



# Volunteer Orientation

## *Training Packet 2023*

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Welcome Letter             | 1 |
| Museum Visitor Types       | 2 |
| Customer Service Tips      | 2 |
| Safety Procedures          | 3 |
| Volunteer Benefits         | 3 |
| Volunteer Responsibilities | 4 |
| Museum Maps                |   |
| Public Spaces              | 6 |
| Staff Spaces               | 8 |

# Welcome Letter

Welcome to the National Postal Museum volunteer community! The National Postal Museum interprets events, individuals and treasures related to the mail and postal systems used in United States History and around the world. As a Smithsonian Institution volunteer, you are an integral part of the public face of the world's largest museum complex. And you play a very important role in our overall mission:

## ***National Postal Museum Mission Statement***

*The National Postal Museum, through its collection and library, is dedicated to preservation, study and presentation of postal history and philately. The museum uses research, exhibits, educational and public programs to make this rich history available to a wide and diverse audience.*

This training is your introduction to the Volunteer Program at the National Postal Museum. You will learn content and skills that will help you serve our visitors with exciting educational opportunities. Through this experience will also have the opportunity to meet fellow recruits, veteran volunteers, and our dedicated museum staff.

I look forward to your contributions to our museum community and sharing the joy of bringing these stories and treasures to the museum's visitors. Welcome to the family!

Sincerely,

Maggie Sigle  
Volunteer and Intern Coordinator  
Smithsonian National Postal Museum

# Museum Visitor Types

There are many kinds of people that visit museums. These five types were identified by renowned museum researcher, John Falk, in *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*. How can you best serve these different visitor types? Which one are you?

## **Explorers**

Motivated by personal curiosity (i.e. browsers)

## **Facilitators**

Motivated by other people and their needs (i.e. a parent bringing a child)

## **Experience-Seekers**

Motivated by the desire to see and experience a place (i.e. tourists)

## **Professional/Hobbyists**

Motivated by specific knowledge-related goals (i.e. a scholar researching a specific topic)

## **Rechargers**

Motivated by a desire for a contemplative or restorative experience

# Customer Service Tips

No matter what your volunteer role is, if you work with the public you should look to these simple rules for your interactions.

1. **Smile**
2. **Make the visitor feel welcome**
3. **Listen**
4. **Ask questions**
5. **Use positive body language**
6. **Saying “I don’t know” is okay**
7. **Use appropriate language for your audience**

# Safety Procedures

Strobe light and audio alarm, followed by an announcement with one of the following emergency situations:

**1. Evacuation procedure**

- a. Go to nearest exit
- b. Do not assist visitors, security officers are trained to handle the visitors
- c. Go to rally point and check in with education department staff. Rally point is located on the grassy verge behind the flagpoles between Louisiana St NE and E St NE on Columbus circle. Look for NPM staff.
- d. Return when instructed by Security of the NPM staff safety coordinator.

**2. Shelter-in-Place Position 1**

- a. Stay at work place or continue program
- b. No one is allowed to leave the building until the all clear

**3. Shelter-in-Place Position 2**

- a. Go to Blount Center
- b. Visitors will be instructed by security to go to enclosed space in Franklin Foyer

**4. Active Shooter**

- a. Go to nearest exit
- b. If not able to exit, go to lockable space like Education Department or Museum Shop

**5. HVAC shutdown Shelter-in-Place**

- a. Go to emergency exit stairwell 7, entrance in the Director's hallway

**6. Earthquake Shelter-in-Place**

- a. Brace yourself under sturdy desk, table, bench, doorway or exhibit structure.

Workplace Accidents: Inform security and your supervisor immediately if you are injured while performing your duties.

# Volunteer Benefits

- 20% discount at all Smithsonian shops
- 10% discount on items at the National Gallery of Art and the Kennedy Center shops
- Free educational IMAX movie tickets, 20% discount on feature films
- Behind-the-scenes access to the museum and staff
- Invitations to museum's special programs, events and exhibition openings
- Periodic volunteer enrichment opportunities, like behind-the-scenes tours and performances
- Free entry or reduced rates at many American museums (bring your badge and ask)

# Volunteer Responsibilities

## **Minimum Time Commitment Requirements**

As a National Postal Museum Volunteer, you are expected to contribute at the very minimum 24 hours per year to remain a volunteer. You are expected to commit to the time you sign up for, if you agree to a weekly or bi-weekly schedule than any shifts you miss should be made up at a later time.

