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## Volunteers and Collections as Viewed From the Museum Mission Statement



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**Abstract** Museum mission statements typically mandate provisions for collections care and public outreach. As museums continue to transition into more fully participatory and audience-centered institutions, the role that volunteers and interns play with collections extends beyond simple hands-on experiential tasks. Rather, these individuals increasingly play roles in the creation and voicing of museum exhibits and programs. The relationship between the museum as a public institution and volunteers becomes more reciprocal and symbiotic. Through this process, the volunteer position moves from passive to active, as they increasingly take on a stakeholder's role in the museum operation. This paper uses Simon's scheme of contributory, collaborative, and co-creative projects coupled with Worts' Critical Assessment Framework to consider these relationships. Their approaches are applied to the volunteer program at the C. H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa, an institution that interprets the Native American and traditional cultures of the Memphis, Tennessee region. Case studies based on collections curated at the Museum showed that the schemes of Simon and Worts proved useful in evaluating the mission mandates of the Museum's volunteer programs.

To begin, we start with a question: If there were an opportunity for an unlimited number of paid staff at museums would we still recruit volunteers to assist in collections work? In this paper we answer that question with a resounding yes. In fact, we suggest that with increased paid staff, the quantity of volunteers should increase as well. We base this assessment in recognizing the shift of museums from being collections driven to centering on the visitor experience (Anderson 2004:2-5), an

educational approach that is constructivist (Hein 2006:347–349) and that acknowledges the role of free-choice learning (Falk and Dierking 2002). The volunteer does not come to the museum as a *tabula rasa* but with knowledge. Volunteers can take that knowledge and actively engage in the learning process rather than acting as passive receptacles of information.

The participation of volunteers in all phases of museum practices is implicit in the American Association of Museum's (AAM) 2002 publication *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums*. Drawing on this seminal publication, we use the term civic engagement in this paper following that of Hirzy (2002:9) to mean "... when the museum and community intersect — in a subtle and overt way, over time, and as an accepted and natural way of doing business." Hirzy further notes: "... that although these strategies are community-oriented, they are not necessarily civic-minded. They do not always foster deep civic engagement. Working together or diversifying audiences is not enough. What is needed are reciprocal, co-created relationships that connect the assets and purposes of organizations" (2002:16).

In our application below, we operationalize Hirzy's "organizations" as museums and "audiences" as volunteers. Such an approach moves beyond the rigid application of two prevalent models of volunteer programs as economic and leisure driven (Holmes 2007:223–225). Through an understanding of civic engagement as a means of building relationships, museums now foster a diverse set of interactions with the public (e.g., Moyer 2007; Shackel 2009:214–216).

We define volunteers in this paper as unpaid staff, the public who offer their services without compensation, unpaid student interns, and a wide range of groups from garden clubs to Native American tribes who create exhibits and programs or perform services without financial compensation.

We use Simon's (2010: 187–191, 203–279) model of visitors as contributors, collaborators, and co-creators and apply the scheme to volunteers. The model is useful because it incorporates the full range of volunteer roles in museums and draws meaningful distinctions between the volunteer case studies that we consider in this paper. The application of Simon's model is meant only as a heuristic device and does not imply that volunteers, or visitors for that matter, view themselves in distinct contributory, collaborative or co-creative roles. The discussion of volunteers in this paper is organized around Simon's classificatory model.

Next, we adapt criteria reported by Worts (2006:41–48) in the Critical Assessment Framework to evaluate the application of Simon's model. The criteria considered by Worts are useful for exploring intangible concepts that are less readily quantified such as civic engagement or empowerment. In essence, Worts' criteria move beyond quantitative measures of attendance and revenues to consider concepts such as stakeholder development and engagement.

In this paper we draw on recent case studies of our experience at the C. H. Nash Museum at the Chucalissa archaeological site. The Museum's primary interpretive focus is the Native American people whose ancestors constructed the pre-

historic Mississippian Culture (1000–1500 CE) temple mound complex in an area now incorporated by the city of Memphis, Tennessee. Over the past several years, we initiated several programs that draw on contributory, collaborative, and co-creative volunteer participation at the Museum, particularly in working with curated collections. Our experience demonstrates the necessity of making available multiple types of volunteer projects, not just to maximize volunteer utility to the museum operation, but to engage the full range of volunteer interests and capabilities. Such an approach maximizes the potential of developing volunteers into museum stakeholders.

The C. H. Nash Museum staff place considerable emphasis on acknowledging to volunteers the critical contribution they make to the Museum operation. Museum volunteers range in age from elementary school children to retirees. The Museum also hosts volunteer groups such as Boy Scouts, AmeriCorps Camps, youth groups, and garden clubs who perform a diversity of projects. In 2010, over 220 volunteers participated in Museum projects. The vast majority of volunteers participated on only one to three occasions throughout the year. Ten percent of the volunteers participate on ten occasions or more in 2010.

#### The C. H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa

The Chucalissa archaeological site was "discovered" in the 1930s during a Civilian Conservation Corps work project to create a Jim Crow era segregated park for the African American community of Memphis. Upon encountering evidence of a Native American occupation, 40 acres of the development that contained a prehistoric village and earthwork were removed from the park project. As a result, today, the T. O. Fuller State Park (formerly the Shelby County Negro Park) surrounds the Chucalissa archaeological site on three sides.

