



SMITHSONIAN DIRECTIVES CHANGE TRANSMITTAL

March 24, 1995

TO: Heads of organizations units

SUBJECT: SD 828 Visitor Information and Associates' Reception
Center -Partial Revision #1

A change has been made to Page 2, second paragraph "Responsibilities of the Visitor Information and Associates' Reception Center". VIARC's responsibility is to review specific documents for content only (not for style or expression).

CANCELLATION: SO 828, Page 2, dated 1/25/95

INQUIRIES: Office of Visitor Information and Associates'
Reception Center

RETENTION: Indefinite. This directive is subject to review
for currency 24 months from the date hereof.

FILING

INSTRUCTIONS: Replace pages 1 and 2, dated 1/25/95 with the
attached pages.

COPIES: Copies of this directive may be obtained through
Office of Planning, Management and Budget (OPMB)

EXCESS COPIES: Please return all excess copies to OPMB for reuse.



SMITHSONIAN DIRECTIVES-TRANSMITTAL

January 25, 1995

TO: Heads of organization units

SUBJECT: SD 828. (Rev), Visitor Information and Associates
Reception Center (VIARC).- Revised Edition

Smithsonian Directive (SD) 828 has been revised to:

1. reflect increased responsibilities of VIARC;
2. explain VIARC's pre-visit education outreach to the tour and travel industry;
3. format the information for easier reading and accessibility.

Please replace OM 832 dated October 23, 1984, with the attached revision.


Under Secretary

CANCELLATION: OM 832 dated October 23, 1984

INQUIRIES: Visitor Information and Associates' Reception
Center

RETENTION: Indefinite. This directive is subject to review
for currency 18 months from the date hereof.

FILING

INSTRUCTIONS: File this directive in numerical sequence with
other current directives.

COPIES: Copies of this directive may be obtained
through the Office of Planning, Management and
Budget.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



SMITHSONIAN DIRECTIVE 828 (Rev Ed)
(formerly OM 832)

March 24, 1995

VISITOR INFORMATION AND ASSOCIATES' RECEPTION CENTER (VIARC)

Background

The Smithsonian Institution established the Visitor Information and Associates' Reception Center (VIARC) in 1970 to provide information and reception services for Smithsonian National Associates. Over the years, its charter has expanded to include responsibility for administering a range of centralized information and assistance programs serving the public, Associate members of the Institution, Smithsonian staff, and volunteers. Several of VIARC's programs operate seven days a week, and involve the coordination and direction of two large corps of volunteers who are a primary source of support for the Institution's public information activities and for project assistance behind the scenes.

Policy

This directive reaffirms the Smithsonian's commitment to maintain and strengthen its capabilities to:

- Inform, orient, and assist its visitors.
 - Respond to public inquiries.
 - Provide a coordinated means to encourage the effective use and acknowledgement of those who volunteer to serve the Institution.
 - Promote and support Smithsonian Associate memberships and member services.
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overall Responsibilities and Relationships

The directors of museums, galleries, and other activities are responsible for the development and maintenance of effective information programs and services for the public and for support of volunteer programs under their jurisdiction.

**overall
Responsibilities
and Relationships**
(continued)

The Visitor Information and Associates' Reception Center, under the Director of Communications, provides assistance and coordination for the performance of selected aspects of these activities in support of Institutional and bureau programs.

**Responsibilities
of the Visitor
Information and
Associates•
Reception center**

As a central support organization and the principal source of contact between the public and the Institution, VIARC is responsible for coordinating and developing programs, materials, systems, and facilities for public information, visitor orientation, and volunteer assistance. These responsibilities, carried out in consultation with the directors of bureaus and offices, include the authority to pursue, where appropriate, the improvement of public information and visitor-related services, an exterior graphic information system, pre-visit education outreach and the enhancement of membership-related services for Smithsonian Associates.

VIARC is also responsible for the pre-publication review of all visitor-orientation brochures and related publications for content accuracy.

VIARC divides its central support responsibilities among the following eight activity areas.

Services and activities of VIARC include:

- Smithsonian Information Center {SIC}.
 - Volunteer Information Specialist Program.
 - Public Inquiry Mail & Telephone Information Services (PIMATS).
 - Information Resource Division (IRD).
 - Behind-the-Scenes Volunteer Program (BVP).
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Responsibilities
of the Visitor
Information and
Associates•
Reception center
(continued)

- Pre-visit Education outreach.
- Exterior Graphic Information System.
- Castle Docent Program.

