Volunteers in the Medium-Sized Museum Library

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**Dorothy Stimson Bullitt Library** (research library; all collections except Asian): 1 FT staff, 20 volunteers

**McCaw Foundation Library** (research library; Asian collections):
1 PT staff, 15 volunteers

**Wyckoff Teacher Resource Center** (lending library; all subject areas): 1 PT staff, 12 volunteers
Who Are Our Volunteers?

Retired professionals: retired and current public, school, academic and special librarians

Library/info science and archives students: graduate students in MLIS program at University of Washington, undergrad and grad students from Public History program at Seattle University, students in AA for Library and Information Services at Highline Community College

Other students: graduate students in Art, Art History, History, International Studies, Museology, Chinese Studies and Japanese Studies from local universities and colleges

Others: interested people from diverse backgrounds
Volunteer Training + Structure

Training:
• Overall training done once a year with all three library staff
• Additionally, each library does own specific training once a year
• All sessions are recorded onto DVD
• Three volunteer “start” periods: September, January and June
• Start groups of volunteers on same day
• Detailed volunteer binders created
• Individual training done

Structure:
• Each library has its own volunteer corps
• Volunteers work three-hour shifts weekly or bi-weekly
• Within each corps, a “volunteer lead” is assigned
• Volunteer lead does the monthly schedule and attends museum-wide volunteer association meetings
Volunteer Duties

Volunteers without professional library experience/library education:
- Process materials
- Re-shelve/page materials
- Projects based on skills: foreign languages, database skills, etc.

Volunteers with professional library experience/library education:
- Reference work
- Occasional research work
- Copy cataloging with close supervision/review (students should have completed advanced cataloging courses)

Engage MLIS students in structured directed fieldwork or directed study (usually second-year students):
- Projects assigned with specific goals and completion measures
- Examples: Special Collections, Reference Collections, Museum Publication Collections, Artist Files
The Volunteer Conundrum

If volunteers do all of the work, why should the organization hire more staff?

• Clearly define roles/responsibilities of staff from those of volunteers
• Say “no” to projects that require staff and stick by that
• Use professional resources to substantiate this:
  ▪ ARLIS/NA resources like “Staffing Standards for Art Libraries and Visual Resources Collections” (ARLIS/NA Occasional Paper)
  ▪ Conference sessions on advocacy and influence
  ▪ SLA and AAM surveys and documents
• Be a united front - engage your volunteer program manager and/or HR staff to back you up