integral to the creation of the QVHSM. Through his work, he knew about a prominent home built in 1904 that was deeded to the city. The benefactor stipulated that the property must serve as a heritage site that would benefit the community.

In 2001, after the municipality had performed a structural assessment of the house and replaced the roof, Pilliar posted an advertisement in the local newspaper seeking people interested in revitalizing the home. A few townfolk answered the plea, including Harriet Weber, the current Director of Operations and a longtime champion of the museum. The group began restorations, which included rebuilding the porch from early 20th century photos, installing an HVAC system, adding an ADA-compliant bathroom and office space and access to the back of the house, and replacing 1950s kitchen items with donated fixtures from the early 1900s (i.e., wood cookstove, dry sink, ice box, and crank telephone).

The house was named the Reiman-Simmons House in honor of Lauren Simmons, who donated the



Quincy Valley Historical Society & Museum website
qvhsm.org

Quincy Valley Historical Society & Museum Facebook page
facebook.com/QuincyMuseum

"Historical Society Pushes Heritage Barn Toward the Finish Line," *The Quincy Valley Post-Register*, Sept. 7, 2018
bit.ly/41aSGWz

house to the city upon his death in 1995, and Samuel and Katherine Reiman, German-Russian immigrants who moved to Quincy in 1904 and built this fine home. As this rehabilitation work commenced, the QVHSM began to develop its mission to be a hub of history and culture in the community.

What QVHSM Offers

The house, beautifully restored, is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a focal point on an expansive property that has matured into a local treasure. Over the years, the site has grown to include a local landmark church (christened the Pioneer Church) that was relocated to the museum site and meticulously renovated, and several constructed outbuildings, including an ADA-approved restroom facility.

In 2018, with help from the community and grant funding, the Heritage Barn was raised on the site. The barn includes space for large gatherings, a commercial kitchen, contemporary archive space, and hands-on exhibits, including the professionally designed exhibition “Hope and Hard Work: The Story of Our Farms and Food.” The exhibition tells the story of farmers and farmworkers from the early 1900s through today and features video, audio, and interactives for adults and children, including a hand-cranked french fry sorter, an apple tree with weighted apples and a picking bag, an antique tractor (used in mid-century Quincy) to climb on, and crops to identify. An augmented-reality app features short videos of local farmers discussing their lives.

As the physical evolution of the QVHSM took shape, programs and events breathed life into the property. Functions started small with events like high tea and tours of the Reiman-Simmons House. Over time, as the museum’s popularity grew, programming expanded. A foundational event was the annual Harvest Festival, which evolved into the current Celebration of Cultures. The function attracts hundreds of people to the property, offering food and dance from various heritages, and costumed volunteers assist participants with hands-on exhibits, including apple cider pressing, fry bread cooking, old-fashioned laundry scrubbing, and candle and quilt making.

The holiday season brings the beloved Old Fashioned Christmas celebration, where attendees gather to sing carols, read scripture, and participate in the lighting of the Tannenbaum. Each fall, busloads of third-graders, known as Time Travelers, descend upon the museum grounds to reenact life in pioneer times. To prepare for the field trip, teachers and librarians engage the students with artifacts and lesson plans from the “Quincy, My Home” activity booklet. For 21 years, the program has been a cooperative effort between the local school district and the museum.

In addition to these mainstay events, our museum hosts numerous functions throughout the year, such as popular bus tours, poetry readings, concerts, and a speaker series. People are encouraged to explore the museum during visiting hours and wander leisurely through the exhibits, grounds, and buildings. Museum members and the public are kept abreast of museum happenings through a website, Facebook page, email notifications, the QVHSM’s twice-yearly Jackrabbit Journal newsletter, newspaper announcements, word of mouth, and posters prominently displayed throughout the community.



The history of Quincy is portrayed in an exhibit inside the historic home on-site where youngsters can dress up in period clothes.

