

Smithsonian by the numbers

- ❖ The Smithsonian Institution is composed of 19 museums, the National Zoo and 9 Research Centers.



- What is the approximate total number of artifacts, art and specimens in the Smithsonian's collection?

137 million

Volunteering for the Smithsonian: An Overview of the Museum Information Desk Program



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**The Castle, the main information building of the Smithsonian Institution,
Photo Tony Cenicola/The New York Times**

Outline

- Introduction
- Volunteering in the US: definitions and value
- The Smithsonian Institution
 - History of volunteering
 - Volunteering Programs
- Museum Information Desk Program
 - Description of training
 - Attrition and retention
- Summary



Objectives

- 1) description of the volunteer programs
- 2) training for the museum information desk program
- 3) motivations for volunteering
- 4) attrition
- 5) retention



Volunteering in the US

- 26.8 percent

(Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011)

- Reasons

- 1) < stress
 - 2) > health
 - 3) + professional experience
 - 4) + personal growth and self-esteem
 - 5) + learning
- (University of California San Diego, 2012)



Value = \$173 billion U.S. dollars

- hourly wages for volunteers in 2010 = \$23.36
- 26.3% volunteered their time and labor
= 8.1 billion hours

(Corporation for National and Community Service, 2011)



Advantages

- 1) expertise and experience
- 2) more time
- 3) resources
- 4) public awareness
- 5) program visibility



Challenges

- 1) time
- 2) incompetence
- 3) competition
- 4) lower standards
- 5) increase insurance
- 6) inability to negotiate

(FEMA, 2006)

- How many percent of the Smithsonian's collections is on display at any given time?

2%





James Smithson by Johns, 1816.
The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution



Digital Image (c) 1996 Smithsonian Institution

James Smithson

- English chemist and mineralogist
- “an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men”
- 104,960 gold sovereigns
 - 8 shillings
 - seven pence,
- = \$508,318.46 in 1838.



- An Act of Congress signed by President James K. Polk on **August 10, 1846** established the Smithsonian Institution.
- A Board of Regents and a Secretary of the Smithsonian (or chief executive) administer this trust.