The museum at the Chucalissa archaeological site was founded in the 1950s and originally showcased exposed human burials, active field excavations, and a reconstructed prehistoric village. Members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians were the primary public interpretive face at the Museum's inception. Administered by the University of Memphis since 1962, the Museum focus has evolved significantly over the past fifty years (Connolly 2011). The exhibition of human remains was terminated in the 1980s. There have been no substantive field excavations at the site in over a decade. Without proper maintenance, the replica prehistoric village became dilapidated and was removed. Because the village and burial exhibits at the Museum were a mainstay of the operation, annual visitation plummeted from reported highs of up to 40,000 in the 1980s to fewer than 10,000 in 2007. Today, the Museum has a paid staff of less than one-third compared to 25 years ago. The staff includes three regular full-time interpretive and administrative employees. We also employ three University of Memphis graduate assistants who are contracted to work 20 hours per week at the Museum during the academic semesters.

In addition to collections excavated from the Chucalissa site, the C. H. Nash Museum also curates archaeological collections from throughout West Tennessee and the adjacent counties in Arkansas and Mississippi. These regional collections not excavated directly from the Chucalissa site result from fieldwork conducted by University of Memphis archaeologists over the past 50 years. The Museum played a central role in the processing and inventory of all University of Memphis archaeological collections for compliance with the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Since 2007, the Museum operation has been radically restructured largely through the efforts of interns and graduate assistants from the University of Memphis and community volunteers. Over the past two years, the Museum has developed a core of approximately 40 volunteers. Also, in any given semester, up to five unpaid interns each perform 150 hours of work at the Museum. Museum interns include graduate students in the Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program and upper level undergraduate students. Although intern roles include characteristics of both staff and volunteers, for the purposes of this paper, we consider unpaid interns as volunteers at the C. H. Nash Museum.

The Museum's mission statement is:

The mission of the C. H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa, a division of the University of Memphis, is to protect and interpret the Chucalissa archaeological site's cultural and natural environments, and to provide the University Community and the public with exceptional educational, participatory, and research opportunities on the landscape's past and present Native American and traditional cultures.

The mission mandates that the Museum provide the public with participatory opportunities and preserve as well as interpret the Chucalissa archaeological site on which the Museum is located. Educational and participatory practices are incorporated into all aspects of the Museum operation including volunteer opportunities. An essential Museum staff responsibility includes volunteer engagement not because of inadequate personnel to process collections and other tasks, but because the Museum's Mission Statement mandates that we provide volunteer opportunities. Therefore, the desire and ability to work with volunteers is a requisite qualification for all C. H. Nash Museum employees.

As discussed below, this understanding of the volunteer role evolved over a two-year period at the Museum. Beyond the Mission Statement mandate, in 2009, volunteers began to play an integral role in the final NAGPRA inventory process of University of Memphis collections from archaeological sites throughout West Tennessee. Beginning in 2009, through social media outlets and public service announcements to area press, we consistently receive a substantive response to our publicity for volunteer opportunities at the Museum. Currently, the Museum av-

erages about 20 individuals at a monthly volunteer Saturday. Each Volunteer Day includes a presentation on an aspect of the artifacts or associated records being processed or other tasks being performed. All regular staff also work on those days to assist with the growing diversity of volunteer projects. The monthly Volunteer Saturday is supplemented by individual volunteer contributions throughout the month.

Emphasis is placed on assuring the volunteer's interests are addressed and an appreciation for their contribution is expressed. The Museum staff is very clear on this point. A thank you note is written to all volunteers after their monthly participation. At the weekly staff meeting following each volunteer day event, the participants are discussed individually to evaluate their experience. In the fall of each year, the Museum hosts a volunteer appreciation dinner. At the dinner, a presentation is given of the past year's activities and plans for the next year at the Museum. The presentation emphasizes the essential role of volunteers, solicits their input, and invites their continued participation.

### Contributory Volunteers

Based on Simon's model of contributory projects, we define contributory volunteers as those who have limited input on specific tasks in a process that is highly controlled by the institution. Contributory volunteer engagement is generally brief and limited in scope. The volunteer's desire for informal learning and experience is achieved. The Museum benefits through the active involvement with the community and in having necessary tasks completed. The vast majority of our volunteers are of the contributory type. The C. H. Nash Museum's monthly Volunteer Saturday averages 20 participants. The variation in attendance results largely from competing events in Memphis on any given weekend, promotion by the local media, and other logistical factors. The Saturday event lasts from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. For the past two years, the volunteers have counted, weighed, sorted, and inventoried unprocessed artifacts from archaeological excavations conducted by University of Memphis staff over the past 50 years.

The initial reason for establishing Volunteer Saturdays was to properly inventory and curate an accumulated mass of unprocessed archaeological materials. Of critical importance, since initiating the Volunteer Saturdays in 2009, the Museum's perspective on volunteers moved from being a resource to process cultural materials to appreciating that volunteers form an integral part of our mission mandate. We moved from the need to process artifacts as responsible stewards of collections to asking "We have a core of 40 individuals who regularly volunteer and want to remain active. How do we provide them with opportunities to remain engaged?" This question becomes increasingly important as we complete the more simple collections based tasks (sorting, counting, weighing) that require limited training or direct one-to-one supervision of contributory volunteers.

