

Institute for  
Volunteering  
Research

# Exhibiting support ...

## developing volunteering in museums

A summary report by the Institute for Volunteering Research



An initiative of



In association with



The Baring Foundation

## Acknowledgements

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## About the participating organisations

### The Institute for Volunteering Research

The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) is a specialist research and consultancy agency focusing on volunteering. IVR is an initiative of Volunteering England and the University of East London. It was set up in 1997 in response to the increased demand for research on volunteering. Over the past nine years IVR has carried out a wide variety of research, consultancy and evaluation projects on many different

aspects of volunteering. It has conducted three national surveys of volunteering, and worked with a wide range of partners. For more information visit [www.ivr.org.uk](http://www.ivr.org.uk)

### The Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation was set up in 1969. It aims to improve the quality of life of people suffering disadvantage and discrimination. It does this through making grants to strengthen voluntary sector organisations. The Baring Foundation:

- believes in the fundamental value to society of an independent and effective voluntary sector
- uses its funds to strengthen voluntary sector organisations, responding flexibly, creatively and pragmatically to their needs
- puts high value on learning from organisations and their beneficiaries
- seeks to build positive, purposeful relationships with grant recipients, as well as with other grant-makers
- aims to treat grant-seekers and recipients with courtesy and respect.

In 37 years the Baring Foundation has given over £90 million in grants. For more information visit [www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)

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# Foreword

Volunteering is a notable feature of the social fabric of our country. Through it a wide spread of organisations, national, regional and local, benefit from a variety of human talents and experience and are enabled to do far more than would be possible with paid professional staff alone. Those active in the heritage field, ranging from The National Trust with more than 40,000 volunteers to parish bodies relying on the devotion of one or two individuals, provides a rich variety of opportunities for voluntary effort. It comes as no surprise that in this context the needs of the country's 2,500 museums stand out as a source of such opportunities, nor that skill in taking advantage of those opportunities can contribute a great deal to the success or otherwise of museums, particularly within their local communities.

The Trustees of the Baring Foundation felt in 2004 that the topic of volunteering in museums was one that merited attention and looked for a way in which a modest amount of money could most usefully be deployed in this field. Following discussions with Phyllida Shaw, the Foundation's Arts Adviser, it was decided to take as the starting point the findings, published in 2002, of the survey on the subject conducted by the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) on behalf of the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council. Rather than fund further research across the board, the Trustees agreed to a limited programme of grants to three museums for the purpose of enhancing the involvement of volunteers in their activities and to fund the IVR to monitor the use of those grants and review the results. A Steering Group was set up under the Chairmanship of Ranjit Sondhi, a Trustee of the Foundation, to set guidelines for the programme and to review progress.

The museums selected came from a short list drawn from three different categories: (a) those seen as public sector, typically local authority controlled; (b) independent, governed by private trustee bodies; and (c) museums which form part of universities. The intention in selecting three museums of different types was to see to what extent the issues faced in involvement of volunteers coincided and to attempt to draw conclusions from the way in which each museum made use of the £15,000 grant awarded to them. The short report prepared by the IVR brings together the lessons learned from the experience of each museum. Though the outcomes differed, the common thread is that all three were enabled to add an element to their involvement with volunteers, which they had identified as desirable, but would otherwise have been unable to put into practice. IVR has not only produced a highly readable report which indicates many other sources of support but also did a first rate job in supporting all the museums which received a grant.

This report is being published as a contribution to thinking about the relationship between museums and volunteers. If there is one general conclusion worth emphasising it is that investment in the way in which museums manage their volunteer programmes and communicate with individual volunteers deserves investment in thought, time and money. In many cases the employment of a co-ordinator as a member of the museum's professional staff, where this is not already the case, can generate a real dividend in terms of enhanced volunteer effectiveness and morale. The Foundation has been encouraged by the fact that, in two out of the three cases covered, additional funding has been found to continue the work which the original grant made possible.

**Nicholas Baring, CBE**  
Steering group member

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# Developing volunteering in museums ... identifying and exploring the issues

## Snapshot of core issues ... why do museums need to build their capacity?

Volunteers are a vital resource for most museums. Many museums could not operate without volunteers; others would provide far fewer services. But the extent to which volunteers are supported within museums is variable.

