



CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

Program Notes

Program Title: Docent Diversity: Recruiting, Training and Maintaining Volunteers
Location: Oakland Museum of California
Date: April 10, 2002

Presenters: Gail Burroughs, Docent Coordinator, Oakland Museum of California
Cal Case, President of Docent Council
Elena Krause, Docent Oakland Museum of California
Lydia Ramirez, Oakland Museum of California
Beverly Hawley, Docent Oakland Museum of California

Program Overview:

Cal Case

Gail Burroughs introduced Cal Case. Cal has been a docent since 1990 at OMC. He began by giving statistics of the Docent program at the museum:

540 docents

360 active touring docents

180 associate docents

60 trainees

Docents are very gallery specific

Elena Krause

Elena has been a docent since 1995. In 1999, the museum made a special effort to increase the diversity in docents. At that time, diversity was linked to multiculturalism.

The following are statistics regarding the diversity of Oakland and visitors to OMC:

22% White

44% African American

14% Latino

15% Asian

5% Native American or other

33% of visitors are from Oakland

In 1999, of 241 docents, 95% were white. Less than 2% were African-American. This could be due to the following:

- Social isolation: typical stereotype of a docent is gray-haired, retired, women; minorities might feel out of place.

- Facility with English language: individuals who have English as their second language might feel uncomfortable speaking in front of an audience.
- Competing volunteer interests.
- Different feelings culturally about volunteering.

What to do to help increase docent diversity:

- Market for specific exhibits: i.e. Day of the Dead, utilize short-term guides; they usually don't stay but they might come back the next year.
- To turn short-term volunteers into long term volunteers: more social contact with other people; increase continuing education as a benefit; emphasize altruism—service to the community.
- Emphasize the short-term programs first—the exhibit guide and host program; have a set start and end date.
- The host program is a sampler in the spring, there are short training sessions, hosts direct the flow of visitors; over half of the hosts return the following year.

To become a docent you must have 1 year of training and a two-year commitment. One hundred docents have been with the museum or 15 years; thirty for 25 years; and twenty for 30 or more years.

Recruitment suggestions:

- Target groups that fit the docent profile: education, groups that have a demonstrated desire to continue to learn, most have attended at least 2 years of college.
- Social groups, religious organizations, organizations with similar interests or focuses as the museum.
- Consider groups that have available time: most are elderly retirees or students; however, most students stay only a year and are usually looking for a job.
- Target groups that have some financial comfort: the cost of training is \$150.00 plus the cost of materials, cost of driving to and from the museum.
- Visit cultural festivals.
- Use ethnic newspapers.
- Word of mouth—friends of docents.
- Announcements to professional organizations.
- Churches, libraries.
- To combat social isolations—use phrases on fliers like “bring a friend”
- Use pictures of culturally diverse people on the fliers. Recruiters should also be diverse.

Even with these considerations and many fliers, response was underwhelming. However from 1987-1999 the number of male docents has increased from 11% to 20%.

Lydia Ramirez

Lydia was at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts for four years and then at the Mexican Museum for three years. She is now at the Oakland Museum of California.

At the Yerba Buena:

- No permanent exhibits.
- Recruitment occurred every 4 months.
- Most docents were young, students, flexible, tolerant, open minded.
- Recruitment had an emphasis on doing outreach to gay and lesbian docents.
- There were sessions on cultural sensitivity and awareness.

At the Mexican Museum:

- Most docents were individuals who had an interest in Latin American Arts, college students to retirees.
- The art was a little more accessible at the Mexican Museum than at the Yerba Buena Center.
- One of the issues was that some docents had individual agendas.

Recruitment:

- Cultural organizations or centers in an attempt to bring in people who spoke different languages.
- Fliers, phone calls, personal visits.
- Being an ethnic recruiter helped.
- Public service announcements, newspapers, PSA's on foreign language TV channels/
- Retired teacher associations, museum studies programs, libraries.
- 1000 pieces went out.
- Repetition counts in diversity recruitment, meaning repeat visits, repeat fliers, etc.

Beverly Hawley

- Bev has been a docent for 33 years, she is a strong advocate for hearing aids and devices for those who are hard of hearing (HOH). She discussed several assistive technologies that would help on a tour or in a program. Most devices had a receiver and a microphone component. Beverly was going to distribute information on where to obtain the devices. An important note is that once the devices are purchased, docents must be trained on the correct usage.

Activities:

We broke into groups to discuss different topics. There was a general group, a training group, two recruitment groups, a group that discussed special challenges (USS Hornet Group), and a group that discussed Assistive Technologies. The following was reported back from each group when we reconvened:

Assistive Technologies:

- Bev will provide group with sources for assistive equipment for Cultural Connection on their web site. Notes from this group will be placed on the web site.

Special Challenges:

- 4 year old docent program
- Talk to Jeremiah O'Brien and other similar sites
- Young people as interns
- Hayward Anthropology Department Model: students build exhibit one semester, lead tours the next

Recruitment:

- Vast and extensive effort
- 5/1000 return rate on mailings
- Assess target community
- Articulate your expectations—are they manageable
- Be flexible with hours
- Work with teacher accreditation and graduate education programs
- There is a trend towards engagement and touring techniques over content focused training.
- Lydia's list will be placed on the web site
- Volunteer match web site volunteermatch.org, also Craig's list and retired teachers associations (CRTA)

Training and Change

- Oakland Museum model
- Reviews: peer review vs. staff
- Small corps—review is sensitive
- Retention—follow up training every month, put trained staff on the floor immediately.
- Three parts of training—survey with guest lectures (paid), gallery, expert/specialized.

General

- Recruiting—convenience is key, provide incentives such as parking, discounts in museum store or outside organizations, i.e. free coffee.
- Have objects and materials nearby (at hand during the tour)
- Discipline—teacher and chaperone sometimes neglect to discipline, cover this in training to maintain student discipline.

Handouts / Recommended Reading:

Recruitment Resources:

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

<http://www.cultural-connections.org/>

<http://www.craigslist.org/>

California Retired Teachers Association <http://www.calrta.org/>

Articles of interest:

Vivian Letran, "The Changing Faces of Docents: Many museums are looking to meet the needs of visitors by diversifying their staffs of guides and educators," *Los Angeles Times Calendar* (Sunday, February 17, 2002), p. 62.