In the Fall of 2010 we asked our regular Volunteer Day participants if anyone wanted to participate in projects beyond the typical sorting, counting, and weighing activities of prehistoric materials. Several volunteers responded that they did wish to engage in volunteer activities beyond the norm. For example, a husband and wife who have volunteered for nearly two years spent several Volunteer Saturdays identifying culturally diagnostic artifacts curated at the Museum of the prehistoric Poverty Point culture recovered in excavations from West Tennessee. The West Tennessee Poverty Point collections were from satellite sites of the type-site centered a five-hour drive from Memphis in northeast Louisiana. The volunteer couple was so intrigued by the task that they have twice made the five-hour drive to visit the type-site museum.

Another couple opted to help tag the 50 years worth of black and white photos from the museum archives as we prepare to digitize the collection. In the process, they found several photos of themselves dressed in their Native American regalia at a Powwow held 20 years before. Another volunteer with over thirty years of experience as the collections manager at the Pink Palace Museum in Memphis now provides regular presentations on the artifact types that the volunteers are processing and gives tours of the Museum and archaeological site. Other volunteers are digitizing the last 30 years of the University of Memphis Occasional Papers in Anthropology Series that contain reports from archaeological excavations at Chucalissa and other site collections curated at the C. H. Nash Museum.

### Contributory Volunteer Summary

In all of these examples, the volunteer experience falls strictly within the confines of a contributory project. Although volunteers decide on the type of task they wish to take on, such as artifact processing or photograph tagging, they do not determine the materials they will process. Contributory volunteers are trained and monitored with the Museum staff in full control of the process. Although children are welcome, they participate only under the direct supervision of their parent or guardian. There is no assumption that volunteers on contributory projects will return for future Saturday sessions. The demographic data on the volunteers are varied and representative of the range of visitors to the Museum.

As noted, for all contributory volunteers, the Museum provides opportunities for greater engagement, whether in the form of more complex projects, more regular volunteer participation, or a greater voice in the project. The response to such offers is mixed. Some of our most regular volunteers do not wish to move beyond the basic tasks of counting, sorting, and weighing flint flakes and ceramic sherds. For contributory volunteers, we are able to live into our mission mandate of providing opportunities for the public to engage in Museum projects.

### Collaborative Volunteers

Based on Simon's discussion of collaborative projects, we define collaborative volunteers as those who serve as active partners in processes that are ultimately controlled by the museum. The museum sets the broad parameters in which the volunteer operates and actively collaborates and engages with the volunteer to be certain the project is successful. The collaborative volunteer possesses some of the skills necessary to work under less direct supervision than in the case of contributory projects. The volunteer begins to envision the museum more as an institutional support for their interests and opportunities for the community.

Although fitting within the broad parameters of Chucalissa's mission and strategic plan, the actual performance of specific collaborative project relies on the presence of volunteers with interests and skills to perform the necessary tasks. The Museum maintains a list of such projects. Typically, we attempt to either match projects with current volunteer participants or solicit new volunteers with the skill set, or the interest in developing the skill set, to complete the project.

Collaborative projects are illustrative of Palmer's (1998:99-110) comparison of object-based education where the individual must seek access to knowledge through the teacher, contrasted with a subject-based model, where instructors facilitate equal access to knowledge for all. Ultimately, in Palmer's subject-based scheme, instructors simply guide their students. External power relations are replaced by a sense of camaraderie centered on investigation.

There can be a natural transition of volunteerism from contributory to collaborative, or the process may be initiated at the collaborative level. As a transition, the example of the volunteers working with the Poverty Point culture collections is illustrative. Both retirees, the volunteers have considerable discretionary time at their disposal. Through their contributory volunteer tasks and after visiting the archaeological sites, they have become keenly aware of what constitutes the material record of the Poverty Point culture. On their own initiative, they began to photograph and record artifacts they suspected as representative of the Poverty Point culture they encountered in county museums throughout the Midsouth.

Their additional volunteer work will be useful in two ways. First, the C. H. Nash Museum will develop an exhibit on the Poverty Point cultural expression in west Tennessee that fits within the culture history timeline in our main exhibit hall. Second, the identified culturally diagnostic materials are being used in another research project with collections currently curated at the Museum from West Tennessee region. Their additional volunteering is collaborative in that the general parameters of the inquiry are set by the Museum but the volunteers serve as active partners in the creation of the exhibit and the research data collection. Compared to the contributory type, the collaborative project is less tightly controlled by the Museum and the volunteers take considerably more initiative in the process. The Museum and volunteer negotiate the terms and goals of the collaborative project

to which each are mutually accountable. At the same time the Museum maintains complete control over the project, particularly collections access.

The C. H. Nash Museum also supports collaborative volunteerism through student internship projects, where we attempt to match the Museum needs with a student's interest. Such internships are similar to volunteer collaborative projects. Interns differ from regular volunteers in that they are contracted into a mutually beneficial relationship with the Museum for a set amount of hours. The biggest difference from regular volunteers is that internships are taken for academic or service credit.

A recent undergraduate internship used unproven stone tool artifacts from the Museum collections to create a hands-on educational program for visiting school groups. After completing the project, in an exit interview the interns discussed the process. They were pleased to have a hands-on experience in creating a program using materials they had studied in a classroom setting but with which they had limited actual experience. Both students believed they received valuable insights on possible museum career opportunities.