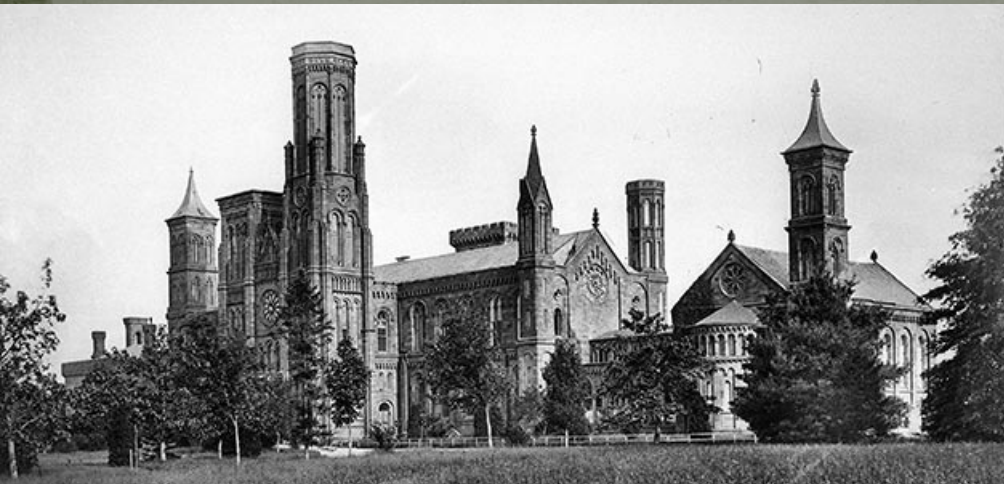
Federal funds



Public donations

History of SI Volunteers

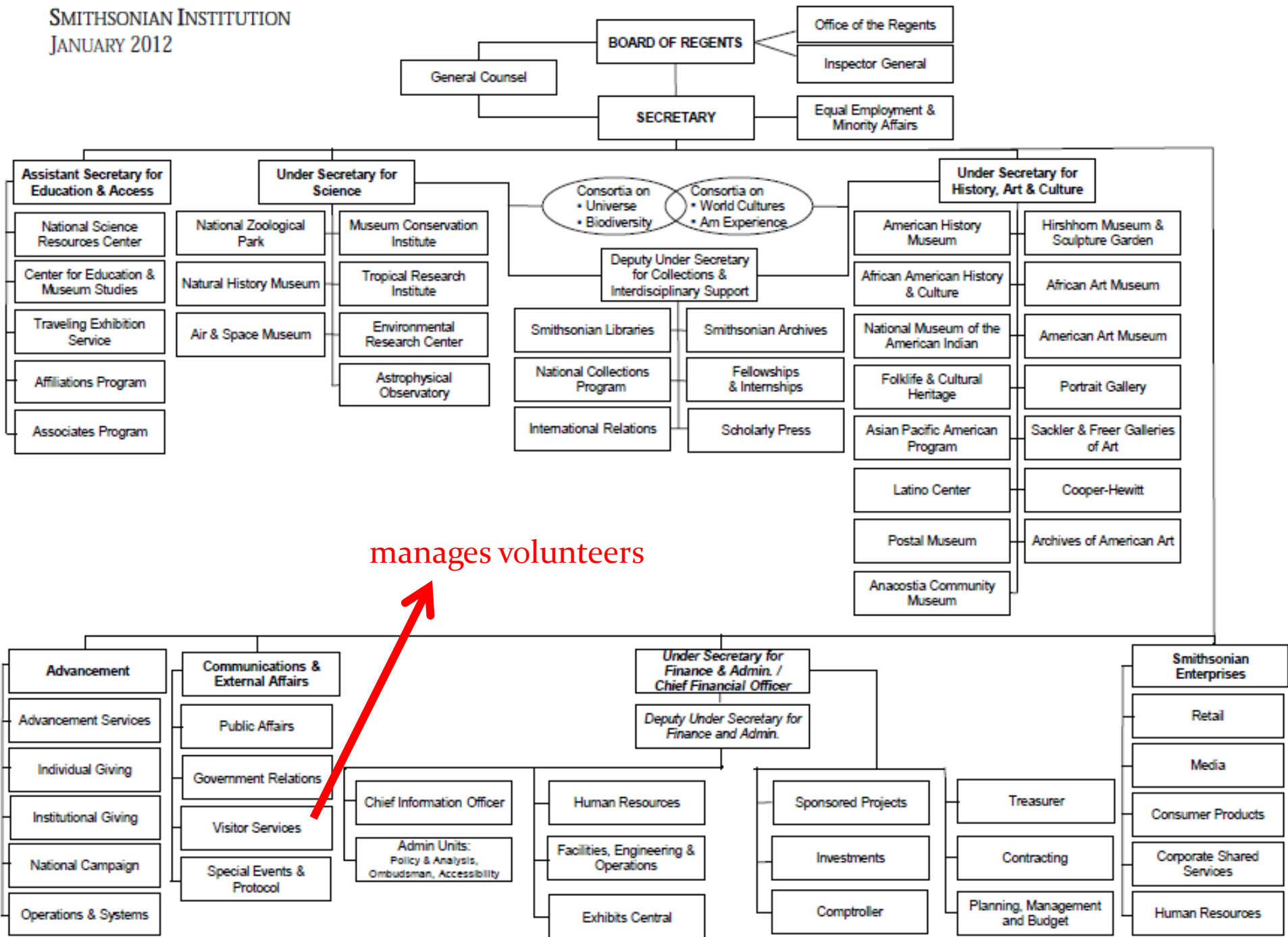
- 1849 – 150 volunteer weather observers
 - Instructions
 - Standardized forms and instruments
 - Daily weather map -> newspaper weather reports
 - -> National Weather Service



History of SI Volunteers



- 1971 – Smithsonian Associates’ Reception Center
- 1975 – Visitor Information and Associates’ Reception Center (VIARC)
- 2012 – Office of Visitor Services



Volunteer Programs

1. Docent
2. Special support
3. Citizen science
 - ❖ (respective museums)

4. Seasonal
 - ❖ (Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage or Smithsonian Gardens)

5. Museum information desk
6. Telephone information
7. Behind the scenes
 - ❖ (Office of Visitor Services)



Why volunteer at SI?

- Name
- Research access
- Special interest

Attracts affiliated and traditional type volunteers



Smithsonian
Institution

More numbers

- 2011 – 28.6 million visitors
- 3 – Washington, DC's rank
- 6,500 – Behind the Scenes volunteers
- 527 – active Museum Information Desk Volunteers



- ❑ Which Smithsonian Museum has more than 126 million artifacts?

