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Reflect on your experience of giving and receiving feedback to identify what makes for effective communication, and review examples where feedback has led to improved outcomes (15%, 500 words or equivalent)

As a participant volunteer in the CITiZAN Low Tide Trail Discovery Program (CITiZAN, 2022), I had several opportunities to communicate feedback in structured interviews with PhD candidates working with MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) on public engagement in archaeology, written attitudinal questionnaires after skills workshops and I was also requested to provide feedback on my overall experience as a CITiZAN volunteer as part of the program closure (Appendix 1). I aimed to provide specific answers to the questions in my feedback to CITiZAN, however I could have provided better structured and critical feedback at the time, which might have been useful to the program, instead of focusing on my benefits as a volunteer.

As the program had a limited funding cycle from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), I was enthusiastic about providing feedback for the program in the expectation that future funding might be a possibility. It was also an opportunity to be part of a PhDs qualitative study that informed public engagement research in the heritage sector and could therefore produce subsequent publications.

In terms of giving feedback, it was important to be attentive to the question, which was being asked, this can be dependent on the format that the question is being proposed. Communication therefore needs to be clear and precise, but it is difficult to provide this without taking the time and effort to consider a reflective model before giving feedback (The University of Edinburgh, 2022).

It would be disingenuous to apply a specific one size model, but there is a commonality of structure between different reflective models in terms the stages involved. For example: describing an experience, feeling the experience, evaluating what was good and bad, applying possible alternative actions and a final process of ameliorating down to the key points of an experience and then feeding it forward into practical framework which could involve changing a specific behaviour or maybe just chalking up the experience as something to be avoided in the future.

The feedback which I received for my intertidal low-tide trail from the CITiZAN community archaeologists was critical but useful. In the first instance I was disappointed. It was communicated to me that most of the content was far too technical in detail for public readership, my target audience, and therefore needed to be just ten points of interest along a few miles of coastline with an overall linking theme. I also needed to pay attention to my sources of information and gain permission to use copyrighted material. It is important to be open and not closed when receiving feedback, otherwise there is a tendency to be defensive and not process and reflect upon the advice given, and then take subsequent realistic action to promote a balanced, effective, and timely outcome.

The professional impartial delivery and consistency of the feedback spread over many months of online Team meetings, was an important factor that enabled me to produce a succinct and accessible low tide trail. I had no real experience of engaging with the public, it was therefore the expert feedback of archaeologists who had that extensive public engagement experience, which gave my project a structured purpose, narrative, consistently themed direction and ultimately covered the key technical requirements which facilitated the publishable online content.

Bibliography:

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Appendices: 1

My Feedback to CITiZAN Discovery Project - May 2021.

Tell us about your experience volunteering with CITiZAN.

I started volunteering with CITiZAN during the lockdown of 2021. I had always been interested in archaeology, and spending time at home in isolation made me rethink my direction. I looked around locally, but I could not find any active terrestrial archaeological organisations at the time in Kent. Living in a coastal community, I have a personal connection with the sea; I was aware of mud-larking in the Thames intertidal zone, but I was unaware of voluntary organisations conducting inter-tidal archaeology in my locality of East Kent. It was a revelation to come across the CITiZAN East Kent Coast Discovery Programme. It appealed to my interests in archaeology and the personal connection I feel living in a seaside community.

I immediately contacted Lara and Lawrence (community archaeologists) and received a swift reply. I was impressed by their work, and I could see the importance of highlighting archaeology hidden in the community and often overlooked—also recognising the challenge of climate change and how this will impact the archaeological record in our coastal communities over time. I wanted to get involved.

We were still in strict lockdown, movement and group work was prohibited under government restrictions. Therefore, we decided that it would be an excellent opportunity to do desk-based research on a low tide trail near where I live and safely access it in line with the government restrictions of the time.

Undertaking considerable archaeological research for the low tide trail helped me focus on something other than the pandemic. It was also amazing to research the history of a place I had lived in for over a decade, adding to my knowledge the considerable amount of history in the archaeological record.

I gained a fantastic feeling of achievement volunteering with CITiZAN to produce my low tide trail. The support I received from Lara and Lawrence was excellent regarding their knowledge and skills; making the final product of the online trail was very satisfying. Moreover, in terms of completing a considerable body of work, producing something valuable and practical to my community and anyone who visits the East Kent coast and wants to understand more about intertidal archaeology. The response from community groups in my area has also been positive.

