

# Volunteers: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Change



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Kentucky Historical Society
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National Archives and Records Administration
- **Sharon Dean**  
Ohio Historical Society

# Help us get to know you!

Are you currently supervising volunteers?

- Yes
- No

Are you thinking about making a change in your volunteer program?

- Yes
- No

What volunteer positions do you offer in your organization

- Tours
- Clerical
- Special Events
- Collections
- Fundraising
- Communications
- Other (please specify in the chat)

# KentuckyHistoricalSociety

**The Kentucky Historical Society made a decision to change the institutional culture by expanding the role of volunteers and developing a mutually beneficial program.**

## WHY?

- q 48% reduction in budget
- q Recognized a need for the same productivity with reduced staff
- q No culture of using volunteers in collections
- q Linked to strategic plan. 1.1(b) *KHS will increase public access to its collections on-site, on-line, and through outgoing loans (while continuing to enhance the security of collections and those employees and volunteers who care for them).*

# KentuckyHistoricalSociety

## Steps to a Mutually Beneficial Volunteer Program

- § Start with small projects
- § Volunteer position descriptions tied to strategic plan.
- § Include supervision of volunteers in job description



- § Screening of applicants
- § Matching volunteer skills to volunteer opportunities
- § Providing a learning experience
- § Find out what motivates volunteers
- § Certification of Volunteer Policy



Volunteers are assigned to volunteers projects based on interests and skills. They assist staff with projects that are related to the strategic plan.

- Cataloging a 629 piece print collection. (Schmidt Collection)
- Rehousing and photographing the Churchill Weavers collection
- Records reorganization project
- Assisted registrar with completing condition reports for in coming and out going loans
- Installations, cleaning galleries, painting, and case fabrication.

# What makes volunteering beneficial to the volunteer?

## PROFESSIONS

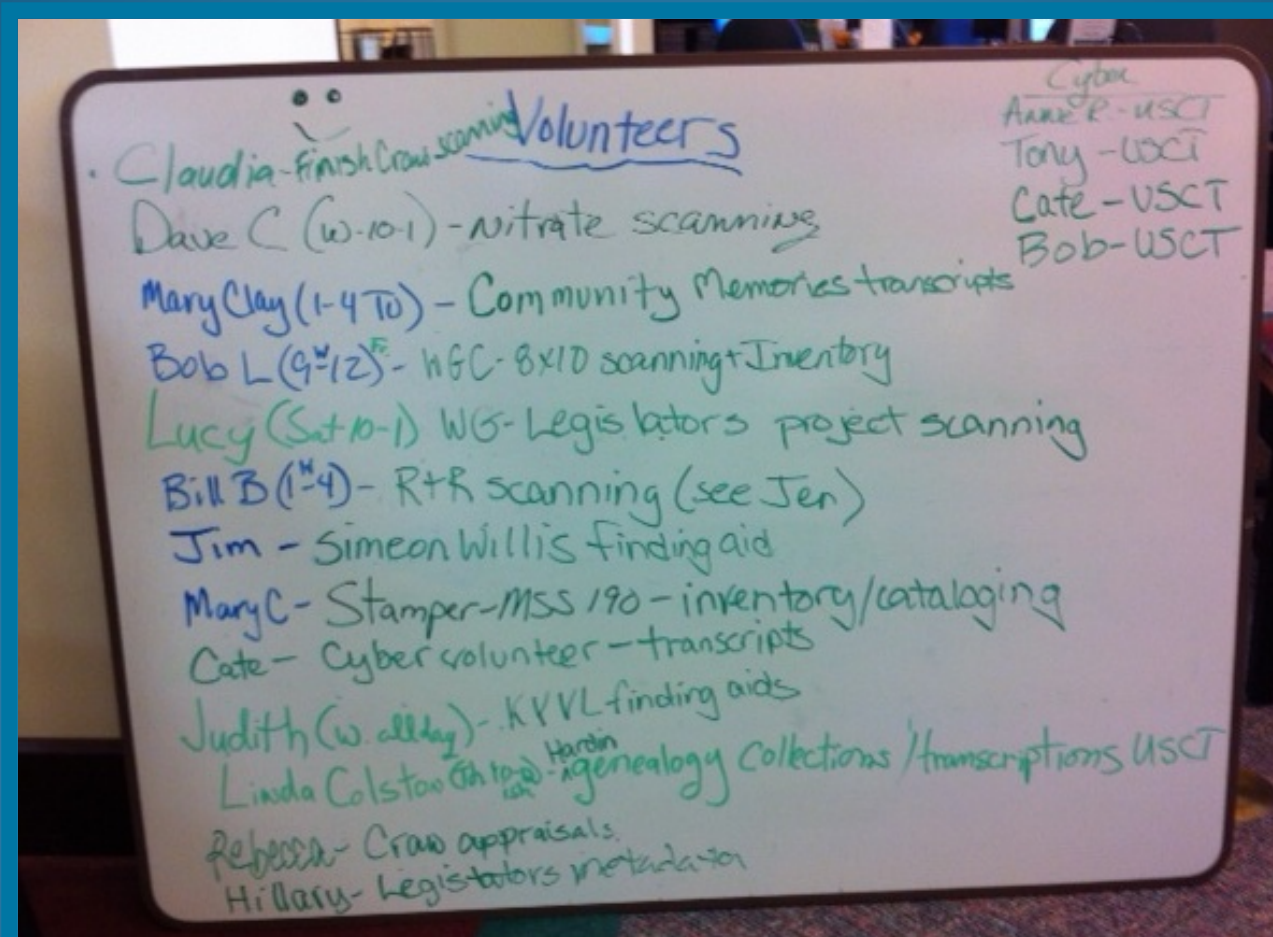
- Photographer
- Student
- Administrative Assistant
- Journalist
- Teacher/Professor
- Accountant
- Minister