The students revealed another critical point about the internship. They both noted that although they received guidelines for creating the program, they felt somewhat undirected at first. They were provided direction, but not definitive answers to their initial questions. They reported that the initial lack of a clear direction was frustrating. They contrasted the internship with coursework where the instructor provides a syllabus with precise expectations. But after some initial uncertainty in the internship, one student noted that she enjoyed the freedom to choose a project direction that brought out her natural creativity. The second student noted that having to take responsibility and be accountable for the project direction forced him to think outside the box. Their internship project can be likened to creating a painting on a blank canvas compared to a paint-by-number project. Both students appreciated that the end product was a creation that would live on after their internship was completed. The students felt they gained valuable hands-on experience and made a real contribution to the Museum.

Significantly, the students created a quality program in line with the perspective of the intended audience. The interns brought a fresh approach to exploring prehistoric stone tools beyond the interpretive perspective in which archaeologists typically operate. In this capacity, the interns formed a bridge between the professional archaeological community and the typical visitor to the Museum. The interns were challenged to scour the appropriate professional literature but also brainstorm on their own to develop creative ideas to explore the evolution in tool form through time and space. They succeeded in doing so. The collaborative process was key to the success of the project. After the students completed the internship, the Museum staff fine-tuned the presentation, worked out several logistical points, tied the project to curriculum standards for public schools, and then launched the program as a regular offering to the public.

A volunteer with decades of experience in ceramic typology pioneered an-

other collaborative project. On a scheduled Volunteer Saturday she was given a box of large prehistoric sherds of pottery to process. The sherds were from the Museum's unproven collections. Drawing on her considerable experience in prehistoric ceramic analysis, the volunteer noted the significance of the sherds and their suitability for a type collection or for educational purposes. In her ensuing volunteer hours she consulted the archive of reference resources in the Museum library to begin to create a type collection from the sherds. While remaining within boundaries of her volunteer role, she was able to create a space for herself as an individual and utilize her considerable experience and expertise beyond her initial intent. Her contribution is indicative of how the Museum responds to volunteer and intern enthusiasm and interest. Flexibility is the rule, within established boundaries, to provide both the Museum and the volunteer a meaningful outcome. What defines these types of projects as collaborative is the volunteer's input into the direction of the project and their ability to act on that direction.

Our experience shows that collaborative volunteers, like contributory volunteers, have levels of engagement that they may not wish to move beyond. For example, as noted earlier, the C. H. Nash Museum curates a fifty-year collection of thousands of photographic images that range from records of excavations to hosted Native American Powwow dancing. In 2010, we began a project to digitize the collection. The first segment of the collection chosen to digitize was the black and white prints of Native American public performance at the Museum since the 1960s. The first step was to tag the photos. The Museum is fortunate to have both volunteers and staff who are Native American and know many of the individuals in the photos. The process generated considerable interest on the part of both non-Native and Native American volunteers, particularly in the identification of known individuals, tribal affiliations and regalia style. When the volunteers were asked, "What should we do with all of this information? How should the information be made available?" there was little response. When prompted with suggestions such as digitizing for an online presence or memory stations in the Museum, there was general agreement these would be good ideas, but there was little volunteer interest expressed in participating beyond the tagging process. This response demonstrates the seemingly inherent limitations in volunteer levels of participation. The tagging process was an enjoyable experience for the volunteers. They were able to socialize and reminisce about the past. They performed a valuable service that could not have been performed by the existing staff. Yet, they expressed no real interest to take the project to different level. The tagging process was enough.

### Collaborative Volunteer Summary

In the above examples, collaborative and contributory volunteer projects were quite distinct from each other. In collaborative projects, the Museum set broad param-

eters, but there was flexibility on the part of the volunteers to determine the actual content of the final product. In the stone tool project, two undergraduate students with an interest in museum collections offered insights on developing programs for the target audience. Given the students level of experience, their insights were an ideal bridge between the target audience and the professional archaeologist. In the ceramic analysis project, a set of artifacts was provided to the volunteer along with general instructions on the desired final product. The collaborative volunteer was able to utilize her skills to define the steps in the process. In the photographic project, the volunteers brought a specialized area of expertise to carry out a well-defined single component of a broader undertaking.

Collaborative projects can result in increased product complexity. All of the collaborative volunteers required considerably more staff direction than in contributory volunteers projects. For collaborative volunteers, a key component is the skill that the individual brings to the table. For example, the identification of individuals in the photographs is impractical or impossible for those without a direct familial contact or memory of the subjects.

Contributory volunteer projects require limited training and the tasks are readily interchanged among participants. This flexibility is not necessarily the case in collaborative volunteer projects. The individual creating the ceramic type collection moved out-of-town before completing the project. We have yet to identify an individual with the expertise to complete the task. In the photo digitizing process, that collaborative project required sequentially staging the activities of volunteers with different skill sets and interests. Based on participant desires and abilities along with museum needs, contributory volunteer projects were not necessarily the first step prior to taking on collaborative projects. Although this shift may occur, importantly, we suggest that the change is appropriately viewed as a transition rather than a progression.