What enables museums to develop their relationship with volunteers? What models of volunteer management are best suited to museums? Can relatively small amounts of funding lead to changes in volunteer involvement?

A review by IVR of the work by three museums to develop their relationships with volunteers through a grant from the Baring Foundation reached four main conclusions.

- Many volunteers are recruited by word of mouth and museums struggle to engage a diverse range of volunteers. If they are to involve new groups they must **reach out and build new relationships**, try a range of new forms of recruitment and develop new opportunities for engagement.
- In order to benefit from the true impact of volunteer involvement, it is important to **invest in volunteer support and management**. Well-supported and involved volunteers tend to be happier and stay longer. But when developing volunteer-involvement programmes, museums must build on existing cultures and practices and recognise that 'one size does not fit all'.
- Working towards **sustainable funding for volunteer management** is a fundamental issue for museums that want to develop volunteering. Short-term, limited capital investment funding programmes can enhance volunteer involvement, but the challenge is for organisations to scale up and ensure the sustainability of this investment and for funders to adopt a flexible and supportive approach.



- There is a growing body of experience of volunteer involvement across museums. In order to benefit from this experience it is important for museums to participate in cross-organisational learning. Research and evaluation can also play an important role in **building the capacity of museums** to involve volunteers.

## Volunteering in museums ... why are volunteers such a vital resource?

A recent survey conducted on behalf of the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council found that 95% of museums involved volunteers. Nearly a third of the responding museums were entirely run by volunteers (IVR 2005a). Evidence of the exact number of volunteers involved in museums is harder to come by, with estimates suggesting that anywhere between 11,000 and 100,000 people volunteer in the sector (IVR 2005b). Involving volunteers allows museums to extend the services they offer, helps them to do things they would not normally do and promotes user involvement.

Government has emphasised the involvement of volunteers, particularly those at risk of social exclusion, in the delivery of public services (see, for example, Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2000). In line with this, volunteering is being promoted as a way of both carrying out the work of the museums and of enhancing user involvement.

Despite this growing reliance on volunteers, and the added value that museums gain from their involvement, evidence suggests that the support provided for volunteers is variable. One survey, for example, found that only a small percentage of museums had a dedicated volunteer manager or co-ordinator and less than half had a volunteer policy (IVR 2002). In addition, volunteers within museums tend to be quite a homogeneous group, with an over-representation of older age groups and an under-representation of people from Black and minority ethnic groups (see, for example, Scott et al 1993 and IVR 2005a).

It is within this context that the Baring Foundation gave grants to enable three museums to enhance their involvement of volunteers. In 2003, these museums received funding of £15,000 each, to be spent over a period of 18 months on developing their relationship with volunteers. The three museums were:

- The Egypt Centre, University of Wales Swansea



- Fairfax House, York Civic Trust
- The Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston City Council.

This report summarises the key learning points to emerge from the programme.

**The Egypt Centre** is part of the University of Wales Swansea. Opened in 1998, the museum contains a collection of Egyptian artefacts. The museum has eight paid members of staff and over 60 volunteers. Volunteers get involved in a wide range of activities, from assisting in the galleries through to leading education sessions.

Opened in 1984, **Fairfax House** is one of five houses restored by York Civic Trust, which was itself set up in 1946 with the aim of preserving the city's architectural heritage and encouraging cultural, artistic and educational activities. Fairfax House contains a collection of English furniture and clocks. The museum has a team of 11 paid staff and approximately 180 volunteers.

Located in Preston, the **Harris Museum and Art Gallery** houses an extensive collection of fine art, decorative art, costume, photography and history artefacts relating to the city. It has a temporary exhibitions programme with strong emphasis on contemporary art. The museum has been managed by the local authority, now Preston City Council, since it opened in 1893. It employs approximately 40 members of staff on a full-time and part-time basis, and involves around 50 volunteers.