A Volunteer Affair

Of course, the QVHSM requires capital to function and serve the community. The museum, incorporated in 2002 as a 501(c)3 charity, has an annual budget of more than \$140,000 and heavily relies on donations and contributions for its income. Almost 250 members produce about \$3,000 annually in membership funds, and upwards of \$30,000 is donated to the museum each year. As the owner of the property, the city of Quincy partially maintains the buildings and grounds and allocates a portion of the lodging tax to the QVHSM.

Additionally, Weber has donated countless hours seeking, applying for, and securing funding from regional foundations and trusts. Recently, her efforts paid off with a fourth grant from the Washington State Historical Society Heritage Capital Projects program. This funding has previously been used to restore the front porch on the Reiman-Simmons House (\$27,000), the Pioneer Church (\$475,000), and the Heritage Barn (\$550,000). This most recent grant will be used for the climate-controlled archive in the Heritage Barn (\$40,000).

Budget expenditures include programs and events, maintenance and improvements, archival input, and operational and administrative costs. The QVHSM has three paid staff members: a bookkeeper paid for five hours of work per week, a staff archivist and docent paid for six hours of work per week for a portion of the year, and Weber, the full-time Director of

Operations, who earns \$1,500 monthly. Employees do not receive benefits.

To keep the museum humming, at least 15 regular volunteers donate hours each week to help with responsibilities such as caring for archives, serving as docents and hosts, stocking the kitchen, managing the gift shop, and providing weekly site maintenance. Twelve board members meet monthly and are active volunteers in other aspects of museum life. Additionally, 80–90 volunteers are readily available to help with events, maintenance, festivals, and student field trips.

We have a healthy mix of professionals, business owners, craftspeople, and skilled laborers who offer their talents. Many positions simply require a willingness to serve and a friendly demeanor. We don't have a formal training program. Existing volunteers mentor new people who can eventually create new programs they feel passionate about. "No matter the volunteer's ability, there is a place for them. There's a place for everyone," Weber says. QVHSM volunteers range in age from 6 to 85, with a significant proportion 55 and older.

Volunteers are often involved elsewhere in the community, from service clubs to art organizations, and therefore have developed networks they can tap when the museum needs additional assistance. The QVHSM has allowed local nonprofit organizations to use the Heritage Barn as a meeting venue, and in return, these groups contribute volunteer hours to the museum.



Costumed volunteer interpreters for QVHSM's Time Traveler student field trips pose in front of the Heritage Barn.

VOLUNTEER BEST PRACTICES

Discourage cliques. The Quincy Valley Historical Society & Museum is committed to creating an inclusive and engaging environment, genuinely embodying the ethos of “Everyone’s Museum.” We prioritize maintaining a professional atmosphere with our dedicated volunteers by avoiding favoritism and steering clear of cliques, recognizing the potential harm of closed groups.

Lead inclusively. Sensitivity to individuals’ feelings, backgrounds, and diverse cultures is paramount to us. Our leaders guide the museum’s direction but believe in fostering a collaborative and invested community where everyone feels valued and included.

Pick your battles. If an issue arises, speak kindly but frankly with volunteers. However, knowing when to overlook something and when to speak is a skill anyone overseeing volunteers must develop. Personalities can be challenging, so a mature individual who is not easily offended is a must.

The QVHSM benefits from 5,000 recorded volunteer hours per year, which equals about 106 hours per week, or nearly three full-time employees. The atmosphere is intentionally welcoming, and leaders have prioritized reaching out to diverse community members for input and support. Volunteers often express a sense of ownership and pride in the museum’s accomplishments.

What the Future Holds

Despite many positive developments at the QVHSM, the organization faces considerable challenges. A fundamental issue is the sustainability of the current volunteer-driven formula. At some point, a new person, or people, will need to fill the director of operations role. Finding someone willing and able to do so much for so little compensation will be a tall order. The position requires dealing with the multifaceted day-to-day operations of an organization powered predominantly by volunteers, along with expertise in community outreach, marketing, and nonprofit funding.

Also, our current volunteers are aging, and younger candidates have not yet filled the potential void. To address this, we regularly collaborate with the high school’s Future Farmers of America club and the choral and theater departments, whose members help with our festivals and events. We have also focused on including families with children in our events.

