

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS FINAL REPORT



ORGANISATION:	Reading Museum & Town Hall
IiV HOST ORGANISATION:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NCVO <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Development Scotland <input type="checkbox"/> WCVA <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Now <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Ireland
ASSESSOR:	Anne-Marie Zaritsky
NAME OF LEAD ASSESSOR:	Dane Gould
ASSESSMENT DATE(S):	14 th May 2015
1ST ASSESSMENT/RENEWAL:	Renewal
ASSESSMENT OUTCOME:	MET
CONDITIONS IF ANY:	
DATE CONDITIONS MET:	
FINAL ASSESSMENT DECISION:	MET

ORGANISATION SUMMARY:

Reading Museum & Town Hall is part of Reading Borough Council's cultural services. Established in 1883, and with 11 galleries, the Museum exhibits are of international, national and local significance. In the same building as the Town Hall it also provides a concert hall and a venue for conferences, exhibitions and weddings. Community engagement is a key focus of the work.

There were 20 active volunteers at the time of assessment, a slight decrease since the previous assessment in December 2011. All volunteering roles are situated within the Museum. Volunteering roles fall within the following five categories: documentation and collections work, community engagement, research, gallery tours and Abbey Quarter Tours. Gallery Tours and Abbey Quarter Tours are both new roles developed since the previous assessment.

The major development since the last assessment is the Reading Abbey Revealed project. Reading Abbey was founded by King Henry I in 1121, and Henry I is thought to be buried there. In June 2014 the Council secured initial project funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). These include widespread conservation work on the Abbey Ruins, and an application has been submitted for further funding. Volunteers, who are also members of 'Friends of Reading Abbey', have been recruited to run tours of the site.

All volunteers have a named supervisor from within the team in which they are placed. The Museum Manager has an overarching responsibility for volunteer practice in the organisation. The Assistant Curator is responsible for volunteer coordination and development of policies, procedures, volunteer management plans and roles. The Museum & Town Hall Manager has a strategic overview of the Museum on behalf of



SAMPLING RATIONALE

Volunteers were sampled from all currently active volunteers. Volunteers were selected to represent all volunteering roles including the Friends of Reading Abbey, newly recruited and longer standing volunteers. The following volunteer interviews took place in person at the Museum:

- Community Engagement Volunteer
- Documentation Volunteer
- Research Volunteer
- A group of 3 Gallery Tour Volunteers
- A group of 3 Abbey Tour Volunteers

A written testimonial was also received by email from a Documentation Volunteer who was unable to participate on the day but was keen to be involved.

The following staff interview took place:

- Museum and Town Hall Manager – strategic overview
- Museum Manager
- Assistant Curator (Collections & Learning) - Volunteer Co-ordinator and liV Lead
- Community Engagement Curator – managing volunteers
- Collections Care Curator – managing volunteers
- Learning Officer – works alongside volunteers
- Assistant Curator – works alongside volunteers

NUMBER OF SITES, BRANCHES, LOCATIONS:	2
--	----------

NUMBER INCLUDED IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE:	2
---	----------

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS:	20
------------------------------	-----------

NUMBER INTERVIEWED:	10
----------------------------	-----------

NUMBER AS % OF TOTAL:	50%
------------------------------	------------

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER ROLES:	5
-----------------------------------	----------

NUMBER OF ROLES SAMPLED BY INTERVIEW:	5
--	----------

NUMBER AS % OF TOTAL:	100%
------------------------------	-------------

NUMBER OF STAFF:	19
-------------------------	-----------

NUMBER INTERVIEWED:	7
----------------------------	----------

WERE TRUSTEES INTERVIEWED?	N/A, Museum & Town Hall Manager interviewed as Council representative
-----------------------------------	---

WRITTEN EVIDENCE

The following evidence was submitted at self-assessment:

- Volunteer Policy
- Volunteer Welcome Pack
- Volunteer Management Plan.

The following evidence was seen at assessment included:

- Volunteer Management Plan - updated
- Minutes from a recent Council Meeting
- Volunteer Registration Form
- Volunteer Agreement
- Website – ‘how to volunteer’ pages

INDICATOR 1

There is an expressed commitment to the involvement of volunteers, and recognition throughout the organisation that volunteering is a two-way process which benefits volunteers and the organisation.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

The Museum has a written policy on volunteer involvement, defining volunteering and the benefits it can bring to the Museum. It is based on the principles of equal opportunities and diversity. The policy was last reviewed in January 2015 by staff and volunteers and is scheduled for review every three years. The policy also includes problem solving procedures, recruitment and screening guidelines and health & safety guidelines based on Reading Borough Council policy. “The museum’s volunteer programme is seen as an exemplar in volunteer engagement across Reading Borough Council, and many museum developed policies on volunteering have become corporate ones” explained the Museum Manager.