## Key learning areas ... points emerging from the programme

### Recruiting and involving volunteers ... why is it important for museums to reach out and engage people?

Research shows that many museums do not have enough volunteers. They often lack the time, and do not have a specific volunteer manager post that would enable them to undertake the necessary recruitment drives (IVR 2005a). There is a tendency within museums to rely on word of mouth recruitment, with many museums waiting for volunteers to approach them directly rather than reaching out proactively to engage new people (IVR 2002 and 2005b). Not only does this approach leave museums short of volunteers, it also leads to a lack of diversity.

#### Diversity

Volunteers in museums tend to be drawn from older age groups and are often retired. A recent survey found that 45% of museum volunteers were aged 65 and over (IVR 2005a). It also found that volunteers are predominately white. The gender balance is better, but this does vary among museums according to their activities (Holmes 1999).

For the three museums involved in the programme, this was a familiar story. To different degrees, all had struggled to recruit a diverse range of volunteers. Although it was not always its central focus, attracting new volunteers was an aim for each museum in the Baring Foundation project.

What became apparent through the programme is that the focus for diversity initiatives does – and should – vary from museum to museum. Each institution must establish what its current volunteer profile is, what the make-up of its local community or membership base is, and whether or not it thinks it is important to reflect that community. Although it is true that different approaches will work for recruiting different groups of volunteers in different areas, there are a number of general lessons in working towards diversity that can be gleaned from the three museums.



To begin with, there is a need to be proactive in reaching out to new groups. The greatest success came when links were made with community-based organisations representing the groups that the museum wanted to target. Face-to-face meetings and other personal approaches were more effective in establishing these links than formal methods such as sending letters. Developing these links, however, takes time, dedication and expertise – and these commodities and skills are not always available.



## Opportunities

The range of tasks undertaken by volunteers varies across museums and this can influence who chooses to get involved with that museum. In general, museum volunteers get involved in a mixture of managerial, front of house and behind the scenes roles (Chambers 1997). But, as Silver (1978) argued, the role of volunteers in museums has changed, with professionalisation in the sector excluding volunteers from certain roles. While care is needed to ensure that all new volunteer roles are 'value added' and are not substituting for paid roles (see Millar 1991 and Graff 1984), increasing the range of activities available for volunteers may increase the diversity of volunteers who get involved.

## Managing volunteers ... what steps will help museums to work towards best practice?

How best to manage volunteers has been subject to lengthy debate, and museums have not escaped this. On the one hand, volunteers have been challenging existing forms of volunteer support. Seventy-one per cent of volunteers in the 1997 National Survey of

### Engaging different age ranges

The Egypt Centre has been successful in attracting volunteers from a wide age range. The volunteers are divided into three, age-based groups: 9 to 16-year-olds who volunteer on Saturdays and in the school holidays; 16 to 24-year-olds (mainly university students); and those aged over 24 years. Volunteers are involved in a wide spectrum of activities across the museum and this has helped to engage different age ranges of volunteers.

However, there is a slight over-representation of female volunteers, most of its volunteers are white and they involve only a small number of disabled people. The museum was keen to use the project to address these issues. In the early stages they wrote to a number of local Black and minority ethnic organisations inviting them to join a project steering group. No response was received and contact was not achieved throughout the project. This may be due to a number of factors, including the location of the museum within the university campus and the associated images of formal educational institutions as well as a lack of capacity to make personal contact with these groups. Meanwhile, building on existing links with a local disability organisation did prove effective and a successful partnership developed which resulted in a number of new disabled volunteers in the museum.

Volunteering thought that the volunteering they were involved in could be better organised (Davis Smith 1998). Evidence from other surveys suggests

that there is still considerable room for improvement when volunteers are involved in museums. For example, 45% of responding museums in one survey did not have a volunteer policy and 52% did not pay volunteer expenses – both well recognised as ‘good practice’ when involving volunteers (IVR 2005a).

### Involving a more diverse range of volunteers

Fairfax House has traditionally involved a large body of loyal volunteers, but one that was relatively homogeneous. At the start of the project, many of the volunteers were aged 65 years and over and most were retired. Nearly all were white. The diversity of roles performed by volunteers was also limited, with most involved in room stewarding.

