

Museum on Main Street
2008 National Planning Conferences
Sharing Best Practices

Best Practices Model: Docent Training

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MoMS Tour(s) That You've Coordinated (exhibition and year): Key Ingredients 2003/2005; Between Fences 2005/2008; New Harmonies 2007; Journey Stories 2009

Description: For each of their MoMS exhibition tours, the Illinois Humanities Council partnered with the Illinois Heritage Association to provide docent training at each host site prior to the exhibition opening

How did extra effort(s) in this area come about? Needs identified in the state; among the local hosts, etc.

- Needs identified in 2004 with "Yesterday's Tomorrows," where content required further explanation among local hosts and their patrons;
- IHC's increasing familiarity with statewide museum service providers – like Illinois Association of Museums (IAM) and Illinois Heritage Association (IHA) – led to collaboration;
- IHA had an established track record of producing general docent training workshops for individual museums, larger groups of museums/historical societies, and workshops in building a more effective volunteer base

What council resources/expertise were you able to utilize? What partner resources/expertise?

- IHA develops handouts, activities, and reading lists that provide entrée into practice of docenting;
- Workshops are highly effective and user-friendly; IHA has track record of making the 'profession' seem less professional, while still enabling folks to consider their roles with dignity and responsibility.

What were the steps involved in implementation?

- IHC contracts directly with IHA, utilizing CASSA funds;
- Workshops are delivered to host sites after acquisition and installation of the exhibition;
- Workshop is a mandatory activity for host sites;
- IHA then presents voucher to IHC for payment.

What were the results?

- Hosts promote the workshops and issue an RFP for new volunteers;
- Whether they attract new volunteers or not, those who undergo the workshop training report an increasing esteem for their organization and its work;
- New volunteers have also had role in the development of local exhibitions and subsequent exhibitions.

What adjustments (if any) did you make along the way?

- Recognizing the benefit of providing direct technical assistance for volunteers, the IHC now makes this workshop mandatory;
- We have yet to evaluate a long-term impact of this decision.

What's been the short and long term benefit to the local hosts?

- Short term - Attracting new volunteers and having hosts think systematically about training for themselves and those who provide the labor
- Long term – we are in process of establishing these metrics.

What's been the short and long term benefit to the state council?

- Increased connection to statewide service agencies;
- IHC has become more involved in the museum community;
- IHC has physical presence whereby the State Museum Association does not.

What advice would you have for other state tour coordinators trying to make a similar impact in this area?

- Work within existing museum infrastructure – sometimes the best people are either staffers at a museum, or might be in an allied agency that might not yet have had the opportunity to work with a state council;
- Build familiarity amongst service provider with MoMS project, especially as it relates to the state council's goals/objectives for the program;
- Make sure you site-visit a workshop prior to a contract.

Do you have any files, forms, documents or digital images illustrating this component of your MoMS tour(s) that we could post on-line to share with others?

- Will be submitting later

Would you be willing to serve as a mentor to other state coordinators, advising them on this topic? If so, please indicate the best way for them to contact you.

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