## INTERESTS

- History
- Genealogy
- Kentucky
- Networking
- Education
- Art
- Community Involvement



# Recording work accomplished



CELEBRATE  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

EVALUATE YOUR  
PROGRESS

CONTINUE TO  
MAKE CHANGES  
WHEN  
NECESSARY



“If you want to go fast go alone; if you want to go far go together”

# Volunteering at the

**OHIO**  
H I S T O R Y



**OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

# Traditional Uses of Volunteers

- Easy tasks (filing, removing staples, taking reservations)
- Non-mission critical projects
- Things we don't want to do



# In tough economic times, my museum is more likely to

- Expand its volunteer program
- Reduce its volunteer program
- I'm not sure

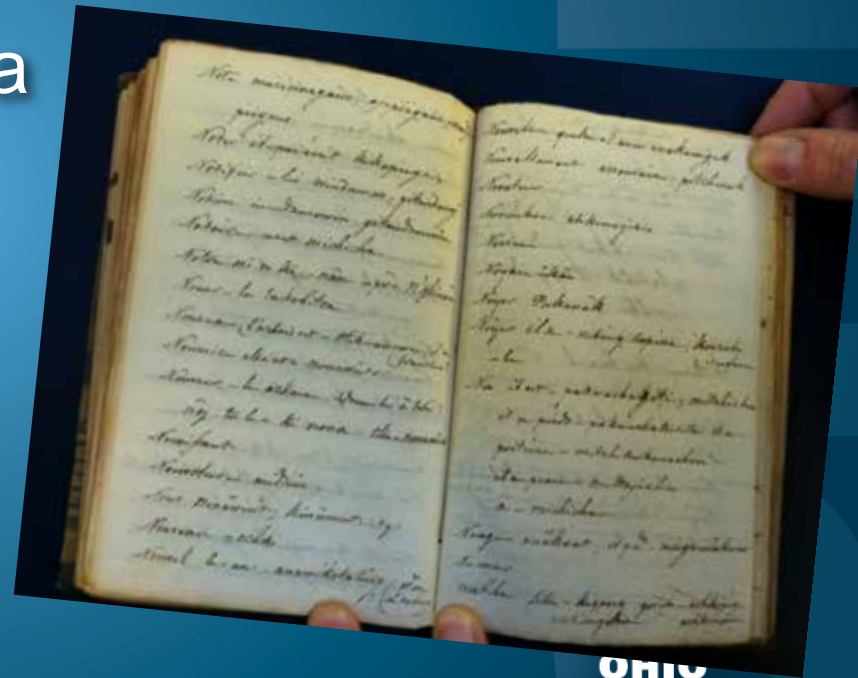
# Challenges facing museums today

- Budget cuts which result in a lack of staff for collections management, education, other duties
- Lack of connections to the community
- Lack of expertise in some areas (especially technical)
- Many of these are areas in which volunteers can help



# Engaging volunteers

- Volunteer opportunities can be a way to engage groups of people who are already stakeholders
- Potential volunteers with a special interest can help get projects done and give the organization a better understanding of material in the collection
- Especially important for small organizations



# Shift Our Thinking

- Create an organizational strategy that incorporates volunteers into vision of the organization
- Attract experts
- People can engage without formalizing the structure
- Goal is to engage people in something they are interested in





# Incorporate volunteers into operations

- Requires a change in how we work
- Staff become facilitators & managers instead of doing the work themselves
- Requires some work to change behavior
- Also requires changes to procedures



# Let them be 'doers': Example: Digital collections



- Paid staff used to select, digitize, describe and post online each image
- Now layer in volunteers to do scanning and description
- Workflow change: Have to track all steps of the process
- Behavior change: Staff have to be comfortable not doing it themselves



# Create Affinity groups

- Draw on expertise
  - According to John Durel, retired baby boomers may be able to engage with museums differently around certain topics they care about (Civil War, Native American, etc.)