Details on the services and activities of
VIARC follow.

smithsonian
Information
center

The Institution's primary orientation and information facility for visitors is located in the Great Hall of the Smithsonian Institution, Building. Open daily from 9 a.m. - 5:30 p.m., except December 25th, the Center provides:

- Two orientation theaters featuring a 20-minute video overview of the Institution.
- Interactive "touch-screen" programs about the Smithsonian in 6 languages.
- Scale models of Washington's Monumental core.
- Electronic wall maps and interactive "touch-screen" programs highlighting popular capital attractions.
- Scrolling screens monitors listing daily activities at the Smithsonian.
- Printed information materials in 6 languages.
- Associate Reception Services and membership sales.
- Volunteer Information Specialists to answer questions and provide direction from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Volunteer
Information
Specialist
Program

Through this VIARC volunteer program, the Institution's Washington, D.C., visitors and callers are provided with timely, accurate, and consistent information about Smithsonian exhibitions, activities, programs, and services as detailed later in this directive (See page 6).

•Public Inquiry
Hail ▼
Telephone
Inforaation
Service• (PIMAT8)

These activities form the Institution's central response and referral points for public inquiries. Public inquiries consist of solicited and un olicited questions.and comments received from the public orally, electronically, and in writing. Prompt and adequate response to such inquiries provides the Institution with an opportunity to promote further understanding of its initiatives, exhibitions, programs, and activities in art, history, and science in a coherent, consistent manner. VIARC's specific responsibilities regarding public inquiries are detailed later in this directive (See page 8) .

Inforaation
Resource Division
(IRD)

Working through key bureau, organization and program representatives Institution-wide, it is the responsibility of this Division to produce and maintain VIARC's pan-Institutio'n on-line and printed information systems and resources regarding museum exhibitions, daily activities, events, programs, and services used by internal Smithsonian audiences and by the public. IRD also designs and produces printed a erials and publications that support VIARC program activities, and a range of.printed and screened information materials and aids for the public. Additionally, with the Office of Public Affai s. (OPA) as outlined in Smithsonian Direct·ive 813, "Public Information Programs," the Division is responsible for the pre-publication review of all visitor information brochures and related publications produced internally by Smithsonian bureaus, as well as those submitted for review by organizations outside the Institution.

(Visitor information materials are sent to VIARC prior to publication primarily for consideration of content and are then sent to others within the Office of Communications for r view, expression, and consistency with Smithsonian policies and editorial standards.)

**Behind-the Scenes
Volunteer Program
(BVP)**

The Institution's central recruitment, registration and placement activities for behind the scenes volunteers are carried out through this program as outlined later in the directive (See page 12).

**Pre-Visit
Education
Outreach**

"This activity provides the Smithsonian's central pre-visit education outreach to the travel and tourism industry and to prospective visitors. Through the promotion and distribution of pre-visit education information, the purchase of annual industry memberships and external on-line services, regular mailings, attendance at marketplace functions and industry development seminars, VIARC interfaces with key segments of the local, national, and international tourism industry on behalf of the entire Institution. Generic Smithsonian information as well as bureau and office specific information is disseminated to:

- Promote the Institution as a primary tourist destination in the nation's capital.

- Aid in effective pre-trip planning by informing travel planners and prospective visitors about the physical size of the Institution and the full range of its collections, exhibitions, programs, and services.

VIARC is listed in various industry directories as the central Smithsonian organization from which to acquire information to aid in pre-trip planning.

VIARC also maintains mailing lists of principal industry contacts for domestic and international outreach which can be made available to individual bureaus and organizations. As appropriate, VIARC refers tour and convention planners to bureaus and offices for information and assistance regarding their activities.

Exterior Graphic
Information
System

Ten color-coordinated, free-standing pylons strategically placed on the Institution's pedestrian walkways along the National Mall provide informationwaytinding, and o ientation assistance to visitors. Text ana international symbols provide information about th'e-focus of each museum, accessible entrances, and the service& available. A large map locates Smithsonian museums on and near the National Mall, identifies the visitor's location, indicates distances, locates Metro stations, and more. Further assistance is provided through general information directories situated on the National Mall, which are coordinated with the National Park Service.

castle Docent
Program

Tours of the Smithsonian Institution Building (Castle) f0J" the public and Associate members are provided by Docents on a regular weekly sche ule throughout the year. These tours inform visitors about the history and organization of the Institution and the architecture and furnishings of the Castle. Tours in Spanish are conducted monthly; and during warm-weather months, Castle Docents also provide tours of the Haupt Garden. VIARC recruits and trains volunteers to serve as Docents.

