

Session Title: Concurrent Session 3B – Best practices in docent presentations

Moderator: Heather Barnes

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General Notes:

- Guiding Questions (Answers/Topics bolded in notes below):
 - Top 2-5 urgent needs for the network in the areas of docent presentations
 - Identify best practices for training and professional development of docents
 - What are the essential elements for docent training?
 - How does an institution move from a model from passive interpretation to active?
 - What are some of the best ways to stimulate conversations?
- Success Stories
 - Frances Kruger: Denver Museum – Space Odyssey
 - Designed on the premise that the main content comes from people (not displays)
 - Every shift of volunteers gets briefings so they have current knowledge of space missions, etc.
 - **Briefings by a staff person from different departments**
 - **Full set every week**
 - Volunteers do pretty well showing up because they know when it happens (20 minutes before shift)
 - Work with volunteers so they are better presenters
 - **Hire people with strong engagement strategies**
 - Peter Leighton: Nauticus
 - Staff shrinking → everyone must spend time on the sphere → must **simplify data**
 - **Let staff select their own playlists**
 - **Also do weekly updates (newsletter) about the sphere and content**
 - Amy Wood: Docents need to know how to read the image and then you don't have to be there every week
 - Does training based on what topics docents want to discuss on the sphere
 - Sanna Reponen: Weekly information that is updated by everyone (staff and docents)
 - Heather Barnes: MSI uses RSS feeds that sends current news associated with key words
 - Maurice Henderson: review new datasets with docents every week, but let docents decide what to incorporate into their playlist
 - Focus each presentation on 3 items – let audience what those 3 things are and repeat them throughout the presentation and at the end

- Use volunteers and 2 full-time staff
 - Significant number of presentations given by scientists
 - Scientists specify data they want on the sphere and Maurice creates the playlist
 - When a new dataset comes up, schedule trainings as needed
- Sue Guevara: Explains to volunteers why programs are why they are
 - More training with volunteers about what types of questions docents should ask than on any specific content
 - Helps move toward more active interpretation and aligns presentation with audiences knowledge/needs
 - **Need to know how to ask questions** to get at prior knowledge
 - Is more than one-way transfer of knowledge
 - Need to ask question within first 20 seconds in order to **“train” audience that they will be participating during the presentations**
- Amy Wood: Let audience know what they are getting into at the beginning
 - Length of show, level of interaction
 - Mike Smith: Puts docent into better position because audience is prepped to interact
- Abbey Spargo: See, Think, Wonder Technique – gets audience (schoolchildren) to describe what they see first and then ask questions
 - College-level volunteers start off on a kids presentation because the content is easier and they get comfortable
 - Move to adult presentation as they get comfortable
 - Team present (**shadowing and co-presenting**) to learn from more comfortable presenter
 - Also used at Chicago MSI
 - Maurice Henderson: Explorium team of docents is well integrated, on the same page, understand scripting, etc.
 - Frequency of training: massive (comprehensive) training for each of major installations
 - Big trainings are in evenings with paid staff and volunteers (**with food!**)
 - Smaller trainings and one-on-one training to work on individual presentations
- Susan Pion: **Dress Rehearsal** – Test programs on non-science, non-educator team members at the museum
 - Can practice questions and answers
 - Some smaller trainings during lunch to minimize evening time
- Heather: Will try out **new presentations during the day and just let visitors know** that it is in creation
- Maurice Henderson: Volunteers want publications (or related/relevant materials from NASA and NOAA) early that goes with content of installation so volunteers are prepared

- NASA could put together dataset description/script products with movies and datasets (i.e. Larger)
- Most institutions – emails from Beth Russell get filtered by staff and then sent to docents
- Mark Smith (MSI): Use station in museum for docents to get content
- Heather Barnes: Frequently asked question cards that visitor can fill out and staff can answer by email later
 - Keep log of FAQs so other docents know the answers
 - Sanna Reponen: We do that in Wiki, and it would be great to have a **FAQ site for the entire network**
 - Maurice: That would be great feedback for content producers
- Abbey Spargo:
 - How do you deal with a multi-generational audience?
 - Rob: Have to expect that family will still interact the way they do (parents running off after a kid)
 - Ones that are engaged will stay
 - Steve Bishop: Locate a young children’s exhibit close to the sphere so older family members can engage in sphere
 - Same at Dia Hitt
 - Susan Pion: Train docents to point out different aspects that are more interesting to little kids
 - I.e. put a squirrel on the moon and ask kids to look for it while you continue the presentation
 - Amy Wood: Use props and pick antsy visitors to be volunteers (hold something, unwind the ribbon, etc.)
 - Animated interpreters, lots of humor
 - Reference things people are familiar with
 - Heather: Training exercises that help docents minimize time with non-engaged visitors
 - John: Audio helps keep people engaged (i.e. explosion for Big Bang, grinding for when sphere rotates)
 - Heather: Stickers help train audience
 - Maurice: Survey energy in the room and try to focus it
 - Other best practices to engaging people on both sides of sphere
 - Don’t worry about two sides seeing different things because they still understand scale and scope
 - One method: herd everyone to one side (**cattle herding**)
 - Other method: Describe both sides and let audience know what they are seeing at that time
 - Working on content that gives you four different things going on around the sphere
 - Docent must be sphere-aware

