

River & Rowing Museum Case Study

The River & Rowing Museum has increased its volunteer workforce by attracting members of the local community. It has targeted young people in its efforts to have a more representative volunteer team.

As an independent museum and registered charity the River & Rowing Museum relies heavily on its local community for support. However, Deputy Curator Suzie Tilbury wanted to do more to involve the people of the town in the day-to-day running of the museum through volunteering.

Like many museum professionals, Suzie's work with volunteers was only one of a number of responsibilities. This made it difficult for her and other staff to find time to develop their own skills in volunteer management and to enhance existing volunteer structures.

The Volunteers for Museum project paid for the staff and volunteers to receive training in running recruitment events for volunteers. This led to the recruitment of 16 new volunteers including a breakthrough with Henley College which led to the recruitment of 2 young people.

The project also provided Suzie with a regional support network through the Volunteers Forum and with specific training and resources. This gave Suzie the confidence and skills to influence management attitudes towards volunteers. As a result of this, the museum now has clear policies and a volunteer management plan to take things forward and sustain the volunteers in their roles. The museum was successful in attracting young people through the local college and they have established good links with the local volunteer bureau and press.

Suzie said of the training:

'It was great that it was paid for, as we probably would not be able to have done it otherwise. The volunteer management plan training day was very useful as it gave me time to concentrate on volunteers.'

Support Network

The training of staff responsible for volunteer co-ordination was key to the success of this project. Suzie Tilbury noted that "it was very helpful to have support and experience to draw from. The Volunteer Forum was really useful."

This 'up-skilling' of relevant staff has led to the development of new recruitment methods especially through links with the local volunteer bureau. However, in order to recruit new volunteers, volunteer co-ordinators need the support of senior management.

The specialist training gave Suzie the time and confidence to develop and present new ways of working with volunteers to the management team. The existence of a regional project focussing on volunteering also raised awareness of the value of volunteers to the museum sector.

'The staff and management are more aware of the value and contribution of volunteers and of their potential... and my volunteer management role has a higher profile within management group'

Greater awareness of volunteer potential has also allowed the team at the museum to think strategically about volunteer focussed projects for the future. Suzie has stated that:

'hopefully more money will be available for development projects, at any rate I would like the Forum to continue.'

Hence, an informal structure is now in place which will provide regional support for volunteer co-ordinators like Suzie as they continue to develop their volunteer management strategies.