

SHARE Museums East

Mystery Shopper Scheme 2015

- **Improve your visitor offer**
- **Develop your front of house staff and volunteers**
- **Generate ideas, income and insight**

SHARE is looking to raise the profile and standard of visitor services in our region's museums.

A good visitor experience is absolutely vital to museums and their public facing mission, as well as supporting their ability to **generate income** in a uncertain times.

After a successful pilot last year we are now extending and developing our Mystery Shopper Scheme and making it available to **all museums** in the East for the **2015 summer season**.

The scheme allows museums to benefit from an **objective assessment** of their visitor experience – and so design and **implement improvements**.

The **reciprocal nature** of the scheme means that museums can access this support significantly cheaper than through commercial mystery shopping services. We are also able to **tailor the scheme specifically** to the needs of museums.

Read on to find out more.

What has happened so far?

In 2013 SHARE established its Front of House Forum – a highly popular quarterly training and networking event highlighting current issues and good practice in visitor services.

It was at this forum that we heard from managers at the Museum of London of the **significant benefits** of mystery shopping.

In 2014 we teamed up with them, the University of Cambridge Museums and Welwyn Hatfield Museum service to design and run a pilot scheme that would assess the viability of running a reciprocal mystery shopper programme in the East.



A session on customer service with the Front of House Forum

This taught us a lot about the training, logistics and benefits of running a scheme, and we are now in a position to extend the offer across the region for the 2015 season (April – October).

Which museums are eligible?

Any museum in the East that is accredited or actively working towards accreditation is eligible.

How will the scheme work?



SHARE is recruiting **up to 18 museums** from around the region to take part. Each museum will provide at least **two volunteers** and/or members of staff who will be asked to undertake a total of **up to 6 visits** to other museums in the period **after Easter to October half term 2015**.

Essentially to get a visit – you give a visit.

The shoppers recruited by each museum will be trained by SHARE to undertake the visits, fill in the mystery shopper questionnaire and submit their completed findings promptly.

The feedback is comprehensive. Shoppers are trained to take account of the visitor experience from first contact via phone and website to arrival, signage, welcome, displays, shop and catering offer.

It is up to the participating museums how they use the feedback received. Those in the pilot scheme were often made aware of things they had not previously considered and report how useful it was to have an objective measure with which to raise issues. Shoppers are also able to reflect on their own offer by comparing and considering that of others, so providing a **double benefit**.

SHARE will co-ordinate the training, allocation of visits, data collection and feedback to participating museums.

As with the pilot a small representative steering group will oversee the successful running of the scheme (see “who is running the project”, below).

When will this happen?

We are working to the following schedule for 2015:

Official Launch	February 11 th – Front of House Forum, Botanic Gardens, Cambridge
Recruitment of museums and their designated shoppers	February to March
Shopper Training (Cambridge)	Friday 17 th and Sat 18 th April (only one day required per shopper)
Shoppers make up to 6 visits – by arrangement with SHARE Museums East	End April to middle October
Assessment and Evaluation with participants	End October
Final report to steering group and Plan for 2016	November

Is the scheme free?

Not entirely. SHARE is covering the central administration and coordination of the scheme but **you will be asked to arrange to cover the cost of visits to other participating museums.** This will include travel and a small purchase from the shop and refreshment areas if applicable

We therefore suggest you budget for this cost now. Experience of the pilot tells us that no visit will cost more than £100 and in many cases this will be considerably less. Remember you are being asked to cover the costs of **6 visits** during the season.

Shoppers are recruited by you **on a voluntary basis** and we do not expect you to pay them.

SHARE may be able to offer small incentive grants to potential participants to cover some expenses. Any such offer must be discussed individually with the SHARE Co-ordinator.

What are we looking for?

We are asking **participating museums** to:-

- Recruit volunteers to the scheme – either through staff or volunteer base. We recommend that each participating museum finds **at least two shoppers** to cover absence
- Support their attendance at the training
- Ensure shoppers' visits are completed on time and questionnaires are returned promptly
- Cover the costs of the visits
- Provide feedback to SHARE about the scheme, its value and potential for improvement
- Use the feedback they receive to generate improvements in their visitor offer



The **shoppers** you recruit must be:-

- numerate and literate
- discreet and have a keen eye for detail
- understand the value of good customer service
- able to reflect on the visitor services in their own museum
- fully supportive of the aims of the programme
- prepared to travel by own car or public transport

We are asking **shoppers** to:-

Pre-visit

- Attend the training
- Work with the SHARE Museums East office to arrange visits
- Liaise with the museum by phone
- Use the museum website and other publicity material
- Arrange travel

During Visit

- Be aware of the impressions that the exterior and interior layout have on the visitor
- Be aware of impressions of visitor interactions
- Spend time looking at displays and interacting with staff or volunteers present
- Buy refreshments from the café and a gift from the shop if available
- Attend events or learning activities if appropriate or available.

Post-visit

- Complete and return questionnaire to the SHARE office **within 7 days**
- Claim any expenses from their museum
- Provide additional feedback on the scheme as required by the steering group

Who is running the project?

The project will be administered and co-ordinated by the SHARE Museums East team.

The scheme is devised and overseen by the steering group. They are:

- Graham Stratfold, Head of Visitor Services at the Museum of London
- Jane Felstead, Head of Visitor Services, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
- Linda Dobbs, Director, Welwyn Hatfield Museums Service
- Simon Floyd, SHARE Coordinator, Norfolk Museums Service
- Amanda Lightstone – Opening Doors Project Co-ordinator, University Museums Cambridge

How do we get involved?

If you are interested in being a part of the scheme or have any further questions please contact Simon Floyd, SHARE Coordinator on 01603 638141 – simon.floyd@norfolk.gov.uk .

Once you have agreed to participate we will send a further, more comprehensive briefing to all those involved.

The deadline for expressions of interest is Friday 27th March 2015.



Front of House staff at Norwich Castle

Finally:

This is important work and by taking part in the SHARE Mystery Shoppers Scheme - you are helping us in our mission to support museums to raise the profile and standard of visitor services in our region's museums. We may wish to share your experience on our website or via other channels in order to help us to further achieve this aim.

What is SHARE Museums East?

SHARE Museums East is an operational arm of the Norfolk Museums Service delivering the Arts Council funded Museum Development programme across the six counties of the Eastern region. We do this in partnership with local authorities and by developing and delivering a large central programme of training, networks and other development initiatives which support museums to achieve better governance, collections management and audience development. See www.sharemuseumseast.org.uk for more information on our work programmes.