As part of the programme, the new volunteer co-ordinator took a number of steps to involve a more diverse range of volunteers: in particular, this involved targeting students and people who had retired early. A poster was designed and distributed in venues such as libraries and canteens across York. A second poster was designed specifically to target student volunteers and was distributed through universities. A number of talks were given to different societies across York as part of a new outreach programme for the museum, which gave opportunities to introduce the volunteer programme. The volunteer co-ordinator also worked to encourage existing volunteers to recruit their friends, colleagues and contacts through word of mouth. Potential recruits suggested by volunteers were contacted by letter with a follow-up phone call.

Fourteen new volunteers had been recruited by the end of the programme. Several of these were student volunteers which helped to bring down the average age of the volunteers. While this growth is limited, it is a positive step in the right direction.

### Support

Research shows that one of the motivations for museums to involve volunteers is to save money (IVR 2005b). However, there is a need to recognise that while volunteers’ time is freely given, they are not cost-free. If museums are to get the best out of their volunteers, they must provide them with good quality support.

At the same time, there has been a general move towards increasing professionalisation and formalisation within organisations which involve volunteers. This has been mirrored

within museums (Holmes 2003). While the professionalisation of the sector and associated formalisation of volunteer management has been welcomed by some, others have resisted it arguing that too much bureaucracy might put volunteers off.

What research has shown is that volunteers want a ‘choice blend’ in their volunteer management – they want organisations to get the balance right between professional and comprehensive support but for this to be delivered in a flexible and friendly way. They want to feel welcome, secure, respected and informed in a way that combines choice and control, flexibility and organisation, informality and efficiency, and personal and professional support (Gaskin 2003). All this requires investment and

planning. As Hawthorne (2002) argues: “You can’t just run a successful volunteer program by the seat of your pants any more”.



## Investment

At the heart of the Baring Foundation programme was a desire to strengthen volunteer involvement, but the way in which this was to be developed varied. In all three cases, the grant enabled considerable additional investment in volunteer management. For the Harris Museum and Fairfax House, this investment enabled them to employ a volunteer co-ordinator for the first time. In the Egypt Centre, the investment enabled the centre to buy equipment and to provide training to enhance volunteer involvement and ownership.

What is apparent from the programme is that each museum must develop a volunteer management programme that reflects its own values and culture. When establishing new volunteer management practices they must build from where they are. This meant, for example:

- for the Egypt Centre, which had well-established volunteer management structures, what was needed was to extend those structures to give volunteers an increased sense of involvement and ownership
- for Fairfax House, while the programme enabled a volunteer co-ordinator to be employed for the first time, it was recognised that their role was not to introduce formal, structured volunteer management practices but to offer support for volunteering in a way that maintained the existing sense

### Attracting young new volunteers and volunteers from Black and minority ethnic communities

The Harris Museum’s volunteer group lacked diversity at the start of the programme. There were few men involved, and most were aged 55 and over; and there were few people from Black and minority ethnic groups. The museum had been relying on word of mouth recruitment, which tended to reinforce rather than address this lack of diversity.

The volunteer co-ordinator initially focused more on developing systems to enhance the support for existing volunteers rather than attracting new ones, as it was felt that there was no shortage of people applying to volunteer at the museum. Flyers were, however, distributed to the university in a successful attempt to attract student volunteers and new opportunities for younger volunteers were created. This recruitment drive led to a number of overseas students joining the volunteer scheme. At the end of the programme, significant numbers of young people had started to volunteer at the museum including art students with a special interest in contemporary art who act as information assistants in exhibitions which some visitors might find difficult.

In addition a Community Consultation Group was established which is predominantly made up of Black and minority ethnic individuals, some of whom also take part in other voluntary activities in the museum. This has helped the museum re-evaluate its approach to diversity and has helped the museum work with Black and minority ethnic groups on particular exhibitions and projects out of which further volunteers might emerge.

## Increasing involvement and ownership among volunteers

The Egypt Centre had a well-established and structured volunteer programme before the project started, with effective policies, procedures, training programmes, master classes for volunteers and a volunteer liaison officer in place. All of this is delivered in a friendly, flexible and relatively informal way. There was a high degree of satisfaction among volunteers about their involvement and the support they received. Rather than radically changing the direction of the volunteering programme, the project was designed to enhance existing activities and to increase feelings of involvement and ownership among volunteers.