Our volunteers come with a high degree of passion for the museum, and we honor them with an annual volunteer appreciation luncheon and say “thank you” regularly. The challenge is that someone must be there to fill in the gaps when volunteers cancel or leave early, or if they fail to finish projects. Good communication with volunteers when they take leadership for projects helps; agreeing up front to what will and won’t happen is crucial. Even then, it can be trying sometimes. And in addition to volunteer concerns, there are ever-increasing regulatory requirements, and in recent years, expenses such as insurance and security have skyrocketed.

The formation of the QVHSM was guided by the ingenuity and altruistic spirit of its founding volunteers. The dream of restoring a landmark property that nurtures the community and historic preservation has been realized beyond expectation. Through their volunteerism and financial investments, the citizens of Quincy have continually supported this vision and have been rewarded with a property that is a place of pride for the community. Hopefully, the museum will continue to thrive as it rises to meet its future challenges.

Tracy Ovenell is a former QVHSM board member and past editor of the Jackrabbit Journal. Reach her at ovenell.tracy@gmail.com.



Ben and Wendy, Green Teens volunteers at the Long Island Children's Museum, are ready to welcome visitors to their table.



By Claire M. D’Emic

*SLOWING
DOWN
WITH
INTENTION*

Through reflective practice, the Green Teens volunteers at the Long Island Children’s Museum develop programming for visitors—and lifelong skills.

Claire D’Emic

“In overseeing the Green Teens, I have built a culture of reflective practice among the group.”



Green Teens Devaanshi and Kimaya prepare to teach museum visitors about the monarch butterfly migration to Mexico.

The Long Island Children’s Museum

(LICM), located in a 40,000-square-foot historic airplane hangar on Museum Row in Garden City, New York, began as a dinner conversation among a group of Long Island parents. Thirty years later, the museum has grown into a community gathering place, welcoming over 300,000 visitors each year with a staff of approximately 36 full-time and 75 part-time employees.

Our engaging staff, cultural festivals, community access programs, theater performances, and 14 interactive exhibits fulfill our mission of connecting our communities’ children to a life of wonder, imagination, and exploration. While one-third of all visitors are under the age of 5, LICM is a fun and engaging experience for children and adults of all ages.

One of the key volunteering opportunities at LICM is the Green Teens program, which I oversee. Established in 2009 and funded by regional energy company National Grid, this program annually organizes a group of teenage volunteers from local high schools to work together to design, prototype, and lead play-based programs to engage visitors in science, nature, and sustainability topics. Through this program, the museum offers teens a chance to break down science topics into understandable pieces of information and develop public speaking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. As a result, museum visitors learn about the importance of the natural world and environmental advocacy.

Program Basics

To become a Green Teen, interested students must fill out an application and attend an interview. The strongest candidates—those who exhibit a strong

interest in science and sustainability, are able to work as part of a team, and are curious about learning—are accepted into the program at the beginning of the school year or the start of the summer. Once part of the program, they can continue throughout their high school experience. At any given time, we have between 12 and 16 Green Teens.

The teens meet one day each month throughout the school year and weekly during the summer months. Part of their day is spent developing future programming; thinking through the science themes, such as natural disasters, alternative energy, and habitat conservation, in small groups; and sharing their ideas for feedback. The Green Teens refine their ideas as a group, posing questions and testing activities.

The second half of the day is spent facilitating their previously planned activities on the museum floor (or outside in LICM’s outdoor exhibit, *Our Backyard*, during the summer). These activities have included a game that teaches what helps or hinders monarch butterflies as they make their fall migration to Mexico, an engineering activity where kids design a building that could withstand an earthquake, and a pumpkin dissection that helps participants hone their observational skills. At the end of the day, we come back together to discuss how the activities went, detailing any successes or challenges.