### Co-Creative Volunteers

Based on Simon's discussion of co-creative projects we define co-creative volunteers as community members who work together with museum staff to create projects based on community interests. Co-creative volunteers have considerably more latitude than other volunteer types in the creative process. The primary function of the museum staff with co-creative volunteers is to provide tools and logistical support, allow the volunteers to perform, and observe the project development. The staff needs to be certain that the process remains within the broad parameters of the defined project. Co-creative volunteers have a vested interest in the project and its completion. Co-creative volunteers by virtue of their tasks are likely to become stakeholders in the museum. A distinction between the collaborative and co-creative volunteer is the latter's ability to take on multiple levels of a project from beginning to end.

An example of a co-creative volunteer project is the creation of the African American Cultural Heritage in Southwest Memphis (AACHSWM) exhibit at the C. H. Nash Museum. As noted in the introduction to this paper, the very foundation of the Museum rests in Jim Crow era segregation in the United States. A key orientation of the Museum over the past several years is the reintegration of the institution as a true partner and community asset into the predominantly African American Southwest Memphis community. As well, the Museum staff rewrote the Museum's Mission Statement to include a holistic interpretation of the site area that incorporated the material record of the historic era such as sharecropper occupations and African American penal farm camps. In fact, African American prison labor was instrumental in building the stockade and replica prehistoric village at the C. H. Nash Museum in the 1960s.

In the two years prior to embarking on the AACHSWM project, the C. H. Nash Museum partnered with neighborhood area associations on a range of projects including film showings, banner exhibits, and hosting a community photographic exhibit. The joint projects occurred at the Museum and nearby Westwood Community Center. Over the course of the two years, the collaboration between the community groups and the Museum became more balanced with the Museum carrying less responsibility for conceptualizing and generating projects. The recently installed AACHSWM exhibit is a single step in a continuum of interactions with a past and a future.

The original impetus behind the AACHSWM project was the discovery in the Museum repository of several boxes of artifacts from a 2002 excavation of a 1920s era African American farmstead at the Chucalissa site. The initial vision was to create an exhibit around these artifacts. With \$18,000 in funding from the Strengthening Communities Grant Initiative, nine area high school students were able to create the AACHSWM exhibit. What moved the exhibit from a collaborative venture, as in the case of the stone tool project, to a co-creative volunteer process was the role of the high school students. The only restraint placed on the students was that the exhibit had to explore the African American experience in southwest Memphis.

The project did not go as planned. The grant proposal focused on the creation of a single exhibit on the excavation of the 1920s era farmstead. The students created that exhibit, plus two walls of banner posters, a resource center, and a 20-minute documentary edited from over 30 hours of oral histories with community leaders. The students made the final content decisions on all products of the project including the color of the walls, the interview questions for the oral history, editing the documentary, and selecting the exhibit artifacts. All of the exhibit products were linked back to the cultural heritage concept of the 1920s era farmstead exhibit. In his comments at the exhibit opening, one of the students noted, "It was all on us. There were no limits to what we could do." Participants only needed to remain true to creating an exhibit on the African American Cultural Heritage of Southwest Memphis, the basis for the grant proposal.

The co-creative volunteer nature of the student participation was critical to the project's success. The Museum staff had limited expertise in the history of the Southwest Memphis community. The high school students either possessed the expertise or had access to the knowledge. Beyond technical and logistical support, the primary directive of the Museum staff was to keep the research focused on Southwest Memphis and not the broader Memphis community. For example, when considering the Civil Rights Movement, the student default focus was on the April 4, 1968 assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the related Memphis sanitation workers strike, and The National Civil Rights Museum. By redirecting the focus to Southwest Memphis, the students ultimately recorded interviews with local community leaders who participated in bus boycotts and grew up in Jim Crow era segregation on the very streets the youth currently reside. Similarly, the student's initial default for exploring musical heritage was Beale Street, Sun Records, or Stax Music — all located in Memphis, but outside the Southwest community. In focusing the students back to their own neighborhood, they explored recording industry legends such as Al Green and Little Howling Wolf. Mrs. Bobbie Jones, a long-time resident of Southwest Memphis and the high school music teacher of Stax recording artist Isaac Hayes, who was born and raised in Southwest Memphis, played the soundtrack for their documentary.

The total student creation that included the 1920s farmstead exhibit, a resource center, banners, and the documentary resulted in the Southwest Memphis residents viewing the C. H. Nash Museum more as an asset to the community. At the same time, by presenting the cultural heritage of the Southwest community, the C. H. Nash Museum takes on a greater responsibility and stake in the community beyond the boundary of the Museum walls.

At the completion of the AACHSWM exhibit project, the Museum staff and community members met to consider the next step on their mutual continuum of activity and interaction. The community and Museum decided to hold the first ever Black History Celebration at the C. H. Nash Museum in February of 2011. All of the speakers at the event were Southwest Memphis community residents except for one graduate student from the History Department at the University of Memphis, who spoke on the evolution of Southwest Memphis from the Civil War to the present day. In this regard, the event moved toward what Simon terms a hosted project (2010:281–300) where the museum provides the facility and broad parameters for logistical use of the facility but the participants create, organize, and perform the event.

### Co-Creative Volunteer Summary

The AACHSWM co-creative project was substantively different than either the contributory or collaborative volunteer efforts discussed in this paper. Given the final product, the level of input from the Museum staff was limited in this co-creative process, although two graduate students from the University of Memphis coordinated the project as internships. The commitment required of volunteers working on such projects was considerably greater than in other volunteer types. Arguably, the actual performance of such projects pushes the limits of our definition of a volunteer. For example, the high school students in the AACHSWM project were paid a small stipend for their participation. Although all of the students participated in the project both before and after the required number of hours for the stipend, the compensation cannot be dismissed as a motivating factor in their recruitment.