## **Your Schedule**

Schedules are done via VSYS, the online volunteer system accessed at Vol.SI.EDU. You should have a repeating schedule, and should be able to cancel shifts and sign up for shifts via VSYS.

## **Signing In**

Every time you volunteer your time, whether for program, training or enrichment, please enter your hours in the VSYS system. For many roles, such as tours, you should also keep track of how many visitors you interact with. You will be prompted to enter that as well.

## **Illness and Other Emergencies**

If you are ill or encounter a last-minute emergency preventing you from coming in, call or email the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible.

If you find that you are ill on the day you are volunteering and you are not able to actually speak with any staff, please contact the Office of Visitor Services (OVS) at (202) 633-5282. They will convey the message to the National Postal Museum Information Desk staff.

## **Inclement Weather Policy**

The Smithsonian follows OPM's closure procedure. You can find out the current status at [www.opm.gov/status](http://www.opm.gov/status) or [www.alerts.si.edu](http://www.alerts.si.edu).

If you do not feel comfortable traveling to and from the museum during inclement weather, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator. Your safety comes first!

## **Holidays**

The only day Smithsonian museums are closed to the public is Christmas Day.

You will be scheduled as normal for the following federal holidays and will need to cancel your shift if you cannot make it: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King's Birthday, President's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Juneteenth, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and Inaugural Day.

### **The Volunteer Lounge**

The Volunteer Lounge is a space for you to study, eat, or spend “down time” before or after programs. Make yourself comfortable there, it is your space. There is a mini fridge and microwave if you bring a lunch. Please remember you share this space with other volunteers and interns; respect their needs as they will yours and clean up after yourself. The Education Office is located adjacent to the Volunteer Lounge.

### **Training**

After the completion of the initial Volunteer Training, Postal Museum volunteers will continue to have access to various content and skill related training opportunities for professional development, such as new exhibit trainings. There is also generally a mandatory training every year, covering important concepts.

### **Evaluation**

The Education Department will conduct periodic volunteer evaluations to both provide feedback to each volunteers and also to hear from volunteers if we are meeting their volunteer needs. Evaluations can consist of observation and written tasks.

### **Income tax**

Although the value of services rendered to a non-profit organization is not deductible, the IRS allows deductions for out-of-pocket travel expenses, including transportation, parking tolls, etc. under certain circumstances. The museum cannot help with this, keep track of your hours via vsys.

### **Resignation**

If you wish to discontinue your participation as a volunteer at the National Postal Museum, please inform staff at least three weeks prior to your final day of work. Upon resigning, return the museum ID badge to the Volunteer Coordinator or Security and complete our survey regarding your decision to resign.

### **Dress Guidelines**

Although we do not have an official uniform, it is important that you are distinguishable from our visitors so that they will recognize you as an “expert” whom they can approach. One way we do that is with the blue vests, which clearly mark you as from the museum.

We strongly encourage business casual attire whenever you are volunteering. Shorts should not be worn, as an example. You also should not wear anything advertising a particular brand or service while representing the Smithsonian.

### **Parking**

Free parking is extremely limited in the vicinity of the Smithsonian. There is street parking nearby, though it is only free on Sundays. There are also some paid garages. Weekend parking

passes are available for the garage beneath the building volunteers upon request, but the process of getting one can take months as the postal museum does not control that place. Please feel free to request one, but also have a plan B. The best way to travel is generally metro or bus, especially on weekdays. You are responsible for getting to the museum for your shifts.

### **Comment Forms**

Visitor comment forms are available at the welcome desk. They are a great way for us to collect information on what visitors want to see and where we can improve. They are also a great way for visitors to express frustrations. A longer form comment form is available to welcome desk volunteers, who can collect and flag those comments for staff review. Visitors can also leave comments on our website. Encourage visitors to leave both positive and negative comments!

### **Supplies + Services**

There is a modest budget to provide supplies for the Volunteer Lounge and welcome desk. If you need other supplies, let the staff know. Please do not take office supplies from the desk of interns or staff. The administrative copier is offered to facilitate your learning of museum content and not for personal use.

### **Wifi**

There is wireless internet (si-visitor) available throughout the museum if you want to bring in a mobile devices or laptop for your personal use.

## Behind the Scenes Museum Map