Teaching Reflective Practice

In overseeing the Green Teens, I have built a culture of reflective practice among the group. This set of habits builds moments of reflection into your work so that you can take stock of what you are trying to accomplish, what steps you have tried, and how the different pieces impact each other so that you are able to iterate. In my own career, I’ve had opportunities that have helped me understand the benefit of incorporating moments of reflection and slowing down to notice things, which has reinforced my desire to cultivate this practice in the Green Teens program. (For more on my reflective practice education, see the “My Reflective Practice Journey” sidebar at right.) I have developed the following approaches to reflecting that allow everyone to participate in the way that they are comfortable while we expand on our work at each meeting:

MY REFLECTIVE PRACTICE JOURNEY

Reflective practice is a big part of what the Green Teens volunteers learn at the Long Island Children’s Museum (LICM). To impart this knowledge, I have had to embark on my own reflective journey.

In 2017, I, along with some LICM colleagues, attended a three-day workshop at the American Museum of Natural History to learn about Reflecting on Practice (RoP), a professional learning program developed by the Lawrence Hall of Science that engages participants in habits of reflection, relates learning research to practice, and nurtures a culture of reflection in the workplace. We left the workshop with the tools and curriculum we needed to implement RoP at LICM.

I had another opportunity to understand the benefits of slowing down to reflect when I was chosen as a 2019 Grosvenor Teacher Fellow through National Geographic and Lindblad Expeditions. Through this professional development opportunity for pre-K–12 educators, I participated in a 24-day expedition to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia (an island in the Atlantic), and Antarctica. I saw wildlife; hiked, skied, and kayaked across the landscapes; and learned the importance of slowing down to understand the complexity of our world. As part of the fellowship, I developed the temporary “Slow Down! Explore” exhibition for LICM.

Finally, my participation in the Fred Rogers Institute’s Educators’ Neighborhood has underscored the value of slowing down and reflecting. In watching and discussing episodes of *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, I’ve learned ways to be purposeful in my work and model reflection for the students I work with.

As I have built a reflective practice in my own work, I have been layering these experiences into the Green Teens program to help the teens build reflective habits, improve the programs we offer to visitors, and refine their experience in the program.

Using “think, pair, share.” With this strategy, I pose a question or a topic—for example, “Think about a time in your life when you learned something outside of school. What made it memorable?”—and allow the teens to think by themselves for a set amount of time. Having pen and paper for each person can be helpful. I then invite them to share their thoughts with one other person before facilitating a group conversation. This allows them the time and space to gather their own thoughts, lowers the stakes of sharing out loud by first inviting them to speak with just one person, and opens things up for group sharing.

Thinking on big paper. When we are brainstorming program ideas as a group, I bring out a very large sheet of kraft paper and invite the teens to write down all of their ideas or questions and physically move around the perimeter of the paper to see what their peers have written. This has been especially helpful

when planning for our summer programming. I lead this brainstorming session at our training at the beginning of the summer and bring the paper to each weekly meeting thereafter. This helps the teens develop ideas over time, allows for connections between different people’s thoughts, and creates a space for everyone to participate, even if they are not at each meeting, since the activity spans a length of time.

Facilitating a wrap-up conversation. At the end of each program day, the entire group assembles to discuss what went well, what was a challenge, and what could be improved. The leaders of each activity share their own perspectives of the day, and notes are taken to refer to during the next prototyping session. Because we habitually have this conversation at the end of each day, the teens are thinking about these questions as they are leading their activities and have thoughtful input to share.

Sarah Donaldson



The summer 2023 Green Teens cohort led their activities in the museum’s outdoor exhibit, *Our Backyard*.

Encouraging individual reflections. In addition to having opportunities for teens to discuss things together, there is individual reflection time throughout the program. This serves two purposes: (1) it allows them the quiet space to think through reflection questions, such as “What is your goal for participating?” “What has been your biggest success this year?” and “What should change?” and (2) it gives me a more personal understanding of the teens’ interests and motivations. As I plan for the next program year, I take their feedback into consideration to make improvements to the training structure, the location of activities for maximum visitor participation, the science topics they want to explore, and more.

As I’ve incorporated these strategies over the past few years, I’ve seen a shift in the culture of our group and how the teens approach planning activities. Setting aside dedicated time to be reflective and weaving these habits throughout our meetings highlights this as an important aspect of the program and helps the teens build intentionality. Rather than quickly moving from one thing to the next, the Green Teens think through things, whether that is the best way to explain a complex science concept to a 5-year-old or the best materials to use in an activity.