The greatest lasting impact to date of the AACHSWM project is the reciprocal stake that community places in the Museum and the Museum's stake in the community. As a result, the distinction between the community and the Museum became less clear-cut. This fact is illustrated by the shift in attitude of the local neighborhood association. The AACHSWM project marked a distinct change in the relationship between the two entities that had been evolving over the previous three years. In 2007, the community often viewed the University of Memphis outreach into Southwest Memphis with considerable suspicion. For example, as one resident noted in a rather confrontational 2007 meeting, "The last time that the University did their research here was for over a two-year period and all we got was that chart on the wall." University faculty were viewed as working in the community only for their own self-interest.

Over the three-year period leading up to the exhibit opening, Museum staff met on a regular basis with community leaders soliciting their input on the role of the C. H. Nash Museum in Southwest Memphis. Although the community leadership was supportive of the AACHSWM project, at the outset, they were not interested in participating. By the time of the exhibit opening, the president of the neighborhood association noted "we need to have more of the community know about *our* exhibit at the Museum." This individual also spoke at the Black History Month Celebration several months later.

The C. H. Nash Museum is increasingly considered by the local community as a neighborhood stakeholder that participates in civic events like any other institution. As well, the Museum functions as a community asset for exploring and celebrating the cultural heritage of the neighborhood. This factor directly results from the Museum's co-creative volunteer project. As noted, we view the shift in relationship as a point on a continuum of engagement that will continue to evolve toward a more sustained relationship into the future.

### Worts' Critical Assessment Framework and the Typology of Volunteers

Worts' Critical Assessment Framework (CAF) (2006:41-49) provides a model in which to evaluate a volunteer program's fit with the institution's mission statement. The CAF contains the cultural attributes or values of a typical museum mission statement. That is, like mission statements the CAF does not rely on quantitative measures such as number of artifacts processed, volunteer participants, or photographs digitized, but on the cultural values, quality, and nature of the volunteer program. The CAF allows volunteer programs to be assessed based on concepts such as those in the C. H. Nash Museum Mission Statement of "providing exceptional educational, participatory, and research opportunities."

Worts writes:

Isn't it odd that museums — one of society's principal institutions dedicated to culture — do not measure their success or impacts in cultural terms? Attendance, revenue, objects accessioned, exhibits mounted, and publications published are some of the measures that museums use to assess their operations. But, it can be argued, none of these are cultural indicators. They do not reflect on the cultural needs, opportunities, or well-being of the community. Nor do they offer insights into the cultural impacts of museum operations on individuals (2006:41).

Flowing from this understanding, the success of the volunteer program at the C. H. Nash Museum, as mandated in the Mission Statement, cannot be evaluated solely or perhaps even primarily based on number of artifacts processed or volunteer hours contributed. Cultural values such as "exceptional educational, participatory, and research opportunities" are less readily quantified. However, for the simple logistics of a museum operation, a volunteer program that is focused exclusively on the experience of the participant with little or no regard to product is not a volunteer program but, rather, solely an educational experience. At the C. H. Nash Museum, we can readily quantify the success of our volunteer program in terms of hours contributed and artifacts processed. The Worts CAF approach allows us to evaluate the cultural values dimension as well.

Table 1 is a modification of the Critical Assessment Framework — Museums Projects and Initiatives Chart (Worts 2006:49) used to evaluate the different types of volunteer projects considered in this paper. We recognize that our use of the modified CAF chart (mCAF) does not provide a definitive or mutually exclusive assessment of volunteer types, cultural concepts, or values when applied to the case studies presented in this paper. Rather, the mCAF allows us to explore the cultural indicators for patterns and trends in the case studies and volunteer program types.

Table 1. Modification of the Critical Assessment Framework—Museums Projects and Initiatives Chart

The Volunteer	Volunteer Type		
	Contribute	Collaborate	Co-Create
<b>Personal Level</b>			
Contribute and/or generate new insights	×	×	×
Capture imagination		×	×
Stimulate curiosity	×	×	×
Encourage personal reflection		×	×
Enhance ability to think critically and creatively		×	×
Provide opportunity to examine and clarify values			×
Demonstrate relevance to daily life		×	×
Affirm, challenge, deepen identity		×	×
Help develop a sense of place			×
Help deal with complexity and uncertainty		×	×
Increase responsible action		×	×
<b>Community Level</b>			
Address vital and relevant needs			×
Generate information connecting local to globe			×
Engage a diverse public			
Provide an outlet for voices of diverse group			×
Encourage social interaction and debate			×
Act as a catalyst for action			×
Stimulate intergenerational actions			×
Link existing community groups together			
Initiate or enhance long-term collaborative relations			×
Create partnerships that empower community groups			×
Enhance credibility of participants			×
Result in products that impact community		×	×
Generate info for decisions in museum/ community	×	×	×
<b>Museum Level</b>			
Challenge personal and institutional assumptions		×	×
Guided by clearly articulated goals	×	×	
Use the most effective vehicle to achieve goals	×	×	
Identify and value staff skills and resources	×	×	×
Empower, transform and affect all involved			×
Create a community of learning within staff			×
Engage key players early in the process			×
Include multiple perspectives			×
Engaged different learning styles	×	×	×
Integrate different dimensions of sustainability			×
Integrate scientific, local, and traditional knowledge			
Catalyst for partnering community organizations			×