  - The Goal is to engage people in something they are interested in



# Reach out into the Community

- Veteran's Groups
- Native American Community
- Families



# Organizational change

Volunteers can be a powerful asset if:



- Reach out; don't wait for them to come to you.
- Include them in the structure of your organization
- Consider them part of your team, not just an add-on
- Utilize them for high-level projects when you can



# Increasing Age Diversity in our Volunteer Program



# What is the age range of your volunteers?

- Mostly teenage
- Mostly young professionals
- Mostly people who are retired
- Other (please tell us in the chat)





National Archives volunteers “are educated and experienced. They generally are retirees; however, some are still in the work force. They are, or have been, teachers, students, homemakers, sociologists, writers, genealogists, lawyers, historians, doctors, government employees, or servicemen and women.”  
(volunteer pamphlet, c. 1991)



# Lots of Little Changes

- Advertised positions in places where young people go
- Made recruitment language more friendly
- Picked a new time for training sessions
- Increased the number of orientation courses held each year
- Adapted requirements for minimum time commitments
- Added volunteer shifts during the evening and the weekend
- Planned evening social events
- Accepted more attrition

miss you!

Tue, Aug 20, 2013 at 2:56 PM

Rebecca Martin <rebecca.martin@nara.gov>  
To: [REDACTED]

Hi

How is your summer? I miss seeing you. Want to come in any time?

Becky

Manager of Volunteers, Interns, and Interpretation  
National Archives Building  
700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20408  
(202) 357-5272

Tue, Aug 20, 2013 at 3:21 PM

To: Rebecca Martin <rebecca.martin@nara.gov>

Hi Becky,

Thanks for the email. My summer is flying by. This new job sure makes time disappear. It's funny you write me today, I was planning to stop by yesterday, but had to meet with the new condo board treasurer to pass her all my knowledge last night. I am still a board member, but will not be overseeing the finances anymore. Being out of the country frequently sure has changed my life.

Unfortunately, it will be a little while before I'll be back in to volunteer. This week is busy and next week work is sending me to Iowa. The following week, Labor Day week, I should have some time. I will plan on coming in on Tues, Sept 3.