This reflective practice also helps them exercise their voice. When teens are asked at the beginning of the program about their goals for participating, many say that they want to overcome their fear of public speaking or social anxiety. Giving them different opportunities to voice their thoughts allows them to take risks. By the end of the program year, these same teens will write that their biggest success is that they’ve been able to share their ideas out loud with their peers and contribute to group conversations.

In developing these habits, the teens are able to move through the iterative process of activity development, creating a better learning experience for museum visitors. Over their time in the program, they see that their feedback makes an impact.


Looking to the Future

Thanks to recent funding from PricewaterhouseCoopers, I am currently working on ways to expand the program to connect the current

cohort of teens with alumni of the program. I have relied on our habits of reflection to help me shape these new experiences. The alumni and the current cohort have thoughtfully responded to reflection questions that explore how they want to be connected with the other group, their career aspirations, how participating in Green Teens has impacted them, and what they hope to learn by interacting with this larger group.

With this information, I am beginning to set up several ways to bring the current and former Green Teens together. Some participants who want a more in-depth connection will be paired with an alumni mentor with whom they will meet virtually to discuss topics like how to find internship opportunities, how to navigate making friends in college, and what goes into choosing a major. We will also have several alumni lunches, where Green Teens alumni who are local will meet up with the current cohort to share their personal experiences. I am also creating a contact list of all current and former Green Teens with their school, major, and, if they’ve already graduated college, their job. Current teens will then be able to reach out to alumni with specific questions.

As we work through this current iteration of the program, we will build on our reflective practice to continuously improve the experience. As we do so, I look forward to seeing more teens embrace the practice to create engaging programming for our visitors, develop more self-confidence, connect with other Green Teens participants, and successfully navigate the next steps of their lives.


Claire M. D’Emic is the STEM Initiatives Program Director at the Long Island Children’s Museum in Garden City, New York. Reach her at cdemic@licm.org or at clairedemic.com.



ART OF SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA
CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC EXCHANGE
FROM THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT AND CHINA TO THE PACIFIC

From a region marked by great cultural and artistic achievement, which saw the results of shared innovations as well as trade and exchange within the region and beyond. Today the region seeks to explore the common roots with which it shares its connections and shared practices. Through a series of four interconnected cultural and artistic exchange events and activities to create. This is evident in the continued vitality of cultural activities by the people of the region, and in the ongoing production of new and innovative art forms throughout the region. The objects presented in the gallery reflect the dynamic of the region as both agents and recipients of cultural and artistic practices and exchange.

A USC Pacific Asia Museum docent, Jane, leads students in a drawing activity inspired by an Indonesian sculpture.



By Valentina M. Quezada

WELCOMING CHANGE

The USC Pacific Asia Museum took a trust-building approach to working with docents on an evolving education program for student tours.

All photos courtesy of USC Pacific Asia Museum

On a typical Wednesday morning at the USC Pacific Asia Museum (USC PAM), as you walk into the building's Imperial Palace-style courtyard filled with plants, Taihu rocks, and a koi pond, you might see a group of students gathered with a docent. The docent asks the students to share what they see, if they are reminded of anything familiar, and how being in the space makes their bodies feel. They discuss

museum expectations and what they will learn during their visit, and then they slowly make their way into the galleries to begin exploring.

USC PAM, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, is a small museum in Pasadena, California, dedicated to the art of Asia and the Pacific Islands. The historic building that houses the museum celebrated its centennial this year. Part of

“We view our docents as instrumental to the education department and thus choose to invest time and resources in improving the quality of their service and experience.”

the University of Southern California, USC PAM is often described as a hidden gem in the city. With 19 full-time staff members and more than 150 volunteers, the museum serves a diverse audience that is local to both its San Gabriel Valley neighborhood and greater Southern California. Its programs range from school tours and family days to large-scale cultural festivals and events.