As restrictions were lifted, more opportunities became available for group work with CITiZAN. This has been invaluable in meeting a multitude of different people from different backgrounds, coming together over a common interest in learning new skills and generally having a good time.

Have you picked up new knowledge, skills, and experiences? Please share your story with us.

Yes, my life direction has changed considerably since volunteering with CITiZAN.

In October 2021, I enrolled on a three-year MA in Archaeological Practice at the University of Wales Trinity St David. I have also started a three-month traineeship in archaeology with Pre-Construct Archaeology LTD and hope to be qualified to work in the field by May 2022.

The Skills, knowledge and experience have been (invaluable) for both my coursework and practical work:

The Low Tide Trails:

- Undertaking desk-based assessments to understand local historical environmental records HERs.
- Learning to research historical sources online, such as journals, and the archaeological data service.
- Undertaking historical map regression to understand how the coastline has changed over time.
- Using real-time GPS coordinates to map features via the CITiZAN recording application.
- Analysing aerial photography data to pick out key historical features in the landscape.
- Networking with local community archaeology groups and individuals to improve my locality knowledge.
- Learning technical GIS skills with ArcGIS Story maps.
- Understanding due diligence for copyright when producing online material.
- Project management skills in planning the project over several months to produce the deliverable product, the low tide trail.
- Presentation skills in terms of taking people on the low tide trail in August 2021.
- Promotion skills in terms of marketing trail to local interest groups via media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Fieldwork – Conyer Creek, Sandwich Bay, Long Rock and Pegwell Bay (Kent).

- Archaeological drawing, scale plans of hulks in the intertidal zone of Conyer Creek Kent.
- This was an invaluable experience as a lot of what I currently do in my PCA traineeship is scaled drawings of sectioned features; this gave me a head start on understanding how archaeological drawing plans work in practice. In addition, I also learnt about archaeological photography whilst using the CITiZAN application, using scales and even presenting photogrammetry into 3D models, a technology becoming more prevalent in archaeology practice.
- Introduction to context recording and measuring features in the field; again, this is an invaluable skill that was good to learn with fellow volunteers and is used extensively in my current traineeship.
- Recording data points with GPS total station, I also gained insight into using GPS data to draw lines and polygons on maps for features.
- Bagging up samples and labelling to be used for further scientific investigation.
- Workshop on wood species identification at Canterbury Christ Church University. This was a fantastic opportunity to take the samples we had collected from Sandwich Bay and to identify under a microscope (with the assistance of a professional environmental archaeologist) the wood species used for intertidal fish traps that we recorded on the foreshore.

Academic Work:

My first module on archaeological research methods at the University of Wales was also based on the practical experience that I gained from volunteering with CITiZEN:

- My first assignment was based on the methods used on the Tankerton Bay wreck excavation in 2018 with Wessex Archaeology and supported by CITiZEN.
- My second assignment was based on using Sandwich Bay Kent's datasets to record the anti-aircraft landing poles on the beach. I gathered additional data on these features, which will be incorporated into a published report in 2022.
- My third assignment was based upon another feature on my low tide trail, namely Pudding Pans. A type of Roman Samian Ware recovered by Whitstable fishermen over the last 300 years is believed to come from two Roman ships sunk off the East Kent coast.
- My final assignment was based on the structure and organisation of MOLA/CITiZAN and the East Kent Discovery Programme.

How could CITiZAN have helped improve your experience?

I could not have expected a better outcome from volunteering regarding my new academic and career direction. I found both Lara and Lawrence excellent people with fantastic interpersonal skills in communicating complex archaeology to people from every background, culture, and age.

The only minor critique is that the citizen app for Apple products did not seem to work well with authentication. That may need to be revised and updated, but that is technical, which should be easy to resolve going forward.

It is unfortunate that the programme will not be continued in the longer term because of funding. This is really a perennial problem in archaeology in general, as it is a project-based profession. It is essential within community archaeology, as relationships are built over time, and it is perhaps insincere to the volunteers and communities to put on the breaks and then change direction. After all, the climate and our coastlines are changing but we still need people to form cohesive networks over the long-term if we are to protect our shared heritage.