

Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service: Case Study

Museum: SHARE Museums East Project: Museums Volunteer Programme 2011-12



Why we did it: SHARE Museums East is the museum development programme for the East of England funded by Arts Council and managed by NMAS. Its mission is to support excellence, resilience and cooperative working in museums in the region, through offering an extensive skills-sharing training programme, supporting specialist networks and working with cohorts of museums to meet specific development needs. One such need was around managing and developing museum volunteers who are “**at the heart of what we do**” (course participant). The Volunteer Development Programme was set up to help museums to develop holistic approaches to recruiting, managing and involving volunteers.

What we delivered: Participants attended three workshops based around a Volunteer Lifecycle Model which covered three main strands: **planning** for volunteering, **selecting** and **retaining** volunteers. Participants reviewed their strengths, identified areas for improvement and used these to create an action plan for their museum. Issues which arose included: operating a stronger business focus with volunteers at the heart; encouraging greater diversity in the volunteer base and clarity around roles and responsibilities. Participants were invited to a follow up workshop three months later to share successes and challenges and update their action plans.

Who benefited: So far, 26 museums across the region have taken part, including independent, volunteer-run, local authority and university museums. Feedback on the impact of the project has been overwhelmingly positive with a beneficial effect reported on workforce capabilities, visitor engagement and enjoyment, empowerment to effect change, integrity, professionalism and reputation in the local community. For example, one museum has doubled the members of its Community Outreach team following training to volunteers in delivering Reminiscence for well-being.

What happened next: A report bringing to together the main learning points from the project is available on the SHARE Museums East website: http://www.sharemuseumseast.org.uk/shares/resource_160.pdf A further cohort programme ran in 2012-13, and a related development need supporting the sector in managing trustees is currently in development.

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“We have now got the skills, knowledge and facilities to know how best to recruit volunteers and, most importantly, maintain their interest.”

The Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS) is a multi-award winning service comprising **ten museums and a study centre**. The Service aims to inform and inspire people's interest in the cultural and natural heritage of Norfolk, and address relevant contemporary issues by:

- **Collecting, preserving and interpreting material evidence of the past**
- **Stimulating creativity, inspiration and enjoyment**
Providing an enjoyable way to learn throughout life
- **Engaging with the widest possible audience**
- **Enriching people's lives and creating a sense of place and identity**
- **Enabling people to understand and value other cultures**

It is a high performing service. In 2010/11 **380,000** visits were made to the museums, and **43,000** schoolchildren participated in formal learning events.

The Norfolk Museums Service was established in 1974 when the County and District Councils in Norfolk agreed to delegate their museum powers to a Joint Committee to manage museums through a county-wide Museums

Service. The museums in each district are managed by local Area Museum Managers who liaise closely with each District and ensure that the museums support local strategies and initiatives.

NMAS is one of only 16 Major Partner Museums receiving substantial revenue funding from Arts Council England in order to achieve ACE's vision for museums:

"A museums sector that is delivering inspiring public programmes using high quality collections to reach more and more people, especially children and young people. The sector is innovative; it shares best practice and is embedded in communities and responsive to audience needs. It is made up of strong, sustainable organisations with a highly skilled and diverse workforce; it is excellently led."

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