Several purchases were made to enable the volunteers to take a more active role in interpreting and presenting objects from the museum. For example, a plasma screen was bought and volunteers were trained to produce PowerPoint presentations to enable them to identify their own objects and present them to visitors. A display case was bought specifically to house volunteers' displays. Volunteers were encouraged to produce alternative labels (their interpretation of an object) within the main display cabinets, for which they received training. A newsletter was published, produced by and for volunteers. And a library system was established with volunteers receiving privileged access.

Through the various strands of the project, the volunteers developed a stronger sense of involvement in and ownership of the museum. They talked about 'my object', 'our collection' and 'our museum'. Those who had created presentations, put objects on display or produced interpretation labels became more enthusiastic, knowledgeable, confident and committed. They also became more assertive in making suggestions for how the museum could be developed and run, leading to positive developments within the museum alongside some interesting issues for the museum staff on boundaries and how to deal with the demands of volunteers.

of informality valued by volunteers and staff

- for the Harris Museum, introducing a volunteer co-ordinator enabled more structured and comprehensive volunteer management systems to be developed for the first time.

## Ethos

The old adage that 'one size does not fit all' is perhaps more relevant than ever. Any attempts to develop volunteering programmes should correspond with the starting point of each individual museum and its organisational culture. The culture of an organisation and the personalities within it are significant factors in the success of any volunteering programme. The history of volunteer involvement in an organisation is also important. Investing in a volunteer co-ordinator can move an organisation on a long way in terms of its relationship with volunteers, but only if there is a will within the organisation to do so and an organisational culture which allows the role to develop appropriately. Equally, for museums with well-developed volunteering programmes,

there are steps that can be taken to

enhance the sense of ownership effectively among volunteers. This can bring real benefits to both volunteers and the organisation but, again, this must be part of the overall organisational culture – it would be unlikely to succeed as a bolt-on initiative where the volunteering ethos is not a core component within the organisation.

This need to develop individualised volunteer management practices implies the need for flexible funding programmes, which encourage

organisations to build from where they are in a way that matches their organisational aims and ethos.

## Funding volunteers ... what are the lessons for creative thinking and sustainability?

The lack of funding for volunteer programmes has been identified as a significant barrier to the development of volunteer involvement in museums. In particular, museums struggle to find sustainable funding and funding for volunteer co-ordinator positions (IVR 2005b).

The Baring Foundation provided the museums with relatively small grants: £15,000 over 18 months is unlikely to radically change the way in which an organisation works. For each of the museums, however, it was a significant source of funding and a considerable additional investment in their volunteering programmes. In each case it enabled an important step change in the relationship between the museums and their volunteers.

## Innovation

The funding enabled all three museums to try something new in their volunteer involvement. None of the museums would have been in a position to undertake these 'experiments' without the funding from the Baring Foundation. The Harris Museum and Fairfax House would not otherwise have been able to recruit volunteer co-ordinators; the Egypt Centre would not have been able to purchase the tools to enhance the engagement of

## Maintaining the existing equilibrium while also building and modernising the programme

Within Fairfax House, before the programme, management and support structures for volunteers were limited. There was a high level of satisfaction among existing volunteers. But a more general feeling that the volunteering programme needed reinvigorating overlay this. The project had to mediate between these two views. It had to maintain the existing equilibrium while also building and modernising the programme.

The museum wanted to use the funding to expand its volunteering and to enhance the skills of volunteers to give quality information to museum visitors. It sought to do this by appointing a volunteer co-ordinator for the first time. It was clear throughout, however, that the focus was not on introducing formal volunteering management structures; rather, it was about building on what they already had which was a relatively informal approach to volunteer management. Indeed there was some resistance to change.

The volunteer co-ordinator post provided a central point of contact for volunteering in the organisation and so enhanced communication between staff and volunteers. It did not lead to a dramatic change in volunteer involvement, but it did result in a small step change. By adopting what might be seen as a cautious approach, the museum was able to take its existing volunteers and staff along with it as the programme developed. Although the policies and practices at the museum might not meet what are generally regarded as quality standards in volunteer management, they do appear to meet the needs of those volunteers involved.