Staff interviewed were clear on the organisation’s ethos on volunteer involvement, “volunteering is a key part of our audience development plan, plus involving volunteers means we can do the extras we would otherwise only dream of” and “as staff we might be pigeon-holed in our thinking, volunteers bring a different skill set and perspective”.

Volunteers interviewed were also clear on why the Museum involved volunteers, and the mutual benefits their volunteering brought, “I’ve got loads out of it, I never thought I’d have the confidence to be working with the public” and “it has given invaluable insight and experience, integral to my current career”. A Gallery Tour volunteer explained, “having different volunteers give the tours means no two are alike, there are core things we cover, but we’re also encouraged to research and talk about exhibits that are of personal interest to us”. An Abbey Tour volunteer added, “they can run twice as many tours because of us and we’re keeping the Abbey profile up while it’s closed”.

INDICATOR 2

The organisation commits appropriate resources to working with all volunteers, such as money, management, staff time and materials.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

The Museum & Town Hall's Assistant Curator- Collections & Learning also acts as Volunteer Co-ordinator, and this is reflected in the job description. Other staff managing volunteers also have their responsibilities outlined in their job descriptions. Staff who supervise volunteers are provided with the relevant support and training, "I managed volunteers in my previous job, here [the Volunteer Co-ordinator] is a great source of support if I need any guidance." The Volunteer Co-ordinator also attends the 'Museums' Regional Volunteer Forum' and receives regular updates from NCVO and Reading Voluntary Action.

"Volunteering is permanently on the agenda for meetings including collections and learning team meetings and learning development. It is also discussed at operations team meeting and management team meetings", explained a member of staff. It was clear that volunteering was fully integrated throughout the organisation and into planning at both a team and strategic level.

The organisation has a Five Year Plan that is reviewed annually and includes objectives for the volunteering programme. This strategy informs the Volunteer Management Plan, which was last reviewed in April 2015. It includes objectives such as improving diversity of volunteers, maintaining 'Investing in Volunteers' standards and, if further funding is secured for the Abbey Project, recruiting an additional Volunteer-Co-ordinator. Volunteering is also integrated into the Audience Development Plan and Community Engagement Strategy.

Volunteers interviewed all confirmed they had the resources required to carry out their role, "they recently bought a new laptop as finding a computer to use was sometimes a problem" reported one volunteer. Since the last assessment a desk booking calendar has been introduced to encourage staff to plan ahead for the equipment and resources their volunteers will need. "When completing funding bids for projects that involve volunteers we include the costs for resources that are required for volunteers to successfully complete their role" confirmed a member of staff.

INDICATOR 3

The organisation is open to involving volunteers who reflect the diversity of the local community and actively seeks to do this in accordance with its stated aims.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

Volunteering roles are advertised widely, through the Museum's own website, social media, Reading Voluntary Action, local press, the local university and at outreach events. Volunteers interviewed cited the website, local library, college and being a 'Friend' of the museum as how they found about volunteering at the museum.

The Museum works under the equal opportunities policy of Reading Borough Council, and these principles are adopted into the Volunteering Policy, outlined in the Volunteer

Handbook and discussed with volunteers at induction. Volunteers interviewed were diverse in terms of gender and age, but the museum acknowledges they are underrepresented with regards to volunteers from BME backgrounds. “As part of the Reading Abbey bid we have asked our consultants to consider ways to attract non-traditional museum volunteers to roles” explained a member of staff. It is suggested that irrespective of the bid outcome the museum explores ways to attract a more diverse range of volunteers, perhaps consulting with local BME community groups, to fully understand the perceived barriers that might be in place to ensure the museum reflects the make-up of the local community.

Volunteers confirmed the Museum to be a “welcoming place to be, I don’t think it matters who you are – you just need to be interested in the museum”.

The Museum introduced equal opportunity statistics monitoring at the last assessment and data is compared to the borough demographics. A development point at the previous assessment was to review equal opportunities statistics on an annual basis and use the results to influence the Volunteer Management Plan. This now takes place, and relevant objectives to improve diversity have been identified.

Images and descriptions of the organisation on its printed material and website reflect the diversity of the local community.

INDICATOR 4

The organisation develops appropriate roles for volunteers in line with its aims and objectives, which are of value to the volunteers.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

All volunteer roles have a written description which also includes the skills and experience required and the preferred times the volunteering can take place. Roles are available in many areas including collections, community engagement and gallery tours.

