

Getting the Most from Your Volunteer Program, or How to Train Your Dragons

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Initial onboarding and training:

- Ask incoming volunteers to fill out interest form/experience form after orientation
- Expose volunteers that are unsure where they want to be to all the different areas to find their best fit
- Follow up with volunteers on their interests after three months
- Ask more of volunteers after they prove they're reliable
- Move volunteers to different departments if they seem uninterested in their current role

Customer service and working with guests:

- Model the behaviors you'd like your volunteers to use when interacting with guests
- Arm your volunteers with clear examples of language you want to see used in customer service interactions
- Have in place an 'order of escalation' for when visitors insist on going above the person they initially talk to
- Get creative with solutions to potentially sticky situations and behaviors

Ongoing professional development:

- Create consistent messaging across trainings
- Lead the trainings in a way that directly models how you want volunteers to engage with museum guests
- Allow for personal connections and discussion to cultivate positive team relationships and provide opportunities for personal learning and growth
- Make the topic relevant to volunteers' everyday work so new ideas or skills can easily be put into practice
- Make it fun and hands-on

Training all staff to better interact with and manage volunteers:

- Consider creating a staff training for those who supervise and work with volunteers and interns
- Ensure that new supervisors are aware of their duties and responsibilities towards volunteers and interns
- Ensure expectations are clear: what are volunteers expected to do vs. department supervisors vs. the volunteer program staff
- Consider creating a volunteer supervisor handbook, and/or share your volunteer handbook with supervisors, so they have expectations, policies, and procedures in writing

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