## Strengthening the support provided to volunteers

At the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, volunteers were managed on a fairly ad hoc basis before the project. Responsibility for involving volunteers was spread across several posts; there was no overall volunteer co-ordinator. Levels of satisfaction with the support provided for volunteers were mixed. A significant number of volunteers indicated their dissatisfaction with the support they received.

Employing a volunteer co-ordinator led to a number of steps which were taken to strengthen the support provided to volunteers. For example, the co-ordinator updated the existing volunteer handbook, bringing together volunteer policies and procedures to inform volunteers about their roles and responsibilities. The co-ordinator also identified volunteers' training needs, and arranged training workshops. Previously defunct monthly volunteer meetings were re-established and a new volunteer newsletter was launched.

The creation of the volunteer co-ordinator position has provided a central focus for volunteering within the museum. There was a consensus among the staff that volunteers were now better supported in the museum. Volunteers generally felt that the volunteer programme was more structured and focused; they had more information about volunteering, more opportunities to attend events at the museum and more opportunities for training. However, there is still more to be done, with a demand for relevant staff to be trained in volunteer management.

Developing the volunteer programme was not always easy. For example, the co-ordinator had to mediate between a desire for the volunteer programme to be flexible and inclusive while also accommodating Council recruitment processes and the need for volunteers to have Criminal Record Bureau checks.

In 2005, the museum nominated two of its volunteers for the Year of the Volunteer Award in recognition of their outstanding commitment and hard work. Both were successful, which was a great boost to morale for the whole team.

volunteers in the museum. Although the nature and extent of impact made by the programme on each of the three museums varied, in all three cases it created some degree of change in the relationship between the museum and its volunteers.

The flexibility of approach adopted by the Baring Foundation in the delivery of this funding programme was valued by the museums, and enabled them to test out different models of working. This flexibility and the relatively broad criteria for inclusion in the programme encouraged innovation, rather than restricting the museums to certain types of projects. This enabled the museums to think creatively about how they engaged their volunteers and how they could develop relationships with them. This process was particularly important to enable each museum to build from 'where they were' and to adapt to changing environments within the museum that affected, for example, the timescale for project delivery.

The personal approach that the Baring Foundation adopted with the museums in the programme was also important. The Foundation had approached a number of museums before the programme and the opportunity that this provided for the museums to shape the programme was welcomed. The continuation of this approach throughout the funding period was also welcomed.

## Sustainability

Two additional issues emerge as important in funding volunteer programmes: firstly, the possibility of using small grants to lever in additional funding and/or in-kind support; and, secondly, sustainability. Leveraging additional funds was possible for both the Egypt Centre and the Harris Museum, which was a significant added bonus to the programme. These two museums also took significant steps towards ensuring sustainability.

Two areas of learning can be considered here: firstly, that it is essential within short-term funded programmes that organisations are encouraged to consider sustainability right from the start; and, secondly, that there could have been value in extending the programme beyond 18 months but with reduced levels of funding in the subsequent year(s). This may have allowed more time for the impact of the funding to be realised and commitment to sustainability to be engendered within all three organisations.

Working towards sustainable funding is a fundamental issue in the future development of museum volunteer programmes. This review shows that short-term, limited capital investment funding projects can enhance volunteer involvement programmes. The challenge for organisations is to scale up this investment through, for example, leveraging additional funds. The learning for the funders is that in order to be successful, such programmes require a flexible and supportive approach. A challenge for both is the replicability of these small-scale 'experiments' in volunteer involvement.

The Egypt Centre was able to capitalise on its relationship with other departments in the university to secure cost-effective deals in purchasing its equipment for the project. It was also successful at leveraging in substantial amounts of in-kind support. This, and a determination to ensure that the project was not a 'bolt-on' but an integral part of its on-going volunteer programme, has helped to ensure the sustainability of volunteer support at the Egypt Centre.

In the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, the Baring Foundation money was used to leverage in additional match funding from the Single Regeneration Budget to help support the work of the volunteer co-ordinator post as part of a wider access and inclusion programme. The Harris Museum is now one of the partner venues in the North West Hub of museums established as part of the Renaissance in the Regions programme. The post of volunteer co-ordinator has been built into the business plan for the Hub, securing the post until at least March 2008. Additional sources of funding are currently being explored to ensure the post is sustainable in the long term.