Volunteer docents serve a vital role at USC PAM. They lead tours for K–12 students as part of the School Tours and Distance Learning programs. They are critical to advancing the museum’s mission of creating inspiring encounters with the art, history, and culture of Pacific Asia to promote intercultural understanding. There are currently 65 docents on the museum’s roster, with 33 actively leading tours for student and adult groups. Their history with the museum dates to its early days when the docent council was essentially the education department. Their love for the museum’s art and building has endured for decades, through several administrative and operational changes.

In the past decade, since the museum was acquired by the university, the docent council has embraced dramatic changes once thought impossible. At a time when many museums are shifting the leadership of their education programs from volunteer docents to paid educators, USC PAM has retained and evolved its docent organization by establishing trust between docents and education staff and empowering docents to be active stakeholders in our collective work.

Our Strategy for Change

We view our docents as instrumental to the education department and thus choose to invest time and

resources in improving the quality of their service and experience. Whenever a change is approaching, no matter the scale, docents are included in the conversation. The education team attends every docent board and council meeting, always offering to assist with any major or minor need or concern. Our strategy for fostering this relationship comprises four components: review, collaboration, assessment, and reflection.

We approach each change in museum education by reviewing the current situation. What works and what doesn’t work with the way things are currently? As we undertake this analysis, we think about our goals and objectives for implementing the new structure or process.

For example, during the onset of the pandemic, like many other museums, we pivoted our popular K–12 field trip program to a virtual format (USC PAM Distance Learning Program). Our docents worked with me and the school programs coordinator to learn several new skills, including navigating virtual platforms, modifying content for accessibility, developing virtual activities, and more. The biggest shift was the implementation of thematic tours based on grade levels, something most museums were already doing at the time. However, our docents chose not to switch to thematic tours before the uncontrollable circumstance of a global pandemic, instead favoring a format in which each docent could talk about whatever they wanted.

Once we began making plans to reopen the galleries, we knew that docent-led tours for students could not return to the way they were. With no set themes, groups of students on the same field trip would get a completely different experience



A docent, Paige, talks to middle school students about the qualities of a Buddha on a Silk Road tour.



TIPS FOR HELPING DOCENTS DEVELOP ENGAGING ACTIVITIES

- Provide examples of age-appropriate activities and modifications specific to different artworks.
- Allow docents to brainstorm and practice ideas in groups.
- Encourage experimentation with students, followed by reflection and modification of the activity.
- Encourage docents to share successful activities with each other and include them in forthcoming training sessions.

depending on who was giving the tour. We reviewed the data from pre-pandemic teacher surveys and consulted current teachers to understand what they were looking for in an in-person field trip program. Teachers expressed a desire for a more interactive experience, with less lecturing and more activities to foster deeper connections with objects and historical content.

Armed with this information, we set a goal to prepare our docents to confidently lead engaging, interactive thematic tours of our permanent collection and special exhibitions. Within the themes we developed—animals in Asian art (grades K–2), nature in Asian art (grades 3–5), the Silk Road (grades 6–8), and contemporary Asian art (grades 9–12)—docents can choose the tours' objects and activities, leaving them some creative freedom in how they lead their tour. The program focused on students learning about Asian and Pacific cultures through discussion of artistic practices, materials, and themes while making personal connections to the themes through reflection on experiences and prior knowledge.

Subsequently, we collaborated with the docents on developing their new training for in-person tours. In a series of meetings with staff, active docents shared their thoughts, experiences, and advice on effectively presenting this new tour format to the group. One of the key takeaways from the meetings was that docents wanted to understand the reasons behind the changes. With that in mind, our training included explanations outlining the shift to thematic touring, grounded in best practices and successes at other institutions. We also shared the teacher surveys that underscored the need for cohesion in the content their students received at the museum.

Once docents began touring students in-person again, we began assessing the program by collecting more survey data from teachers. We asked docents who had not participated in the Distance Learning Program to shadow an experienced docent before scheduling them to tour. Experienced docents often offered advice and moral support to their colleagues who were nervous about trying this new format. Education staff supported the docents by providing feedback on their work and brainstorming solutions for challenging situations. After each day's tours,



A docent, Jon, begins a tour about nature in Asian art with third-graders in the museum courtyard.

docents reflected on successes, challenges, and ideas for improvement.

