

**The South West Volunteer Survey 2013 results**

**Overview**

In spring 2013 the South West Museum Development Team developed a survey to build a picture of the volunteering. This gathered data on volunteers, including age, demographic and roles. The survey also explored the policies and procedures museums have in place and recruitment methods. The survey also asked if museums use a volunteer framework such as the SW Museums Volunteer framework.

**Background**

Volunteering is strategically vital to museums in the South West. Museums rely on volunteers and many are volunteer-run. Since 2006, the South West Museum Skills Programme has trained volunteers in key skills and provided specialist volunteer management training. Since 2009, Renaissance investment has strongly advocated for the social, organisational and economic impact of volunteering for our sector. In 2011, the South West Museum Development Team has supported further improvement with the [Volunteer Framework](#) and by convening and facilitating the [Heritage Volunteering Forum](#).

**Breakdown of returns:**

<b>County</b>	<b>Number of returns</b>	<b>% of total returns</b>
West of England B&NES and Swindon	7	10
West of England Bristol and South Gloucestershire	2	3
Gloucestershire	7	10
Somerset	7	10
North Somerset	1	1
Wiltshire	9	12
Dorset Bournemouth and Poole	8	12
Devon	19	26
Cornwall	12	16

From the analysis the following shows the breakdown in terms of type of museum

Type of Museum/Organisation	Number	% of total returns
Independent	55	74
Local Authority	15	20
Military	1	1
National Trust	1	1
Other (Landmark Trust, Archive)	3	4

### Key facts from the survey:

- 74 museums and heritage organisations from across the South West responded (there are 195 accredited museums in the region and many more heritage and community based organisations).
- 2.7% of museums have a dedicated volunteer coordinator/ manager. For the vast majority supporting volunteers is part of a paid or voluntary role.
- 97% of museums open for over half the year (26 weeks or more). For all these museums volunteers are enabling museums to open and to conduct engagement activity with users.
- 55% of museums are aware of the Volunteer Framework for South West Museums
- The most popular resource to support volunteer development is local training courses (41%). Just behind this were regional training, primarily delivered through the Museum Skills programme, advice and services from the local volunteer centre and MDO advice and support (28%) and using a volunteer framework (26%)
- 70% of respondents had paid staff with 30% totally reliant on volunteers

## Detailed analysis

- The following shows the age profile of volunteers which reflect the demographic of the South West region. As people potentially retire early and live long there is an impetus to do something enjoyable, with purpose and to meet other people:

21 and under:	122 volunteers
22 to 34 years	238 volunteers
35 to 44 years	149 volunteers
45 to 54 years	280 volunteers
55 to 64 years	620 volunteers
65 and over	1218 volunteers

- In terms of length of volunteering one year and less is the highest. This could reflect age and other commitments for instance young volunteers going to university or students volunteering whilst studying. It can also reflect older volunteers who may be more involved in caring for a relative.

Less than 1 year	693
1-2 years	626
3-4 years	553
5-6 years	464
7-8 years	354
9-10 years	228
11+ years	326

- How often volunteers got involved varied from mainly weekly (952 times) to fortnightly to once a month. The largest response was open ended at 1518 responses. This reflects the flexible approach to give volunteers. This gives both the museum and the volunteer flexibility.

Open-Ended Response	1518
Once a month	507
Once a fortnight	351
Once a week	952
2-3 days per week	172
4-6 days per week	28
Every day	13
Other	44

- There are six main roles which volunteers are engaged with. The largest by over 50% is the Front of house role which includes stewarding of galleries, and covering the café and shop. Then it the curatorial / conservation role.

Role	Number of hours
Front of house/Stewarding/Café/shop	11967
Curation/Documentation/Conservation	5398
Marketing/ Exhibitions / events	1055
Learning/Education	1349
Governance/Management	1610.5
Volunteer management	366

- The key area of support to volunteers is in-house training at 70%. This is followed by an induction process/pack at 62% and health and safety policy in place at 59%. This shows levels of awareness by museums to their legal responsibilities to volunteers.

Induction process/pack	46
Equal opportunities policy	36
Child protection policy	27
Health and Safety policy	43
Insurance for volunteers	38
Volunteer policy	42
Role description	37
Task Lists	28
Training in house	52
External Training	24

- Museums identified the need to support volunteers through training. These are the areas which were identified:
  - Front of house/stewarding
  - Collections care
  - Maintenance
  - Working with schools/families
  - Working with schools/families
  - Marketing
  - Governance/ Management
  - Exhibition planning and delivery
  - Administration

Many of these are addressed through the Museums Skills programme. Where necessary the MDO will be able to provide guidance on other specific training and on support which they give or can lever from other organisations.

- Diversification is an area which requires further support. 89% of museums responded to their need to diversify their volunteers. Museums also identified the areas where they wanted to diversify. The highest ranking was younger volunteers at 36% followed by skills at 31%.

Younger	36%
Older	3%
Ethnicity	24%
Socio-economic background	16%
Skills	31%

Some respondents explained their reasoning, as shown:

- More diverse heritage and languages as we have visitors from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and from other countries. More IT competence is required as many procedures are now computer based.
- Succession Planning
- To be representative of the community and to increase in the range of activities volunteers can get involved in
- Broader skills base to assist in different areas of museum work
- Because we are getting older
- Recruitment of new volunteers primarily takes place through word of mouth through their museum’s existing volunteers and staff where applicable. This was followed by posters around the museum building

Word of mouth	61%
Volunteer bureau	39%
Advertise in media	32%
Don’t actively recruit	7%
Posters in museum	45%

Other methods included the museum’s website as well as other organisations websites including Arts Jobs and Do It which is connected to local volunteer centre. One cited social media and another cited posters in other council buildings.

- The perception by many museums is that time is the barrier for stopping volunteers from coming forward.

Time needed	45%
Lack of publicity	9%
No money/budget	16%
Lack of knowledge of processes	7%

Other reasons included:

- Finding volunteers with the right skills
  - Space for them to work
- Museums believe the challenge to finding new volunteers is the time potential volunteers have as well as people’s perceptions of the museum:

Lack of knowledge of opportunity	32%
Disability	8%
Lack of skills and experience	8%
Time available to give	54%
Age	7%
Perceptions	45%

## Conclusions

From the analysis of results from the South West Museums volunteer survey it is clear that volunteers fulfil a range of roles which support the objectives of the museum. Clearly front of house and collections roles engage the largest number of volunteers. Equally the largest age group to volunteer is the +65 years. This seems to reflect the demographic of the region where there is a higher number of retired people living along side life expectancy increasing. In terms of recruitment the key success indicated through word of mouth with other means including posters also cited. Fewer museums though are using social media. Perhaps this reflects why when asked about recruiting new volunteers the highest response was young people.

From the analysis the next steps are:

1. To identify what policies and plans museums have in place to support their volunteers
2. To record which museums use a volunteer framework and if so which one
3. To support museums in create roles which engage younger volunteers
4. To explore new ways of advertising volunteer opportunities particularly in line with 3 (above).

These actions will be explored over the period from October 2013 to March 2015. This will engage museums and partners to share and explore information and support primarily through the South West Federation website. One of the key areas of support is the South West Heritage Volunteer Forum. The growing membership includes volunteer managers in heritage organisations including museums, English Heritage and National Trust. It provides an opportunity to explore good practice and participate in bespoke training.

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