

BEING A DOCENT IN A SMALL MUSEUM
Sybil Williamson, Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College

I. Problems

- Limited gallery space
- Scheduling of docents and tours
- Personnel problems
- Small docent corps; lack of docent coverage

II. Limited Gallery Space

- Lack of space makes it mandatory to work with other docents to create strict schedule of tour through gallery
- Use a docent facilitator who makes sure groups move according to schedule
- Carry radio contact to be in touch with other docents
- Create tours that concentrate on a small area, limited subject matter or include enough activity associated with the subject (contained in one area) that tour does not need to move to many spaces
- When tours are in process, have someone direct visitors to other galleries

III. Scheduling

- Tours need to adhere to strict schedule; often tours are following very closely and there is not enough space for tours to overlap
- Open early or late to meet demand for docent tours
- Don't schedule regular (introductory, "walk-in" etc.) tours at the same time docent tours are scheduled
- Work with schools to establish guidelines for tours – help them to be ready to go when they arrive; emphasize need to arrive on time due to other tour groups
- Combine tours of compatible groups (age, interest, etc)

IV. Personnel – Small museums may not have an education department, or only one person who has little time to train or work with docents

- Communication between volunteer docents and staff is essential and can affect the success of docent program
- Create a structured docent organization that can help schedule, work with staff, help recruit and train new docents; this group must have access to staff with two-way communication
- All staff, including Director, must be available to docents, especially when there is little or no staff to direct docents

V. Small docent corps; too few docents/too many tours

- Recruitment – hold open house to stimulate interest and attract new docents
- Hold a few social occasions for docents (perhaps regular coffee hour in conjunction with training or meetings) - helps to establish a cohesive unit of docents and maintain interest and involvement in the program