Subsequent training meetings included dedicated time for reflection and sharing feedback and experiences with the new format. These conversations confirmed the success of thematic tours with docents telling us they had become comfortable trying new things, experimenting with activities, and sharing strategies with one another.

Focusing on Trust

Of course, this change was not unanimously embraced, and several docents stopped doing in-person tours with students. Some opted to contribute to the docent council and the museum by participating in special committees that utilized their talents for event planning, content research, and documentation. This resulted in a period during which the task of leading tours fell on a smaller group of dedicated individuals, who by the end felt burned out. Before we could train a new class of docents, staff had to step in occasionally to lead tours when there were not enough docents who could do so.

Trust and relationship building emerged as integral to getting docents to accept and adapt to changes in the institution and its programs. The education department's approach to this change in tours and other changes has involved listening to concerns, engaging in discussion, and collaborating on solutions accepted by most, if not all, members of the group. Involving interested docents in the planning for new programs and projects fostered a deeper connection with those activities and created advocates for the new ideas among the larger group.

Our trust-building strategy also helped us implement annual diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) training for docents and shift to a training format that is more inclusive and accessible for new participants. Docents helped plan DEAI workshops by suggesting areas where they needed more resources, such as inclusive language and working with differently abled individuals, and by sharing real-life scenarios for exploration in the workshops. At one point, they formed a committee to explore topics of race and discrimination in the museum education field, revealing that biases are deeply


rooted at nearly all levels of our beloved institutions.

After two years of annual DEAI workshops for the docent council, training committee members unanimously accepted including a DEAI workshop at the beginning of the new 12-week docent training. This workshop includes anti-bias training and information on inclusive language. Additional changes in the most recent training focused on the recruitment process, touring strategy workshops, and information sharing. Current docents modeled best practices to new recruits, sharing ideas for engaging experiential activities with modifications for different ages and ability levels.

Feedback from training participants indicated that the changes more positively affected their training experience compared to previous years. We also saw room for improvement in helping new docents gain confidence in inquiry- and object-based learning techniques.

Our docents work at the museum because they love to learn and engage with a community that shares their interests. One longtime USC PAM docent, Nancy Lan, a scientist by trade, has enjoyed making new friends with similar interests, appreciating art from different points of view, learning about Asian cultures beyond her native Chinese culture, engaging with curious children, and even improving her leadership skills. "I take every chance in my life, including being a docent, as an opportunity for learning, and adapting to change has been a part of that," Lan says.

We hope that USC PAM docents continue to evolve with the changing institution. We envision the next round of docent training to be more diverse, inclusive, and accessible. By building relationships based on mutual trust and an understanding of motivations, museums can embrace their docents as a valuable resource and lead them through any changes and challenges.

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Kudos



The Anchorage Museum and its communications team, including Chief Communications Officer **Janet Asaro** and Communications Managers **Hank Davis**, **Zakiya McCummings**, and **Leroy Polk**, were recently recognized by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Alaska Chapter with six first-place and two second-place Awards of Excellence for the museum's e-newsletter, social media, video material, creative tactics, and marketing communications. The museum also garnered PRSA's Grand Award of Excellence for its website, anchoragemuseum.org.

