



# Visitor Studies Association Annual Conference Host Community RFP

Currently accepting proposals for **2012, 2013, and 2014 Host Communities**

**In order to be considered for 2012, all proposal materials must be received on or before, April 9, 2010.**

**Everyone wins!** What makes the Visitor Studies Association (VSA) Annual Conference special? It's the People. It's the Places. It's the Ideas. The VSA Annual Conference offers your museums and your city an opportunity to shine. Your community and VSA are promoted to more than 2,500 individuals and museums across the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia. Between 150 and 200 individuals regularly attend the Annual Conference.

## **General Information:**

The Visitor Studies Association is an international network of professionals committed to understanding and enhancing visitor experiences in informal learning settings through research, evaluation, and dialogue. Since 1988, international museum professionals have convened for networking and professional development at an annual summer conference.

Traditionally, VSA meets over five days in July or August (Tuesday – Saturday), with two days of pre-conference workshops and two and a half days of conference sessions. Attendance has varied over the years from 120 to 250, and currently averages about 200 attendees. VSA strives to provide a conference that is **affordable, accessible, and relevant.**

## **Conference Structure:**

Tuesday	Pre-conference workshops (typically held at local museums)
Wednesday	Pre-conference workshops (typically held at local museums) Opening evening reception (hosted by an anchor museum in the local community)
Thursday	Conference opens, keynote address, concurrent sessions (held at the conference hotel) Evening reception (hosted by a local museum)
Friday	Conference, concurrent sessions (held at the conference hotel) Evening reception (hosted by a local museum)
Saturday	Concurrent sessions/speaker in morning; Closing luncheon complete by noon (sessions and luncheon held at the conference hotel)

### **Benefits to local museums, their staff, volunteers, and stakeholders include:**

- Creating or strengthening relationships among local museums, opening the door to future partnerships and collaborations.
- Providing valuable training opportunities for staff and volunteers.
- Showcasing recent projects, including capital projects and special exhibits.
- Providing recognition of leadership skills of staff and volunteers who assume prominent volunteer roles on various committees.
- Introducing staff and volunteers to new ideas while building a valuable network of international friends and colleagues.
- Complimentary attendance at conference sessions for:
  - Any local host institution staff-person who volunteers to assist with a pre-conference workshop may also attend that workshop at no charge.
  - Volunteers who assist at a conference session receive complimentary admission to one additional conference session.
- Waived conference registration fees (partial or full) for a designated number of staff from local institutions that host pre-conference workshops and/or evening events.
- Complimentary registration for the designated Local Host Committee Chair to attend the VSA conference the year prior to hosting.

### **Benefits to the local community include:**

- Directing international attention to the successes of your cultural community and its supporting businesses, governmental agencies, private foundations, and educational partners.
- Attracting over 150 visitors to your community which translates into more than \$60,000 in revenue generated from hotels, restaurants, and transportation services.
- Demonstrating your community's ability to host international conferences for this market. This can be then used as a model of success to attract other regional museum and special interest conferences including science, technology, zoos, aquaria, etc.

### **Benefits to the Visitor Studies Association:**

- Strengthening the museum, informal learning, research, and evaluation professions.
- Providing support for VSA's professional development offerings, publications, and member services, and helping to support the Association's service to the field. The conference proceeds provide primary support for VSA's general operations.
- Providing opportunity to cultivate individuals for future leadership roles with VSA.

### **Conference Site:**

The conference hotel is typically the primary location for daily conference activities, with pre-conference workshops and evening events taking place at area museums. Consequently, the hotel must have available: at least 120 sleeping rooms, at least 4 breakout rooms (with a minimum seating capacity of 40 people), ballroom space for general sessions, luncheons, and breakfasts, and a marketplace space that can accommodate 30 six-foot table displays.

## **Funding Structure:**

The VSA Conference Planning Committee develops the conference budget, including setting the registration and other fees. The typical conference budget anticipates a projected income of \$70,000 and expenses of \$55,000. The revenue streams fall in three categories: 1) **registration and workshop fees**, which account for 70% of income, 2) **events income**, which accounts for 10% of income, and 3) **sponsorships** of keynote presentations, receptions, and other activities, which account for the remaining 20%.

Event budgets and ticket prices are established by the VSA Conference Planning Committee and designed to keep costs to attendees affordable. Ticket fees are intended to cover event costs: catering, transportation (if necessary), and entertainment (if desired), while still providing a modest amount of revenue for VSA. It is often desirable, however, for the Local Host Committee to secure in-kind donations of services in support of the events to supplement the event budget.

