

12/9/08

### **Letter from the Project Directors**

The Visitor Studies Association (VSA) received a planning grant from the Informal Science Education Program of the National Science Foundation to plan a Continuing Education Program for Mid-Career (Practicing) Professionals in informal learning research and evaluation. That VSA should pioneer in the development of guidelines and aids for those wanting to plan their own professional development is an appropriate step in the evolution of visitor studies as a profession.

VSA was founded in 1988 by a small group of research and evaluation practitioners interested in creating a forum for the exchange of information in the field of visitor studies and evaluation. And from the start, the founders recognized the need and opportunity for continuing professional education by offering a menu of workshops in association with the 1989 annual meeting. Professional development workshops have been offered ever since.

The NSF planning grant gave us resources to take these efforts to a new level. Both of us had served terms as chair of the VSA professional development committee. In that capacity we were able to see the potential for strengthening the VSA continuing education offerings but we could also see there was not a coherent structure to guide development.

The evaluator competencies for professional development are the result of a good many people thinking about the essence of visitor studies. We probed the definitions of visitor studies and have made an attempt to distill the diversity and breadth of the field to an elemental core. Many people have contributed to this project and we owe them considerable gratitude. Much of this work has been carried out on a volunteer basis and we are grateful to have such generous colleagues that are interested in the continuing professionalization of the field of visitor studies. Rebecca Reynolds got us off to a good start as facilitator of the first planning meeting held in August, 2005. Catherine Eberbach, John Fraser, Lisa Hubbell, Kathy McLean, Kris Morrissey, and Marcella Wells joined the two of us to form the first working committee to refine all the information that came from the larger planning meeting and turn it into a working idea. Support was also received from various officers of VSA including Kirsten Ellenbogen, Alan Friedman, Julie Johnson, Judy Koke, Mary Ellen Munley, Deborah Perry, and Beverly Serrell. Toward the end of the planning phase, the registration program concept was separated from the professional development planning and it moved forward on its own. We thank those who helped specifically with this part of the project including Sue Allen, Jessica Brainard, Lynn Dierking, David Ellis, Ellen Giusti, Cheryl Kessler, Elizabeth Kollman, Ross Loomis, Wendy Meluch, Amy Grack Nelson, Randi Korn, Kris Morrissey, Christine Reich, Matthew Sikora, Steve Yalowitz, and members of the VSA Board of Directors.

This has been a labor of love on the part of all who have contributed to this project for the field of visitor studies and we hope our efforts will prove beneficial. In spite of all the assistance with this project, there may still be errors and omissions. We accept the responsibility for these. We hope that the competencies will evolve as the field does.

Larry Bell, Senior Vice President for Research, Development, & Production, Museum of Science, Boston  
Barbara Butler, Retired, formerly Program Director, Informal Science Education, National Science Foundation