How about your summer?

Rebecca Martin <Rebecca.Martin@nara.gov>

Tue, Aug 28, 2012 at 5:59 PM

To: [REDACTED]  
Cc: [REDACTED]

Hi Stephanie,

I'm so sorry to hear that your schedule won't allow you to continue in your position as vice president of NAVA. We love your contributions--your great ideas, your sense of fun, your hard work. It will be difficult to fill your shoes. But, I don't want you to feel pulled in different directions or stressed by your commitment to the board.

As for your decent work, I do hope that it continues! Your tours are outstanding, and it would be a great loss to us for you to go off of the schedule--please continue to do what you can, and don't worry.

I'll talk with you soon,  
Becky

>>> [REDACTED] 8/26/2012 9:25 PM >>>

Hi Becky,  
[Quoted text hidden]

To: Rebecca Martin <Rebecca.Martin@nara.gov>

Tue, Aug 28, 2012 at 6:31 PM

You are so sweet, Becky. I love being associated with the Archives. I didn't want to do this but I just didn't feel I had a choice. Thank you for allowing me to stay on giving tours. I love doing them. I will continue to do what I can. I was just starting to feel too guilty about not being able to do my best.

I stopped by to talk to you about this the other day but you were swamped, as usual.

Thanks for your kindness and understanding.



Rebecca Martin <rebecca.martin@nara.gov>

## Volunteering for the Archives' National History Day competition

3 messages

Rebecca Martin <Rebecca.Martin@nara.gov>

Mon, Apr 15, 2013 at 5:10 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Hi Brittany,

We've missed you! I hope that your semester is concluding on a happy note. I know how stressful this time can be.

We'd love to welcome you back with a special event. . . You may know that the National Archives coordinates the Washington, DC portion of the annual National History Day (NHD) competition. This year, the DC competition will be held at Archives I on Friday, May 3, and Saturday, May 4.

Students from schools across Washington, DC, will be competing in several categories: documentary, web site, paper, exhibit, and performance. Juniors will compete on Friday, and seniors on Saturday. We will give out the awards for all ages on Saturday afternoon.

As you might imagine, a two-day event is a major effort and requires lots of help. We have many jobs--from helping register students, to helping students find the right room, to escorting judges to the volunteer office, to distributing the awards. Some volunteer jobs start as early as 8 a.m. On Friday, we'll end at 4 p.m., and on Saturday, we'll end after the awards ceremony (at approximately 5:30 p.m.). We'll have shifts throughout both days.

I thought that this might be a good time for you to resume volunteering at the Archives--and that this kind of education event might interest you. And, of course, we'd love to have you with us! If you are available and interested, please reply and use the space below to let me know what you would prefer to do and when you'd prefer to be here.

[REDACTED] Mon, Apr 15, 2013 at 6:00 PM

To: Rebecca Martin <Rebecca.Martin@nara.gov>

This sounds wonderful, Becky, thank you for telling me about this opportunity! I would be happy to help all day on May 3, and until the afternoon shift on May 4th.  
Brittany  
[Quoted text hidden]

Rebecca Martin <Rebecca.Martin@nara.gov>

Mon, Apr 15, 2013 at 6:02 PM

Fantastic! It will be great to see you again. And to have someone here who will be a superstar helper!

Becky

[REDACTED]  
[Quoted text hidden]

# A Program I'd Like to Join

- No guilt
- Friendly
- Adaptable to my schedule
- Fits my interests

# Volunteer Ages

- **2005**

- 0 volunteers younger than 30

- 1 volunteer between 31 and 40 years old

- 77% in their 70s, 80s, and 90s

- **2013**

- 35% of volunteer corps is younger than 50

- 30% in 70s, 80s, and 90s

# There are downsides

- Sometimes the generation gap shows up
- We have much more attrition, so we have to recruit many more people to maintain our corps
- A higher percentage of people don't follow through

- What is one change you will take back to your program after this workshop?
- What is a barrier to change in your organization?



**Questions?**