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Nominee Information: Name of Resource

BubbleHub: Guest Engagement Volunteer Online Community

Nominee Information: Contact Name

Guest Engagement – Lisa Ostrego

Nominee Information: Institution

John G. Shedd Aquarium

Nominee Information: Institution Address

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Nominee Information: Telephone

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Link to resource

https://gevols.sheddaquarium.org/
USERNAME: AAM2017
PASSWORD: AAM2017

Resource Information: Target Audience

This resource is exclusively for the Guest Engagement department's volunteers who are primarily adults. These volunteers engage with Shedd Aquarium's 2 million annual guests in exhibit spaces and during premium experiences using interpretive techniques to make Shedd's mission come alive. This role requires continual training, enrichment and coaching to remain relevant with an ever changing live collection. Volunteers utilize the "BubbleHub" online community to access exhibit information, connect to each other and experts and to complete online training modules in the form of digital badging. Staff use this platform to stay connected to volunteers and to easily track their progress.

Resource Information: Documentation of Planning and Design/Best Practices in Education Theory

Interpretive volunteers play a vital role in fulfilling the aquarium's mission: "At Shedd, animals connect you to the living world, inspiring you to make a difference." As the value of these impactful interactions has increasingly been recognized, the need to grow the size of volunteer corps was evident.   The challenge this presented was being able to continue offering robust training and enrichment opportunities for a larger group of volunteers (over 130) while the number of staff remained the same (10). Guest Engagement investigated alternative ways to sustain and manage these growing programs while continuing to innovate within our practices.

Feedback from volunteers wanting easy access to aquarium resources such as fact sheets, as well as content experts (ex. animal care staff), directed Guest Engagement to explore trends in blended learning and digital badging. Guest Engagement networked with other organizations to learn about their digital learning platforms and attended conferences workshops on the topic to better inform this direction. Integrating a digital community into the current in-person training and enrichment experiences provided by staff creates a sustainable and well-rounded blended learning environment. This allows for a greater number of enhanced engagements in our exhibit spaces which furthers our mission with the public.

Guest Engagement based the "BubbleHub" online community on the aquarium's successful teacher badging programs. The department collaborated with several aquarium departments in order to develop the "BubbleHub":
- 	the digital learning manager for converting in-person trainings into digital content,
- 	the IT department for site build-out,
- 	the learning planning and evaluation department for program evaluation

Guest Engagement sought feedback during the development phase from the Interpretive Volunteer Advisory Council, a representative group of the department's volunteer corps.   This

valuable feedback allowed for adjustments to content and design prior to launching the online community with all of the volunteers.

While Guest Engagement staff worked closely with IT for site build-out, they were responsible for converting training content into digital resources. This required staff to learn new skills such as HTML coding and training development using Learning Management Systems (LMS).

Guest Engagement is committed to achieving the following goals with the "BubbleHub" online community:
•	Increase volunteers' abilities and confidence in engaging guests through interactive online trainings
•	Foster greater staff contact with the entire volunteer corps
•	Empower volunteers to make change and take ownership within the volunteer program by using the online resources and working through online training at their own pace
•	Share with and learn from staff and fellow volunteers through active participation in online training and forums
•	Make resources and enrichments available to all at any time

Resource Information: Implementation/Best Practices in Education Theory

Blended learning allows us to recognize and cater to an array of learning styles, increase our training capacities and digitally track progress with our volunteers. The "BubbleHub" online community is a complement to ongoing in-person training. This blended learning model encourages volunteers to take ownership of their learning, working through training modules at their own pace. This platform also makes Shedd accessible to volunteers even when they are not able to be on-site through virtual experiences such as videos and Q&A forums.

Volunteers access this resource at Shedd during their scheduled shift times as well as offsite outside of their regularly scheduled shifts. Recognizing the range of comfort levels with technology as well as access to technology, volunteers are given time to work on aquarium tablets and computers to complete trainings and access resources. This provides support for volunteers, as needed, from fellow volunteers and staff as well as keeps the online community top-of-mind as a key aspect of the volunteer program.

During their online time, volunteers may contribute to forum discussions, review exhibit guidelines, and complete training missions and activities. Through the training module of digital badging, volunteers are able to test their content knowledge through online activities such as quizzes, and track their in-person practice and exhibit interpretation clearance through the completion of "missions". Once volunteers complete all missions within a digital badge they

receive recognition online as well as a physical badge (a lapel pin representing the exhibit for which the volunteer is cleared to interpret).

As with the range of comfort, there is a range of participation from volunteer to volunteer in the online community – from volunteers who access resources and complete digital training badges to those who also contribute regularly to forums and post articles.

Staff engage with volunteers online through conversation on the forums and throughout the badging process. As volunteers complete missions and submit work, staff provide specific feedback through the "BubbleHub". This digital feedback loop allows volunteers to engage with all members of the department staff rather than exclusively with those that work on the same days that they volunteer at the aquarium.

Resource Information: Outcomes/Measuring success

The "BubbleHub" online community has been fully integrated into the Guest Engagement volunteer program as of January 2016. Volunteers have noted in focus groups and surveys that the ease of access to aquarium resources and relevant articles is the biggest success of the online community. They are taking ownership of their learning by self-pacing their digital training work and staying current with relevant information. They continue to extend their learning through participation in online forums and enrichment opportunities.

Staff has been able to easily track training progress and continues to build training content on the digital badging platform. Ongoing volunteer feedback via forums helps inform content development and future enrichment experiences.

Data from the most current volunteer survey indicate that:
86% of volunteers who responded are satisfied with the BubbleHub
77% of volunteers who responded feel that the BubbleHub has a positive impact on their training
73% of volunteers who responded are motivated by earning digital badges and lapel pins

Positive feedback from volunteers about the BubbleHub:
"BubbleHub allows me to finish my online badging and review all exhibit guidelines and transition to the floor seamlessly. The time spent on BubbleHub is in balance with the time spent on the floor and is amazingly beneficial."

"It's provided an opportunity to have dedicated study time to the materials enhancing our knowledge base, a venue to learn things outside of our position (the Resources is a cool

function), the forum allows volunteers to connect with one another and the Ask the Expert helps answer some of the questions guests have that we don't always have the answers to."

"I like having the shared resources, opportunity to contact staff members relatively easily, and a digital tracking method of my progress with various galleries. Plus, it's less paper waste (vs. printing out multiple copies of the gallery guidelines)."

Resource Information: Product Details

Currently all 135 Guest Engagement volunteers and staff are utilizing the "BubbleHub" online community. Aquarium stakeholders such as IT, digital learning and volunteer services have access as well.

Volunteers access the site through the URL address with an activation code during onboarding. Access to the site aligns with their active status as a Guest Engagement volunteers.

The overall product budget is minimal. Most of the cost is in staff time for development and maintenance of the site.
WordPress, badging plugin – free
URL - $150
Server - $150

Nominator Information: Name

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May we contact you with any further questions?

Yes

Nominee Information: AAM Member Number

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