

# SHARE Museums East Mystery Shopper Scheme 2016



Gain insight and understanding

Improve your visitors' experience

Develop your front of house staff and volunteers

Generate ideas and income

Learn from other museums

# Benefits of taking part

- You will receive comprehensive feedback about a range of factors in your museum, from first contact via phone and website to arrival, signage, welcome, displays, shop and catering offer
- Feedback can be used to make improvements, for advocacy, funding bids, training, marketing and much more
- You are supported throughout by a scheme administrator
- Shoppers are trained and gain a lot from taking part
- Shoppers can reflect on their own museum by comparing and considering their visits
- SHARE co-ordinates the training, allocation of visits, data collection and feedback to participating museums
- The reciprocal nature of the scheme means that it is significantly cheaper than commercial mystery shopping services.

## Background

SHARE is working to raise the profile and standard of visitor services in our region's museums. The Mystery Shopping Scheme was initiated after one of our Front of House Forum events heard from managers at the Museum of London about the significant benefits of mystery shopping.

We ran successful pilot of a reciprocal programme in 2014, and 18 museums sites across the region took part in 2015, enjoying and benefitting from 102 mystery shopping visits.

**The 2016 programme is now open for registration for museums in the East.**

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

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

**Open to all museums in the East.**

**May to October 2016.**

# About the scheme

## Which museums are eligible?

Any museum in the East of England that is accredited or registered as actively working towards accreditation is eligible to take part.

## How does the scheme work?

Each participating museum is asked to provide:

- a Museum Lead to be responsible for the scheme within their organisation
- and at least 2 volunteers and/or members of staff to be Shoppers, who will chose to undertake a total of either 3 or 6 visits to other museums in the period June to October half-term 2016.

Your museum will receive the same number of visits back.

### **Essentially: give a visit – get a visit.**

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

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

Previous participants were made aware of things they had not previously considered, and also received confirmation of some things they suspected. You choose how to use the feedback received.

Shoppers are also able to reflect on their own offer by comparing and considering that of others.

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

*“The Mystery Shopper scheme has helped greatly to improve our customer service for our visitors by having our museums looked at objectively by ‘shoppers’ who are asked to comment on all aspects of their visit.”*

## When will this happen?

Scheme opens	April
Recruitment of museums and their shoppers	April to May
Deadline for expressions of interest	13 <sup>th</sup> May
Shopper training [Cambridge] [only one day required]	Fri 20 <sup>th</sup> and Sat 21 <sup>st</sup> May
Shoppers make 3 or 6 visits – by arrangement with SHARE Museums East	1 <sup>st</sup> June to 31 <sup>st</sup> October
Assessment and evaluation with participants	27 <sup>th</sup> October
Final report to steering group and Plan for 2017	November

*“The data has also supported me with direct and specific evidence when I have been looking for support in terms of funding for improvements to the Service.”*

*“It is very useful to have such detailed feedback covering many areas of the Museum from a visitor perspective. It was helpful none of our Mystery Shoppers appear to have visited the Museum before and were coming to it with fresh eyes.”*

## What will it cost?

SHARE covers the training, support and central administration of the scheme. However, museums will be asked to arrange to cover the cost of mystery shopping visits to other participating museums. This will include travel and a small purchase from the shop and refreshment areas if applicable.

We therefore suggest you budget for this cost now. Experience of the pilot schemes tell us that no visit will cost more than £100, and in many cases this will be considerably less. Remember you are being asked to cover the costs of either 3 or 6 visits during the season, and therefore receive either 3 or 6 visits in return.

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

In some circumstances SHARE may be able to offer small incentive grants to potential participants to cover some expenses. Any such offer must be discussed individually with the SHARE coordinator.

## What will museums need to do?

We ask that participating museums do the following:

- Recruit a Museum Lead for the scheme who will be responsible for managing volunteer shopper visits. We recommend that there is also a deputy who can step into this role to cover absence
- Recruit volunteers to the scheme – either through staff or volunteer base. We recommend that each participating museum finds at least two Shoppers to cover absence
- Support their attendance at the training
- Ensure Shoppers' visits are completed on time and questionnaires are returned promptly
- Cover the costs of the visits, including travel and expenses
- Provide feedback to SHARE about the scheme, its value and potential for improvement
- Use the feedback they receive to generate improvements in their visitor offer.

The Shoppers you recruit must:

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

*“Having this monthly data helps me to nip things in the bud. I can take swift action to correct or improve anything that has been adversely commented upon in the reports.”*

## What will Shoppers and Museum Leads be expected to do?

### Pre-visit we ask that both the Shoppers and Museum Leads:

- Attend the training (either 20th or 21st May)
- Work with the SHARE Museums East office to arrange visits
- Liaise with the museum by phone
- Use the museum website and other publicity material
- Arrange travel.

### During visits we ask Shoppers to:

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

### Post visit we ask Shoppers to:

- Complete and return the questionnaire to the SHARE office within 5 working days
- Claim any expenses from their own museum
- Provide additional feedback on the scheme as required by the steering group.

*“It is a great way to see how other museum services function when it comes to front of house etc. The visit allows you to spend the whole day taking in the service including what is good or bad.”*

*“I am enjoying visiting other museums and reflecting on our own.”*

## Who is running the project?

The project is administered and co-ordinated by the SHARE Museums East team. The scheme is devised and overseen by the steering group, comprising:

- Graham Stratford, Head of Visitor Services at the Museum of London
- Jane Felstead, Head of Visitor Services, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
- Linda Dobbs, Director, Welwyn Hatfield Museums Service
- Simon Floyd, SHARE Coordinator, Norfolk Museums Service

NB. There is currently a vacancy on the steering group for a smaller museum representative. Please contact Simon Floyd if you are interested.

## How do we get involved?

To take part in the scheme please contact the SHARE Mystery Shopping administrator, Sarah Coleman: [sarah.coleman@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.coleman@norfolk.gov.uk) before Friday 13th May.

For questions please contact Simon Floyd, SHARE Coordinator: 01603 638141, [simon.floyd@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:simon.floyd@norfolk.gov.uk) .

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

## Finally...

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

## About SHARE Museums East

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

*“Communication with people managing the scheme is very smooth and prompt. That left me worried about nothing but how I perform my own task. My every enquiry was met with help and consideration. Very professional.”*