## Learning about volunteers ... how can research and evaluation help to build capacity?

There is a growing body of experience of volunteer involvement across museums. In order to benefit from this experience it is important for museums to participate in cross-organisational learning. Research and evaluation can also play an important role in building the capacity of museums to involve volunteers.

### Communication

Early on in the programme the museums expressed an interest in sharing experience, knowledge and learning across the three participating institutions. This, it was felt, would bring a number of benefits to the individual museums and would help to cement them together as programme beneficiaries. Although steps were taken to enable cross-partner communication, when it actually came to it there was some ambivalence. The Baring Foundation did facilitate a meeting of all three museums, themselves and the research team at the end of the programme and this was reported on positively, but a more proactive approach was needed at the beginning of the programme to initiate a network through which experiences could have been shared as the project progressed. Shortly before the start of the project, the Harris Museum and Art Gallery had become a member of the North West regional museums Hub. This helped to increase the sharing of good practice on volunteer involvement across the region particularly with partner Hub museums which have their own volunteer programmes.

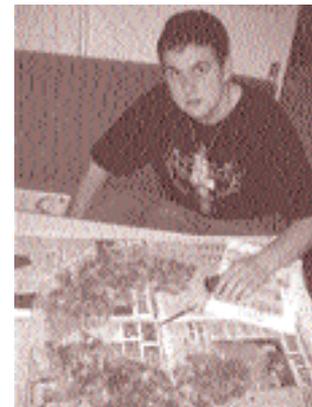
The research process that ran throughout the programme provided an additional opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences. The approach adopted for the evaluation, which saw the research process more as a support mechanism than a straight evaluation, helped facilitate this. On the whole, the museums valued engaging with the research process, seeing its potential to help their learning alongside that of their colleagues in other organisations.

# About the research

The Baring Foundation commissioned the Institute for Volunteering Research to conduct an evaluative research review of the funding programme. The aims of the research, on which this report is based, were to:

- establish how each of the museums used its grant to develop its relationship with volunteers over a period of 18 months
- establish how effective each of the museums was in meeting the aims of their respective projects.

The research was not set up as a traditional evaluation exercise. Rather, it was designed more along the lines of an action research approach, where the researchers observed and monitored the progress of the projects throughout their lifetimes and provided regular feedback to the Baring Foundation and to the participating museums. The research involved a literature review; baseline research with staff and volunteers in each of the museums; interim interviews with staff; and end of project research with volunteers and staff.



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## Resources

Bowgett, K, Dickie, K and Restall, M (2002) *The Good Practice Guide for Everyone who Works with Volunteers*. Second edition. London: National Centre for Volunteering.

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Gaskin, K (2006) *On the Safe Side. Risk, Risk Management and Volunteering*. London: Volunteering England.

Institute for Volunteering Research (2004) *Volunteering for All? Exploring the Link Between Volunteering and Social Exclusion*. London: The Institute for Volunteering Research. Available free at <http://www.ivr.org.uk/socialexclusion/fullreport.pdf>

Institute for Volunteering Research (2004) *Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit*. London: The Institute for Volunteering Research.

Restall, M (2005) *Volunteers and the Law*. London: Volunteering England.

Volunteer Centres provide support at a local level for individual volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. They act as brokers between organisations and volunteers; they market volunteering; and they help with good practice development, developing new opportunities, policy and campaigning and the strategic development of volunteering. Find your local Volunteer Centre at: <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/volunteerdevelopment/agencies/findoutaboutvolunteeringinyourarea.htm>

[www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org) is a website listing some 70,000 volunteering opportunities for potential volunteers to browse.

The Volunteering England website at [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk) contains up-to-date information on volunteering. The Good Practice Bank, in particular, has a wealth of guidance about finding volunteers. Find it at [www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/goodpracticebank/](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/goodpracticebank/)

[www.ivr.org.uk](http://www.ivr.org.uk) is the website of the Institute for Volunteering Research and has many useful research studies into aspects of volunteer recruitment and support.

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