- Amy Wood: Changes orientation with sphere so that each side of the audience gets different focal points
 - Heather: Ask people to get up and move around
 - Sue: We design presentation so visitors don't sit down
- Struggles:
 - **Money!**
 - Sanna Reponen: Teenagers – they like to show that they are not interested (act unengaged)
 - Maurice Henderson: Give teenagers the Wii and 30 second of instruction
 - Amy Wood: Location and timing and competition with other exhibits for attention
 - Sue Guevara: Difficult to get docents to actually use the techniques that you train them with
 - Heather: We had to do hook training to increase comfort level
 - Peter Leighton: Not everyone will spend extra time on being a good docent
 - Who is in charge of recruiting?
 - Some people have that power and some do not (depends on institution)
 - Redefine what your ideal volunteer would be
 - Sara Lee: Can recruit during presentations
 - Amy Wood: our volunteers have to do multiple jobs
 - Heather Barnes: we are doing a half and half model so that floor volunteers are separate from behind-the-scenes volunteers
 - Rob Morris: We find engaging people by asking them: “Pretend that you are talking to a preschooler and they ask you how many dinosaurs can you fit in the orbit of Pluto?”
 - Frances Kruger: Elderly, retired docents are the normal demographic for volunteers
 - In Space Odyssey, made a conscience effort to **recruit out of this demographic**
 - Home school families
 - Helps engage other age groups besides seniors
 - Sue Wu: Don't have a lot of written material for scripts because we are a new institution
 - Mark Smith: **Sound pollution and distractions**
 - Sara Lee: Limited time, same audio space as tour docents
- Access to adequate science expertise? (John McLaughlin)
 - Sarah Waters: our volunteers would rather have a training/lecture than reading
 - Could use spherecasting for training
 - Sanna Reponen: Part-timers don't have time → I digest it and give them little snippets they need → takes a lot of time
 - Sara Lee: Limited staff and limited time → would like information from NOAA and NASA about new datasets, etc.

- Dia Hitt: Need more technical help than science help
 - Maurice Henderson: Would have something available every week as a forum?
 - Scientist and educator joint training (30-45 minutes)
 - What format?
 - **Spherecasting, video, webcast trainings**
 - Sanna Reponen: Would help identify people to ask questions of
 - Mark Smith: Sphere behind the presenter on spherecast so it could be watched as a video at a later date
 - Live allows people to ask questions
 - Amy Wood: Could we submit questions beforehand or use FAQ page to define topics of training?
- In general, best way to communicate?
 - Online forum, Wiki, Google Account - emails,
 - Lots of email
 - Yahoo user group with digest feature
 - Fix a weekly time for a 45 minute training/earth update/spherecast/webcast/chat?
 - **MONTHLY**
 - Bill Bendel: Issue with installation schedule
- Sue Guevara: **videotape their trainings**
 - Amy Wood: Would you want video or just script?
 - Everyone is different with what they use
- Passive interpretation to active interpretation (example: Sue Guevara's shoe presentation)
 - Sue Guevara: Started with one dataset (Earth at Night) and trained docents on how to ask questions about it
 - **People want access to how to train docents to ask good questions**
 - Heather Barnes: Use of iClickers and it is a support system for the docents if they aren't good at coming up with questions off the cuff
 - Sanna Reponen: Would like a video of a session with iClickers with SOS
 - Mark Smith: Can **we post video on SOS website**
 - John McLaughlin: YouTube channel to post videos
 - Could link to institutions that have channels already
 - Heather Barnes: **Good questions throughout entire presentation** to maintain active engagement
 - Good opening questions – what do you see? Where are these images from?
 - **Want a list of good questions to provide to docents**
 - Steve Bishop: Don't want presenter to be in a position of being an expert
 - Presenter should be trained as a facilitator instead
 - It's okay to say "I don't know" and explain how to get resources
 - Bill Bendel: how to handle expert in audience?
 - Heather: Less of an issue because we move on to next question, say that you want to hear from someone else

- Maurice Henderson: How many docent trainings are less than half hour?
 - Most are shorter, some have longer sessions that are more in-depth
 - Have longer workshops for classes, school programs
 - Amy Wood: **Props** to show size to scale increase engagement
 - **Physical involvement**
 - **Ask for predictions** before showing a model (and can use iClickers!)
 - Abbey Spargo: Dealing with visually impaired general public in sphere room?
 - No one has dealt with (hearing impaired only)
 - Sara Lee: Haven't catered to it in SOS because they can go elsewhere
 - Have tactile objects to simulate continents, etc. Only relevant to schoolkids
 - FFO in December calls out professional development programs and will reference network's priorities
 - Prioritization
 - **Engagement Strategies (training docents) = 11**
 - Props, stickers, questions, etc.
 - How to train audience
 - How to ask good questions
 - iClickers
 - **Briefings on current science news (weekly updates/content related) = 7**
 - Simplifying data
 - Hiring/recruitment/interview strategies = 0
 - FAQ list and forum = 5
 - Trainings (Internal and External)
 - How to SOS trainings
 - How to read and interpret datasets (content
 - Strategies for large-scale vs. one-on-one
 - Engaging multi-generational audience
 - **Having datasets documentation and scripts on the website (document, outlines, scripts, and videos of shows – for datasets) = 6**
 - Access to materials
 - Docent ownership of presentations = 0
 - Choose playlists
 - Simplify data
 - Training videos on YouTube = 4
 - Best practices document

Recommendations to NOAA (Office of Education, Earth System Research Laboratory, National Visualization Laboratory):

- For NASA (from Maurice Henderson): Volunteers want publications (or related/relevant materials from NASA and NOAA) early that goes with content of installation so volunteers are prepared
 - NASA could put together dataset description/script products with movies and datasets (i.e. Larger)
- Would like more information (technical and scientific) from NASA and NOAA about available datasets
 - Sphercasting, video, webcast trainings – monthly basis
- FAQ site for the entire network – institutions could post questions (and answers) that visitors commonly ask their docents
- Posting information on how to train docents to ask good questions