The VSA Resource Development Committee takes primary responsibility for fundraising support for the conference and takes the lead in soliciting potential sponsors for direct contributions. The VSA Board of Directors assists with the process of identifying potential regional and national conference sponsors

The Local Host Committee generally supports the fundraising efforts of the Resource Development Committee in several ways:

- Securing in-kind contributions of donated services such as printing, bus transportation for events (if needed), and catering, whenever possible.
- Advising the Resource Development Committee about local corporations, foundations, and government agencies that might be approached by VSA for direct contributions.
- Occasionally, the local Convention and Visitors Bureau has provided assistance to VSA in finding local sponsors.

In addition, Local Host museums are asked to waive rental fees for evening events and pre-conference workshops, and to either waive or discount entrance fees for conference attendees during the duration of the conference.

## **SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR HOST COMMUNITIES**

The VSA Annual Conference is an important undertaking that requires an earnest commitment of leadership, volunteer time, and in-kind support on the part of museums and the local host community. Logistically, there are also requirements for meeting space and community accessibility as explained below.

### **Community Requirements:**

- There should be a critical mass of museums in the local area with staff sufficient to help organize the conference as well as attend the conference. We expect that between 10 – 25% of attendees will be from the local community, with as much as 30% coming from the host state/province.
- Museums in the local community should represent a variety of sizes, types, and disciplines (e.g., small, medium, large; historic houses, zoos, botanical gardens, art museums, historic parks, history museums, science centers, children’s museums, specialty museums).
- Travel to and from the community, whether flying or driving, should be easy and affordable.

- Several potential hotels of appropriate size, scale, and location should be available in the community for consideration by VSA.
- Mid- to large-size cities are encouraged to apply.
- VSA regularly rotates the conference around regions in the United States and Canada. Although this is not a strict requirement, consideration of location in relation to recent conference venues may be considered.
- Proposals from locations outside of the United States and Canada should include additional information on any anticipated costs or attributes that may be unique to an international venue. (For example, translation services, if necessary, for printed communications and oral session presentations.)

### **Requirements of Local Museums:**

- The **Local Host Committee** is composed of 12-20 individuals, usually staff from the local museums. The Committee is headed by a Local Host Committee Chair (or Co-Chairs) who oversees the local planning efforts. Successful committees include volunteers from the community who can contribute professional expertise and may assist with obtaining in-kind contributions to support the local hosting efforts.
- Key responsibilities of the Local Host Committee include:
  - Arranging and serving as hosts for evening receptions at local museums (waiving any rental fees).
  - Arranging sites for pre-conference workshops at local institutions (waiving any rental fees).
  - Recruiting and scheduling volunteers to assist with the pre-conference workshops and during the conference. Typically, 15 volunteers are required for pre-conference workshops and 30 to 45 volunteers are required for the conference.
  - Making a commitment to fully support and promote the conference within the local community and send staff to attend the conference.
  - Working closely with the VSA Executive Director and the Conference Planning Committee to coordinate promotion of the conference and host community and to facilitate record keeping for financial transactions (contracts, etc.) that may be arranged locally, but paid by VSA.
  - Providing hospitality information to conference attendees through VSA.
- A Local Host Committee Chairperson should be identified within the Community's proposal. The rest of the committee can be established following the city's selection as a host community.
- Other aspects of the conference (including program sessions, luncheons, workshops, marketplace, and promotion) are managed by members of the VSA-wide Annual Conference Team. The Local Host Committee Chair is a member of this Team.

### **Hotel or Conference Site Requirements:**

Following VSA's preferred schedule of Tuesday and Wednesday pre-conference workshops at local host museums and a Thursday through noon Saturday conference, a local hotel acts as the main conference site. The hotel selection is handled separately through the Conference Planning Committee in collaboration with the VSA Executive Director. Hotel RFPs are typically solicited in cooperation with the host city's Convention and Visitors Bureau.

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMITTING PROPOSALS**

A local museum or the city's Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) may take the lead in organizing the appropriate materials for submission to VSA in consideration of hosting the VSA Annual Conference. VSA encourages the local museum community and the local CVB to work in concert to submit a joint proposal. The CVB may obtain a separate hotel RFP from the VSA office.

VSA is currently accepting proposals for **2012, 2013, and 2014** Host Communities. Bids may be for a single year or multiple years. Please identify in your proposal for which year(s) the community should be considered.

**In order to be considered for 2012, all proposal materials must be received on or before, April 9, 2010.**

With a cover letter addressing how your community will meet the requirements outlined above, please submit **two copies** of the following:

1. At least three letters of support, signed by the directors of local museums acknowledging their commitment to host events and pre-conference workshops, to provide volunteers to serve on the various committees, and to assist VSA in its efforts to raise the necessary funds to support the conference.
2. A packet or portfolio containing general information on all area services and attractions, including transportation, restaurants, hotels, shopping, and other amenities.
3. A contact list of similar conferences held in your city within the last two years.

Submit proposals to: Elisa Israel  
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Questions, contact:

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