



**GRCM  
VOLUNTEER  
HANDBOOK**



# VOLUNTEER INTRODUCTION

## MISSION & VALUES

We are an environment for play. We advocate for the value of play. We build minds through play.

Play is essential for healthy development. Play has the power to transform. Play benefits all ages. Everyone has the right to play. Play benefits families.

## VOLUNTEER ROLES

- playing with children & families
- Cleaning the museum & Resetting exhibits
- Prepping materials for daily programs
- Greeting guests & helping kids stay with their adult(s)

## DRESS CODE

GRCM is a playfully professional environment which extends into our dress code. We expect all staff and volunteers to dress in a clean and professional manner that is representative of the position held in the museum. At no time are staff or volunteers of the museum allowed to wear clothing with inappropriate or derogatory /offensive imagery and/or language.

## WHILE ON THE MUSEUM FLOOR:

- Wear closed toed shoes at all times.
- Wear comfortable shoes that allow them the ability to move throughout the museum with ease.
- Dresses, skirts, and shorts must be an appropriate length that allows the staff member or volunteer the ability to move with ease and perform all essential functions of their job while on the floor.
- Jewelry including but not limited to earrings, nose studs/rings, necklaces, bracelets, etc may be worn at your own risk. Working with children the danger of "forced removal" is always present.

## TASKS

- Sanitize Yuck Buckets
- Fold laundry
- Reset exhibits
- Clean windows
- Reset Gift Shop
- Spot clean dirty exhibits
- Throw away trash around floor
- Wipe down: handles, doors, stair railings, talk tubes, picnic tables, stools, benches, etc.

## WHO TO REPORT TO:

The Floor Manager on duty  
and/or the Volunteer  
Coordinator, Jenny H

## MUSEUM DOOR CODES

Office Door: 0731

Break Room/Kitchen Door: 0731

## GRCM HISTORY

The Grand Rapids Children's Museum first made its debut as a museum "without walls" in August 1993 at Woodland Mall. The Museum featured two exhibits, Funstruction and Bubbles, Bubbles, Bubbles!, which were a huge success and exposed over 30,000 children and their families to "hands-on" exploration and learning.

Due to the exciting success of the museum "without walls," Museum founders Georgia Woodrick Gietzen, Alyce Greeson, Carla Morris, Mary Smith, and Aleicia Woodrick, continued their dream to develop a cultural and educational institution, a children's Museum, where all programming, exhibits and events would focus on children. By the winter of 1994, the "Museum without walls" had found a home at 11 Sheldon Avenue; a building which had caught fire in August 1980 leaving it vacant until purchased by Bob and Aleicia Woodrick and Jim and Shirley Balk, who donated the building to the Grand Rapids Children's Museum. A capital campaign was then launched to help fund the renovation of the Museum, exhibits, a two-year operating budget, campaign costs and an endowment. With the help of many generous community contributors, the campaign goal of \$4 million was reached as the Museum opened in the summer of 1997. The outpouring of community support has truly made this goal a reality for the children and families of West Michigan. Since then, the Museum has seen more than 3 million guests and over 200,000 visitors annually.

In July 2017, the GRCM celebrated 20 years of learning through play with a special proclamation from Mayor Rosalyn Bliss declaring July 31 "Grand Rapids Day Of Play" in honor of the GRCM.

## OPEN-ENDED PLAY

Open-ended play allows children to express themselves in play freely and creatively, not bound by preset limitations. There are no rules to follow, no expectations, no specific problems to solve, and no pressure to produce a finished product when engaging freely in open-ended play. In contrast, closed-ended activities have a determined outcome, a right answer, and a restriction on individual differences.

- Open ended play is a space for children to explore ideas and concepts
- Open ended play provides a low-stress environment where children are less afraid of making mistakes
- Open ended play helps children develop social and emotional intelligence
- open ended play allows children to teach themselves

## GENERAL PLAY PROMPTS

- Have a child teach you something, even if it's something you already know how to do.
- Start a secret club, make up a handshake and codenames, go on very serious missions.
- Play hide-and-seek, or better yet, sardines!
- The sillier the costume, the better. Never forget this.
- Start a band and make some sweet tunes, have fun naming the band too
- Make a fart noise behind a kid and pretend it was them. Do this 10 times.
- Build the tallest structure out of all the manipulatives you can find.
- Ask a kiddo how old she/he is; convince them you are the same age.
- Pretend the kiddo is your grown up for the rest of the time they are here.
- Have a kiddo pick out a costume and direct you in a play/scene.
- Trace a kiddo on the sidewalk with chalk and fill in the empty space.
- Help kiddos meet someone new.
- Start a game, any game. Have the kids teach other kiddos how to play.
- Pick a secret code word with a kiddo; whenever that word is said throughout the day lay on the ground IMMEDIATELY.
- Have kiddos try to get bubbles over the railing to the first floor.
- Make a prank phone call in Little GR

## PLAY PROMPTS BY EXHIBIT

### Bank:

- Have a kid help you open a bank account and explain finances to you.
- Oh no! There's been a robbery! Track down the bad guy!
- How much money can you count out? What do you think you could buy with it?