**Contributory Volunteer Projects** The contributory volunteer projects considered in this paper provide participants with a direct hands-on experience with materials typically not accessible to the museum visitor. The simple tactile experience can be quite stimulating. As well, in typical artifact processing experiences in archaeological labs, the volunteer gains a considerable insight into the excavated material record. Contributory volunteers have a "behind the scenes" experience on a more intimate level than the regular museum visitor. Many of the other attributes listed on the mCAF chart such as "capture imagination," "personal reflection," and "relevance to daily life" do not appear inherent in the contributory project type. However, the volunteer may be encouraged to consider these values. For example, informal presentations contextualize the material record for the volunteer beyond viewing piles of ceramic sherds or flint flakes. Volunteers are challenged to consider the variation in lithic raw material, function and interpretive meaning of historic bottles, and so forth. The project leader can direct the contributory volunteer experiences to include additional insights.

At the community level, in our case studies, contributory projects do not address cultural indicators listed on the mCAF chart. As a predominantly Native American focused site, we pondered if the geographic community or community of volunteers were Native American, would the relationship of the volunteers to the origin of the artifacts make a difference at the community level? Given the inherent nature of contributory projects, we think not. However, we do suspect that were the community of volunteers Native American, there may be the opportunity to transition the contributory participants toward collaborative or co-creative projects (e.g., Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008).

On the museum level, contributory projects engage staff and volunteers in completing necessary tasks. The goals are very clearly articulated. Having volunteers perform many of the rote tasks of sorting, labeling, and weighing, in a process that requires limited training or direct supervision is an effective means to achieve the Museum's task of properly curating excavated cultural materials. Given the variation in types of cultural materials and processes, multiple styles of learning may be engaged. On the museum level, the institutions total control over contributory volunteer projects is paramount and is made explicit by the very nature of the process.

Contributory volunteer projects seem to best articulate the economic model for museums of accomplishing tasks and the leisure model for volunteers in having a new experience. Contributory projects contain only a few of the indicators listed on the mCAF chart. The contributory volunteer projects at the C. H. Nash Museum are in-line with the mission statement mandate "to provide the University Community and the public" with "participatory" opportunities on "past . . . Native American and traditional cultures" of the Chucalissa site area. Whether the opportunities are educational or exceptional is not a given, though we strive for that end.

**Collaborative Volunteer Projects** Collaborative volunteer projects address all of the indicators listed for the contributory type. At the personal level on the mCAF chart, collaborative volunteer projects clearly engage the individual in a wide range of stimulating processes, as evidenced by the stone tool program discussed earlier. The student's exit interviews fully demonstrate that most of the personal level indicators listed on the mCAF chart were addressed. This demonstration is less clear for the other case study collaborative projects. However, for example, in the photo-tagging project, the volunteers might have scored additional indicators had they chosen to take on aspects of the project they declined. The same situation seems apparent with the other case studies. This circumstance results from a volunteer project that in many ways functions as a middle ground between a contributory type that is controlled by the museum and a co-creative type that relinquishes the vast majority of that control to the volunteer.

On the community level, collaborative projects begin to take on mCAF chart indicators. This is so because the collaborative case studies all led directly to products that would be available for the visiting public to experience. The photo-tagging project will ultimately result in a resource to contextualize the Native American presence during the modern era at the Museum. The broader Memphis community will be able to situate their voices within the setting, primarily based in a nostalgic past.

At the museum level, the collaborative type mCAF chart indicators in the case studies include challenging of personal and institutional assumptions. This indicator is included because the collaborative process mandates a dialogue between the volunteer and the museum. The contributory projects are more of a one-way monologue of the museum speaking at the volunteer. The collaborative shift is of considerable importance in moving toward a partnership of the museum and community.

For the collaborative project case studies, given the greater interaction, complexity, and skill level, the type more fully incorporates the "exceptional educational" qualities included in the C. H. Nash Museum Mission Statement. We note as well that the "participatory" mandate of the Mission Statement takes on a qualitatively different meaning. The participation moves from a simple hands-on experience to one of collaboration in determining how and what will be presented by the museum. Simon writes "Collaborative projects are institutionally driven partnerships in which staff members work with community partners to develop new programs, exhibition, or offerings" (2010:231). This application is wholly consistent with the case studies presented for collaborative volunteer projects.

**Co-creative Volunteer Projects** Co-creative volunteer projects incorporate the mCAF chart indicators most completely on all levels. At the personal and museum levels the values are seen in the increased dialogue that is the very essence of the project. By definition, the volunteer is considered a partner who has the authority

to operate within the parameters initially set by or negotiated with the museum. The AACHSWM exhibit project is a prime example of this partnership. Similar types of co-creative volunteer projects resulted in an arboretum at the Chucalissa site created by a local garden club, multiple exhibits created by Native American tribes, and the initiation of a medicinal plant sanctuary through a partnership with a local herbalist. In all of these undertakings, the volunteer and Museum established the broad parameters of the final product and then the Museum provided logistical support to the volunteer partners who carried out the projects.

Noteworthy is that co-creative volunteer projects, based on their very definition, and as verified by the mCAF chart indicators, most effectively engage the museum and community. The discussion in this paper on the shifting relationship with the community surrounding the C. H. Nash Museum over the three-year period leading up to and since completion of the AACHSWM exhibit supports this statement.