Volunteer
Information
Specialist
Program--
General

Volunteers are recruited and trained through this VIARC program to staff the Smithsonian Information Center, 16 museum information desks in 13 Smithsonian buildings in washington, .o.c., and the Institution's central telephone information lines. Each of these activity areas operates seven days a week-and observes a 10 AM to 4 PM workday, except the Smithsonian Information Center where volunteers begin their tour of duty at 9 AM. The Program maintains service records; establishes policie.s and procedures for governance; and observes centralized scheduling, supervi,ion, and continuing education activities for all Information Specialists. Volunteers working in Telephone Information Services are scheduled and supervised separately.

Volunteer :
Information:
Specialist
Program -
scope

This program staffs information desks in all Washington-based Smithsonian public facilities except:

- The National Zoological Park.
 - The Anacostia Museum.
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Volunteer
Information
Specialist
Program--
Responsibilities-

responsibilities are to:

- Assure that volunteer participants who staff the Smithsonian Information Center and museum information desks are informed and knowledgeable about the Smithsonian, the National collections, and Institution programs, events, services, exhibitions, and activities.
 - Assure that volunteer participants are properly scheduled to meet visitor traffic levels.
 - Assure that volunteer participants are properly recognized.
 - Assure that volunteer participants are properly supervised, prepared, and equipped to engage in the following activities:
 - To provide a pleasant welcome to all visitors.
 - To orient visitors to the Smithsonian Institution complex and individual museums.
 - To distribute a variety of Smithsonian information and orientation materials, (e.g., museum floor plans, materials for visitors with disabilities, SI brochures in six languages, membership information/applications).
 - To provide information on museum tours and activities.
 - To provide direction to specific museum exhibitions and service facilities.
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Volunteer
Information
specialist
Program--
Responsibilities
(continued)

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- To process visitor security passes for appointments in restricted areas on weekdays in.mqst museums.
 - To coordinate prescheduled tour groups with.docents in most museums.
 - To distribute, on occasion, free ticketsjvouchers and literature for ongoing and special museum programs and events.
 - To refer visitors seeking artifact identification, authentication, or related information to appropriate Smithsonian staff, departments, and divisions.
 - To provide membership information, and special Associate S\$rvices and sales at specific locations.
 - To provide general information on Washington, D.C., and popular visitor attractions in the nation's capital.
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Mail Functions
and Activities--
PIMATS--VIARC
Responsibility

Answering public inquiries is a responsibility that rests primarily with the bureau or office best equipped to respond.

Public Inquiry Mail and Telephone Information Services (PIMATS) serves as the research, response, and referral point for the Institution's unsolicited public mail as outlined in this directive.

Mail Functions
and Activities--
Mail service
Center, OPlants

The Mail Service Center in the Office of Plant Services receives the greatest volume of Smithsonian mail for sorting and dispatching to addressees. The Mail Service Center:

- Forwards promptly all mail bearing sufficient address for delivery.
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Hail Functions
... Activities--
Mail service
center, OPlants
(fontinued)

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- Opens correspondence without a sufficient address to check the salutation for proper routing.
 - Forwards all public inquiries with insufficient salutation for proper routing to the Public Inquiry Mail and Telephone Information Services (PIMATS), VIARC.
-

Mail Functions
and Activities--
Smithsonian
Bureaus and
Offices

Smithsonian bureaus and offices:

- Answer public requests for information promptly and adequately.
 - Forward public inquiry mail that is not within their purview to an appropriate unit if known, or to PIMATS for routing assistance.
 - Maintain records of correspondence with the public, making these available to PIMATS, as requested, to demonstrate or document the extent of this effort at the Smithsonian.
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PIMATS--Special
Mail

Mail inquiries that cite the Freedom of Information Act or request information on administrative matters are governed by Smithsonian Directive 813, "Public Information Programs," which requires immediate notification of the Office of Public Affairs.

Telephone
Information--
Functions and
Activities
(PIMATS)

Volunteer Information Specialists and VIARC staff answer the Institution's central public telephone information lines (202/357-2700) from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., seven days a week. The Telephone Information Services (TIS) program is the Institution's primary response and referral point for public telephone inquiries and for the dissemination of a wide range of information about the Institution, and its exhibitions, programs, and activities.