The Volunteer Co-ordinator supports staff with the development of new role descriptions. “We try to encourage discussions over the amount of time and days for volunteering to be done between the volunteer and the supervisor. This provides both with greater flexibility.” (Volunteer Co-ordinator)

The Museum offers a variety of roles, “when developing a new role we have to justify that it’s work we wouldn’t be able to do without volunteers, but is highly desirable” and “having defined roles makes things easier for us, expectations are clear on both sides” (staff).

The museum attracts a number of volunteers who bring with them knowledge and interests in areas that the staff may not have. “They always give me really interesting things to do” (volunteer). Supervisors adapt the tasks of the volunteers to make best use of their enthusiasm and knowledge. This can be seen through the volunteer gallery tour guide role; “we were all asked to choose objects that interested us personally, research their history and then include them in our tour- it means every tour is different”.

INDICATOR 5

The organisation is committed to ensuring that, as far as possible, volunteers are protected from physical, financial and emotional harm arising from volunteering.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

There is a risk assessment record that covers all activities undertaken by volunteers and is reviewed annually. A risk assessment was also developed for volunteers delivering the Abbey Quarter Tours, and volunteers confirmed this was covered in their induction training. Volunteers interviewed were aware of their health & safety responsibilities, “we were shown fire exits, told about not lifting heavy objects on our own and where the first aid box is”, another added, “when we start the gallery tours there’s health and safety bit that we need to do first”. Fire safety procedures are also explained in the Volunteer Welcome Pack.

The Reading Museum policy states that they will offer to cover the travelling expenses for university students and those claiming benefits. Travelling expenses are paid for commuting within the Reading Borough Council boundaries up to £5 for one day. This is a Council wide policy. It is suggested that the Museum continue to try and influence council policy so that out of pocket expenses can be offered to all volunteers, as a part of their commitment to equal opportunities, and an appreciation that volunteers in a range of situations could find travel costs a barrier to involvement. Volunteers who did claim expenses confirmed the system was straightforward and that reimbursement was prompt.

Volunteers are covered by insurance provided by Reading Borough Council.

All volunteers’ personal details are kept in a secure filing cabinet with restricted access and on a password protected database.

INDICATOR 6

The organisation is committed to using fair, efficient and consistent recruitment procedures for all potential volunteers.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

People interested in volunteering are initially encouraged to speak to the Volunteer Co-ordinator about volunteer roles or to examine the roles available through the website, which details the roles currently available. An application form can be downloaded from the website or posted to potential volunteers on request. Potential volunteers are invited to an informal interview with the Volunteer Co-ordinator. If it is a competitive selection process for the volunteer role, the volunteers are made aware of this in advance.

There is a standard recruitment procedure that is applied consistently to all volunteers. Volunteers complete a standard registration form which asks only for essential information and that needed to help match volunteers to an appropriate role. Volunteers are interviewed by two members of staff, including the person who will be supervising the role. “I was invited to come and meet with [the Volunteer Co-ordinator] and the curator I’d be working with, we had a tour of the museum, talked about the role and upcoming exhibitions, I was sure by the end of the visit that I wanted to give it a go”.

Details about what the volunteers can expect from the organisation and what the Museum & Town Hall expects from the volunteers is laid out in the Volunteer Policy. It is also covered in the interview with the aim that that both sides are clear from the outset on their responsibilities. “We talked about expectations at the interview, it was quite relaxed, but we had plenty of time to talk about my interests and experience and they answered all the questions I had” (volunteer).

Volunteers that are unsuccessful are informed by telephone, with feedback offered. Volunteers are sign-posted to other museums or Reading Voluntary Action as appropriate.

Two references are taken up for all volunteers; there is a standard form for this. DBS checks are undertaken on volunteers in a small number of roles which involve significant contact with children or vulnerable adults. A previous conviction does not automatically exclude someone from volunteering; “the supervisor and management team would discuss each case on its merits and depending on the role applied for.” explained the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

INDICATOR 7

Clear procedures are put into action for introducing new volunteers to their role, the organisation, its work, policies, practices and relevant personnel.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

Volunteers are introduced to all relevant staff on their first day, “they will also feature in the internal weekly newsletter, so all staff are aware of them and the role they’ll be taking on” explained a member of staff. All volunteers, when asked, confirmed that they were made very welcome on their first day, “I was shown around the building and met everyone who was in that day, shown where everything was I might need during the day”. There is an induction checklist contained within the Volunteer Welcome Pack, and volunteers reported the induction system was effective and covered all the key facts.