In Memoriam



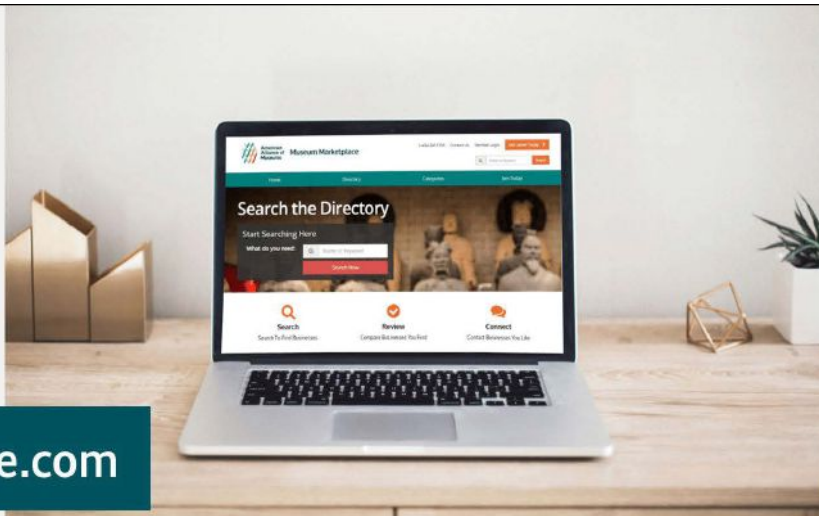
Len Steinbach, 71, passed on January 19, 2024, while doing what he loved: preparing to attend a jazz performance with friends. His loss is unexpected and deeply felt by countless people who loved and appreciated him. Steinbach was a museum leader and technology consultant, serving as CTO at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, CIO at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and president of the Museum Computer Network. He was a lecturer for the Johns Hopkins University Museum Studies Program, adjunct faculty at the Cleveland Institute of Art, and a visiting fellow at the City University of Hong Kong. His titles belied his deep understanding of museums and their internal and external relationships and structures. Steinbach was a respected and innovative thinker, brilliant strategist, and great collaborator who was able to clearly link technology programs to real outcomes for people who visit institutions. A celebration of his life and work will be held at The Peale on Friday, May 17 from 5–7 p.m., which coincides with the 2024 AAM Annual Meeting and MuseumExpo in Baltimore. All of Steinbach's friends and colleagues are welcome to attend; conference registration is not required. For details, contact Nancy Proctor at CSO@ThePeale.org.

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Retirements



Ian Wardropper, The Frick Collection's Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Director, will retire in 2025 following 14 years of service to the Frick and a 50-year museum career. During his tenure as the Frick's director, Wardropper led the museum and library through a period of strategic and measured growth, which included the first comprehensive renovation and upgrade of the Frick's historic buildings in nearly 90 years and a focused acquisitions program that has enhanced the institution's art and library collections. He also prioritized accessibility and public outreach, spearheading innovative strategies and partnerships that enabled audiences to experience the museum and library in new ways.



Jill Medvedow will step down from her position as Ellen Matilda Poss Director of the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston (ICA) after a 25-year tenure. Medvedow transformed the ICA into a collecting museum—including the acquisition of The Barbara Lee Collection of Art by Women—bringing to the fore diverse artistic voices and artists who historically have been underrepresented. Today it is one of the only art museum collections with almost 60 percent of works by artists who identify as women and 38 percent who identify as people of color. Equally notable, Medvedow is a national champion for teen arts programs and the role museums can play in the lives of teens and their city. In 2012, the ICA's teen initiative was recognized with a National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award from the White House, the highest honor of its kind. Today an average of 6,000 teens a year participate in ICA programs and national convenings.



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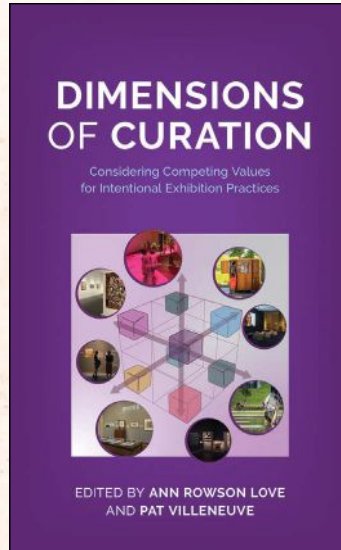
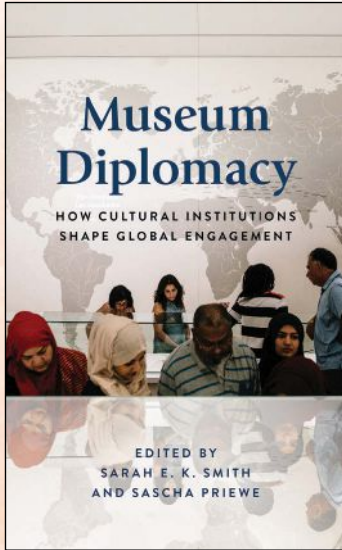
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