Telephone
Information--
Functions and
Activities
(PIMATS)
(continued)

It should not be confused with the Institution's central switchboard (202-357 1300), which operates Monday- Friday and is a function of the Communications Management Division; Office of Information Resource Management (OIRM). VIARC's TIS also provides 24 hour recorded information, through Dial A-Museum, which lists daily activities across the Institution in English; a daily activities' recording in Spanish provided in cooperation with the Office of Public Affairs; a Sky Watchers' Report about activities to be noted in the night sky done in cooperation with the National Air and Space Museum (NASM); other recorded special activity information, and TTY service for persons with communication impairments (202/357-1729).

PIMATS--
Additional
Information

Staff in the PIMATS can be of help in answering public mail and telephone inquiries. The Branch Chief, Mail Services, Office of Plant Services, can explain matters involving mail service. The Manager, Communications Management Division, Office of Information Resource Management, can explain matters pertaining to the operation of the central switchboard. Further information for use may be found in:

- SO 119, Correspondence Handbook.
 - SO 02, Mail Management.
 - SO 813, Public Information Programs.
 - SO 408, Telephone, Telegraph & Radio Communication Services
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Behind-the-scenes
Volunteer Program
(BVP)--General

BVP registers all behind-the-scenes volunteers, maintains service records, and as appropriate, establishes policies and procedures. Further, it is the work of this service to respond to staff requests for volunteer assistance and to recruit and refer qualified volunteers to specific projects commensurate with their skills, experience, and interests.

**Behind-the-Scenes
Volunteer Program
(BVP) --Scope**

This program serves all Washington-based Smithsonian bureaus and offices except:

- The National Zoological Park's Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ).
 - The Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies' Festival of American Folklife.
 - The Smithsonian Associates.
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**Behind-the-scenes
Volunteer Program
(BVP) --
Responsibilities**

BVP responsibilities are to:

- Register and maintain the service records of all volunteers working in nonpublic areas through the time and attendance systems established with individual bureaus in Washington, D.C. and most Smithsonian bureaus outside of the nation's capital.
 - Facilitate issuance of Smithsonian identification credentials for volunteers working behind the scenes in Washington, D.C. facilities upon confirmation of status by volunteer staff-supervisors and in compliance with security regulations established by the Office of Protection Services. Smithsonian identification credentials are issued for the length of a project and may not exceed one year.
 - Provide new behind-the-scenes volunteers in Washington, D.C. facilities with a copy of the "Handbook for Volunteers Working Behind the Scenes," and an orientation to the Smithsonian. Volunteers working with SI organizations outside the Washington, D.C., area are provided with the "Handbook."
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Behind-the-Scenes
Volunteer Program
(BVP) --
Responsibilities
(continued)

- Receive requests for volunteer assistance from staff in Washington, D.C. facilities in the form of written project descriptions, which detail project duration, preferred volunteer skills, experience, and education and which also indicate the security status of the project work area.

- Recruit and screen prospective volunteers for projects in Washington, D.C. facilities through written applications and personal interviews, referring qualified persons to projects appropriate to their interest, skill, and experience for staff consideration and acceptance. Reference checks are initiated by the project supervisor when the work area is considered security sensitive. Assistance can be requested from the Personnel Security Office, Office of Protection Services (OPS).

- Provide all behind-the-scenes volunteer supervisors with the following annual volunteer service awards:

LENGTH OF TIME	AWARD
1 Year	Certificate of Appreciation
2, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 Years	Smithsonian Volunteer Pin
All Intervening Years	Appropriate Number Attachment for Pin

- Retrieve Smithsonian identification credentials from behind-the-scenes volunteers in Washington, D.C. facilities; provide letters of appreciation and request written evaluations of volunteer's experience.

Behind-the-scenes
Volunteer Program
(BVP)--
Responsibilities
(continued)

- Provide ongoing support and assistance in staff/volunteer relationships.
 - Conduct annual Smithsonian-wide volunteer survey to document the number of volunteers across the Institution, their hours of service, and program involvement.
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Volunteer
standards of
Ethical conduct

Ethical standards governing the participation of volunteers, which apply to all Smithsonian volunteers, are established as outlined in Smithsonian Directive 208, "Ethical Standards for Smithsonian Institution Volunteers."