In all of the co-creative projects noted, without exception, the volunteer participants who generated the final product have taken on stakeholder roles in the Museum. In terms of mission, co-creative volunteers capture all of the elements of the contributory and collaborative types. In addition, "research opportunities" are recognized in co-creative volunteer types. Co-creative volunteers are in a position to carry out projects that "protect and interpret" the site's "cultural and natural environments."

### **Hierarchy of Commitment & Radical Trust**

Co-creative projects seemingly required less direct effort on the part of museum staff, however, as volunteers take on more co-creative activities the staff must increase their input to ensure the projects are aligned with the mission and purpose of the museum. As volunteers increase their decision-making roles and authority in projects, staff must also increase their efforts to create a structure of accessible knowledge beyond simple project management. Staff must create an interactive thread that ties the volunteer to multiple levels of decision making in the museum.

The results of volunteer participation in museum processes, including decision making, also strengthen staff participation in decision-making and knowledge stewardship. A mutually beneficial relationship is possible when knowledge is reciprocated as in the case AACHSWM exhibit. The students reciprocated with prior knowledge and resources with staff while exploring their past and claiming a stake in the future exhibition of their culture's heritage.

The potential impact of increased volunteer input in co-creative projects therefore increases the engagement with volunteers in establishing the broad parameters in which they operate. In this regard, if the Museum is not prepared or able to act on volunteer demands for mission mandated "exceptional participatory" experiences, then untapped resources and responsibilities of the mission mandate go unfilled.

As we note, the three-type model is not without ambiguity, and represents less of a linear continuum or scale but one that is realigned at intervals upon intentional and regular review and reflection. Such an approach generates perpetual tension between past precedent for the sake of the past precedent and spiraling out of control without structure. We find Herreman's distinction between "core" and "permanent" exhibits applicable to the model of volunteer programs. Herreman defines core exhibits as integral to the institution, thematically consistent, but readily modified to meet opportunities and demands. He views permanent exhibits as more static and less readily modified to meet immediate demands (Herreman 2004:92). In the same way, contributory, collaborative, and co-creative volunteer projects are all integral to our institution, consistent in their scope of engagement, but readily modified to meet opportunities and demands of the Museum's mission, strategic plan, and volunteer interest/availability.

Of critical importance, we argue that the three types of volunteers should not be viewed as progressive but as transitional. Further, we question whether one type produces more invested stakeholders than another. Some of our most regular volunteers who stake a strong claim in the Museum perform exclusively contributory projects. On the other hand, co-creative volunteers, such as the high school students in the AACHSWM project, are considerably less regular in their participation in Museum activities. The irregularity results in part from competing activities and moving from the Memphis area to attend college.

From here the concept of radical trust, or knowledge contribution from lay participants in the museum's process is applicable. Volunteers are restructuring the commitment of museum staff to communication. When a volunteer is radically trusted by the museum they are allowed to input and represent their outside expertise in the projects to which they contribute. Therefore, as this process is institutionalized, including in an online presence, we cross into a new dimension of knowledge evolution. Radical trust means not only inviting volunteer contributors to provide input, but also their ability to censor the output. In the wiki, blog, and participatory world of museums, the trend is to move toward a substantive virtual presence. A virtual presence can be comprised of largely unregulated contributions to museum knowledge bases, relying on radical trust in developing stakeholders. In the same way that social media is meant to be an interactive and dynamic exchange, volunteers increasingly will be in dialogue. By creating a core of volunteers of all types, the museum insures a responsible and creative interaction that is mission driven.

### **Conclusion**

Simon's scheme of contributory, collaborative, and co-creative projects coupled with Worts' Critical Assessment Framework as applied to case studies at the C. H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa proved to be useful in determining whether volunteer

programs were in line with the mission statement of the Museum. The application suggests the types of volunteer projects are not inherently hierarchical in nature. Individuals do not necessarily pass through a sequence of volunteer stages. In this regard, movements among volunteer types are best viewed as transitions and not progressions. The three volunteer types encompass the range of variation that might be expected of individual volunteer participants. All three types of volunteer programs are necessary to fully live into the typical museum mission statement.

To move beyond economic or leisure models of volunteerism, mission driven approaches require considerably greater coordination and organization by the museum staff. This is not to suggest that the economic, leisure, and mission interests are in opposition. As demonstrated in this paper's case studies, the volunteer programs flow from the C. H. Nash Museum Mission Statement. At the same time, the economic impact of aiding a reduced staff in the processing of prehistoric artifacts is considerable. From a similar perspective, programs and exhibits were created at the Museum beyond the ability of the existing staff. As well, a leisure component to the volunteer program at the Museum is very apparent. For example, the photo digitizing project is a strong draw for a layer of participants who trace their own legacy at the Museum and reminisce about the past. However, volunteer programs that are first driven by mission invite the visitor to engage dynamically around the very purpose of the museum. This approach invites the volunteer to become an active stakeholder in the institution not because of an economic need or an individual's discretionary free time but because they wish to partner in the very reason for the institution's existence. Such an approach is the logical direction in which to take a mission driven volunteer mandate — not because it's an expedient way to get things done, but because it is integral to creating relevant, engaged, and sustainable institutions.

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