Most training is carried out one-to-one by the relevant supervisor; volunteers interviewed had received training on the database, handling objects and giving tours. Gallery Tour volunteers explained how as part of their training they had visited a museum in Oxford and attended a tour given by a volunteer there, “there’s more to it than I thought” commented one volunteer, “you learn how to bring the group around you, and how to manage questions”, another added, “we practiced on staff and received constructive feedback which was really useful, it also made me feel part of the staff team”. Volunteers who had recently joined as part of the Abbey Project, confirmed they had also attended an induction and training on delivering ‘hard hat’ tours of the ruins, “the staff looked after us very well and everything was well organised”. Many volunteers also attend the public talks offered by the museum to further build their knowledge base.

All volunteers have clearly defined roles and were aware of the boundaries of their work, “it’s important just to do the work you’ve been trained to do, otherwise you could be more of a hindrance than help if you input data incorrectly” said a documentation volunteer. “I was given a project plan with clear task and outputs” commented one volunteer, “so I knew exactly what was expected of me”.

The Volunteer Policy and Welcome Pack have sections that look at problem solving. In the event of a problem the volunteer's supervisor will look at ways to address the issue, such as training or changing the volunteer's tasks, where a suitable alternative can be found. "If a situation could not be resolved, I would talk it through with the Museum Manager, any decision to ask a volunteer to leave would not be made lightly", explained a member of staff. Volunteers were aware of the process, and reported staff to be approachable and understanding should a problem of any kind occur.

INDICATOR 8

The organisation takes account of the varying support and supervision needs of volunteers.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

All volunteers interviewed knew who their supervisor was, and also the role of the Volunteer Co-ordinator in supporting volunteers. Support is informal, but effective, "I work alongside a supervisor, it would seem odd to have a formal meeting, and would be waste of everyone's time", another confirmed "I'm regularly asked if I'm enjoying the work, or if I want to change anything". Volunteers delivering the gallery tours meet quarterly, "as we're all quite new to it, it's a good way to check in with each other and ask any questions we may have".

Volunteers were aware they could say 'no' to anything beyond the scope of their role, "I've never had to say 'no' to anything so far, but I would say something if I feel I needed to" another volunteer added, "there's a lot of flexibility and they understand if I have to swap my day or take time off".

There are a number of opportunities for volunteers to give feedback, but the most commonly used method is through informal conversations, "I'm often asked for my opinion on different aspects of our work, any suggestions are always well received" confirmed one volunteer. The formal consultation for the Abbey Project involved volunteers, "I was really surprised, but pleased, to be asked to attend the meeting and give my opinion" explained one volunteer.

Volunteers receive a monthly newsletter which includes a list of upcoming events and staff changes, "the way they pass on information is very effective, much better than other places I've volunteered" (volunteer).

INDICATOR 9

The whole organisation is aware of the need to give volunteers recognition.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

Volunteers are thanked for their work, both formally and informally, and all volunteers interviewed said they felt valued and appreciated for their contribution. "I am always thanked for my work, praised for successes and supported through new processes and any issues" and "they say thank you, but it's more than that, you're valued and given work you can take pride in" (volunteers). Volunteers are also invited to private views and

exhibitions which were clearly enjoyed and appreciated.

Volunteers reported being asked for their views on a number of matters including the Volunteer Welcome Pack and Policy and being involved in the Investing in Volunteers process. Volunteers are also invited to any organisation-wide consultations. The consultants engaged on the Abbey Project proposals, on meeting volunteers, reported to the Council that ‘the Museum’s volunteering programme impressed our consultant who described it as streets ahead of any organisation that they have dealt with in terms of the roles of volunteers and their personal development’.

Many volunteers felt they had developed new skills through their volunteering. “I was not only able to be trained in the catalogue, which was my initial role, but was involved in other curatorial tasks such as packing, conservation cleaning, object numbering, research and text for exhibitions” and “ I’m more confident and much better at dealing with the public” (volunteers).

Details of any training opportunities, both internal and external, are included in the volunteers’ newsletter.

Volunteers who have made a regular commitment are offered references and the opportunity to complete an exit questionnaire upon leaving.

IF APPLICABLE:

SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT (IF ANY)

It is suggested that irrespective of the Abbey Project bid outcome the museum explores ways to attract a more diverse range of volunteers, perhaps consulting with local BMER community groups, to fully understand the perceived barriers that might be in place, to ensure the museum reflects the make-up of the local community.(3.1)

It is suggested that the Museum continue to try and influence council policy so that out of pocket expenses can be offered to all volunteers, as a part of their commitment to equal opportunities, and an appreciation that volunteers in a range of situations could find travel costs a barrier to involvement. (5.3)

SUMMARY OF HOW CONDITIONS WERE MET

OR

SUMMARY OF WHY ORGANISATION HAS NOT MET THE STANDARD