### Meijer:

- Have a kid help you plan a dinner party and pick out groceries for it.
- Have a kid help you buy only red ingredients, figure out what you could make with it.
- Towards closing time see if you can get kids to race to go "unshopping" (a.k.a. putting things back, secret cleaning help!) Make sure to reward their hard work with a sticker from the front desk!

### Bistro:

- Ask if the chef will hire you to be a line cook, treat them like a super serious fancy famous chef and see if they'll teach you a few recipes.
- Make the grossest pizza you can think of. Spaghetti on pizza? Koi fish and canned corn pizza?
- Help a kid set up their restaurant and then help them recruit customers they can cook for; they'll feel so proud of themselves!

### Library:

- Ask a kid to pick out a book to read to you.
- Help a kid set up the window display case with books they think look good.
- Help a kid organize a reading party, gather people to read together on the comfy pillows!

### Bell Run:

- Arrange the bells so the ball hits every single one on the way down!
- Experiment with what other round things you can send down the run and see how it changed the bell's sounds.

### Light Table:

- Can you make new colors by stacking different colored shapes?
- What can you build that uses up every single piece?
- Can you build a castle? A house? A secret lair?

### Sandbox:

- Bury something cool (like a pirate doubloon or some other small prize) and get a kid to act like an archaeologist and unearth it!
- Have a kid bury your hands.

### Stage:

- Put on a silly costume and get as many kids as possible to do the same, have a fashion show on the stage.
- Get a kid to sing a duet with you.
- See if you can get a bunch of kids to go on stage and tell their favorite jokes.

### Fish tank:

- How many fish do you think are in the tank? Ask a kid what fish is their favorite. Why do they like that one?
- Pretend to act like a fish, get a kid to do as well!

### Imagination Playground:

- There is a dragon in the distance! Create some sort of hideout with a kid.
- Who can build the tallest structure?
- Create a tunnel fort!

### Gravity Wall:

- Ask a kid why they think the ball travels through the tubes faster from up high.
- How long can you make the ball tube track?
- Try to get two separate tracks to connect.

## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The questions we ask while we interact with museum visitors can expand their thinking and lead them to new discoveries. The visitor is then actively engaged in their learning rather than being a passive recipient of information doled out to them. The best interaction leads to the "Ah-ha!" experience and further exploration. This is a confidence builder, and leads to feelings of satisfaction with the museum visit- "We had fun and we learned!" Learning how to frame open-ended questions is an acquired skill. Here are some examples that can be adapted to many situations.

### MAKING PREDICTIONS:

- Which car do you think will get to the end first?
- What do you think will happen if we move this one over here?
- How many friends do you think can fit in the bubble at once?
- What do you think will happen if we add drops of red and yellow?

### FORMING HYPOTHESES (THEORIES):

- Why do you think this car went faster?
- Why didn't the bubble break when I put my hand inside it?
- Why do you think we got round bubbles out of a square bubble wand?
- Why do you think the bees fly out of the building?

Note: These questions promote thought about cause and effect, and encourage close observation...

### EXPLORING OPTIONS:

- What else could we do with these?
- What else could we try to make the ball roll faster (or slower)?
- How can you get the pegs into the foam block? How can you get them out again?
- How can I make this side go up?
- Note: These questions prompt out-of-the-box, or divergent thinking.
- Making observations:
  - What happened when we raised the ramp?
  - What did you see while you were inside the bubble?
  - Which tool worked the best to connect the beams?
  - What were the bees doing in there?

Note: These questions lead to reflective thought: re-running an experience in your mind, and expressing your recollections aloud. Lots of opportunity here to work on sequencing i.e. "First the red car was out in front, then the green one passed it." and oral expressive language.

## Family-Inclusive LANGUAGE

avoid	why?	instead
"parents" "mom" "dad" "mom and dad"	Not everyone accompanying a child is a parent. Grandparents, step-parents, and nannies may not identify as parents.  Not all children have a mom and dad.	"grownup" "adult" "caregiver"
"son" "daughter"	The children in someone's care could be grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, etc.  You may also not want to assume the gender of a child.	"children"
"extended family"	This term is usually meant to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins but for folks of many cultures this isn't "extended" family- it's just family.	"family"
"family resemblance"	We're conditioned to look for similar features in family members so you may see resemblance where there is none. Many families include step-parents, adoptive parents, or parents who conceived with donated eggs or sperm.  Inversely, don't assume that a child who doesn't look like their caregiver is adopted- many multi-racial children resemble one parent more than the other.	keep it to yourself
"members of a household"	Families don't always live together. For example, families with divorced parents or incarcerated parents.	"family members"