

Virginia Association of Museums Career Resource:

Ways to Bolster Your Resume: Interning, Volunteering, Networking, and Continuing Education

What is the Difference between Interning and Volunteering?

Interns fill a role similar to that of an apprentice. Their tasks are designed to help them gain on-the-job training and build practical skills they can use in future employment. Interns can receive college credit or stipends, and their performance is evaluated in some structured fashion. Volunteers play a less structured, but no less important, role at a museum. Their tasks do not need to be geared to acquiring new job skills, and they are not evaluated or reviewed as formally as interns. This difference provides a volunteer with more freedom within the museum; they can change departments if they get bored with a task, they can set a more flexible schedule, their jobs tend to be more open-ended.

Does Volunteering Help Me?

Volunteering, like interning, will show your potential employer that you are dedicated to museum work and have actually completed tasks in a museum setting. However, volunteer roles generally won't carry as much weight on a resume. Internships, for an entry-level resume, would be listed under Professional Experience, with specific tasks and achievements for that internship listed underneath. Volunteer roles, on the other hand, are generally considered Community Involvement. You have less resume "real estate" for these personal entries, and they are seen as extras, rather than the primary factors that help you get a job. Volunteering should be on your checklist of things to add to your resume. However, volunteering should come AFTER internships on that resume checklist.

Networking

Networks come in many shapes and sizes. Graduate programs in museum studies have networks made up of alumni and instructors. Museum disciplines have networks—curators, educators, directors. And different types of museums also build networks—zoos, science centers, history museums. But there are also more general networks that you can become a part of before you even have your first job. The best of these general networks is your state museum association. Most (including VAM) have special student rates to make joining affordable. Members have something to add to their resumes under Professional Affiliations, and immediate access to a well-established network of professionals. The more involved you are, the faster your network grows.

Another way to establish a network for yourself is to be proactive when you are working on an internship. Talk to everyone in your museum or department; ask them to introduce you to their colleagues at other museums. Keep in touch with all these people after your internship is over, and you are well on your way to your own personal network. You can also use other opportunities in your coursework to build relationships with local museums and museum staff. In a section of her book *Museum Careers: A Guide for Novices and Students*, Elizabeth Schlatter suggests:

"Any time you have the opportunity to choose a topic for a class research paper or project, try to relate it to an object in a museum. . . . When you ask the museum curator or collections manager to view an object up close or study the object's records and history, you are networking with the local museum community."

Continuing Education

Most people considering the museum field are still in college, so continuing education may seem a bit superfluous. However, museum professionals never stop going to workshops, reading new publications, and attending conferences. Starting this habit early on, and having a couple of workshops or programs on your resume before you even get your first job will go a long way to showing a potential employer that you are committed to the field. In this area, your state or regional museum association (like VAM!) can be a great resource. VAM even offers a Certificate in Museum Management!