National Museum of Natural
History

Museum Information Desk

- 2 classes annually
- 4-5 days' training
 - 1) Intro to the Smithsonian, OVS, museums
 - 2) Computer training (1-2 days)
 - 3) Visitor experience/customer service, social media, accessibility
 - 4) Testing
- Shifts
- Pre-arranged tasks



Attrition

- Transient DC
 - Embassies/Foreign missions
 - International Organizations
 - Changes in government administration
 - Military bases
- Employment
 - Loss
 - Transfer
- Further education
- Personal or family growth
- Illness or Death



Personal



Job



Family growth

Smithsonian Museum Desk Volunteers Attrition Rate

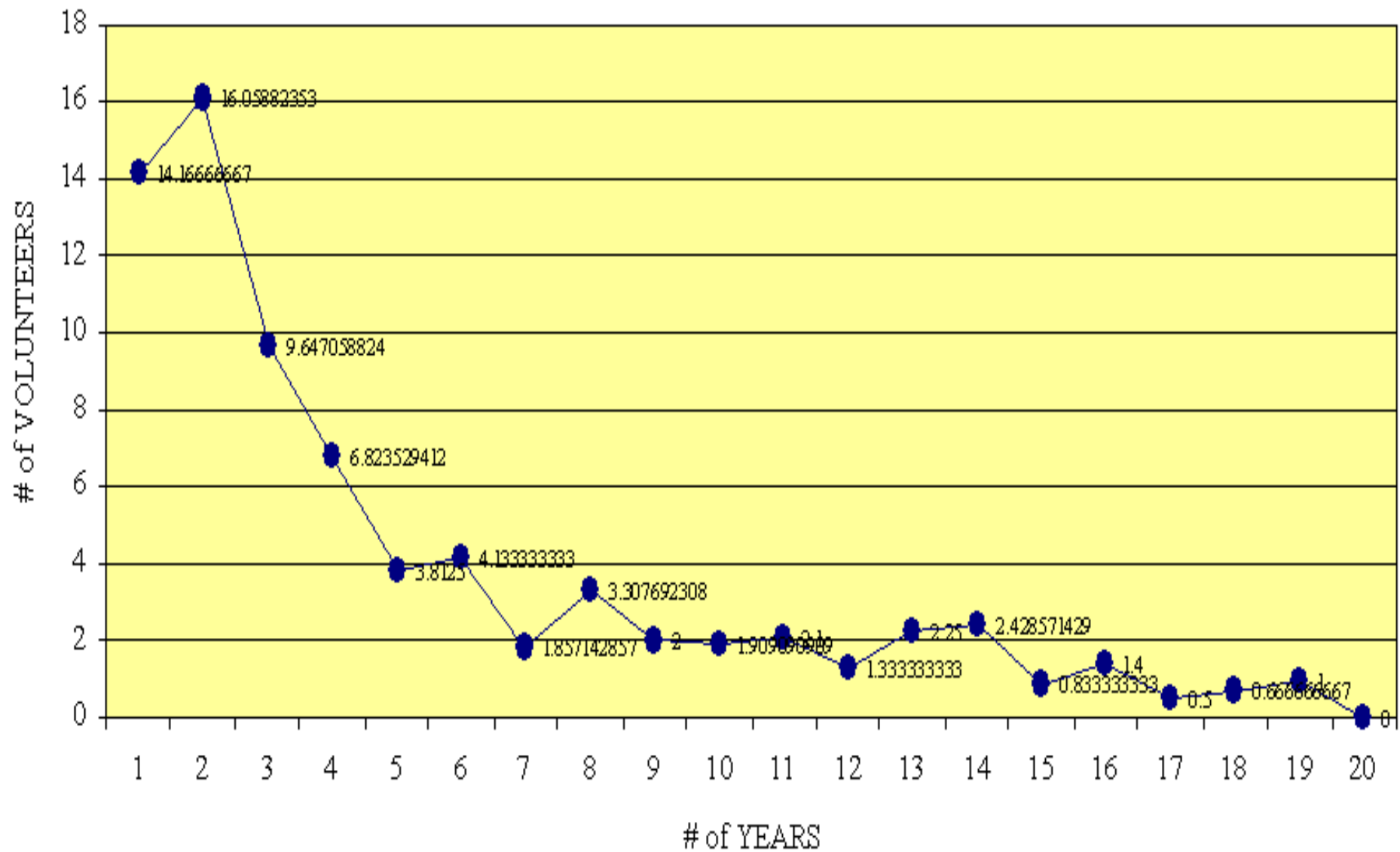


Figure 4. Smithsonian museum desk volunteers attrition rate

Retention



- Training program
 - Fun/interesting
 - Relevant
- Benefits
 - Discounts
 - Membership
 - Stores
 - Tickets (movies, rides)
 - Parking
 - Enrichment training
 - Scheduling Flexibility

Smithsonian Museum Desk Volunteers 1991-2011
Percentage of volunteers remaining from each year

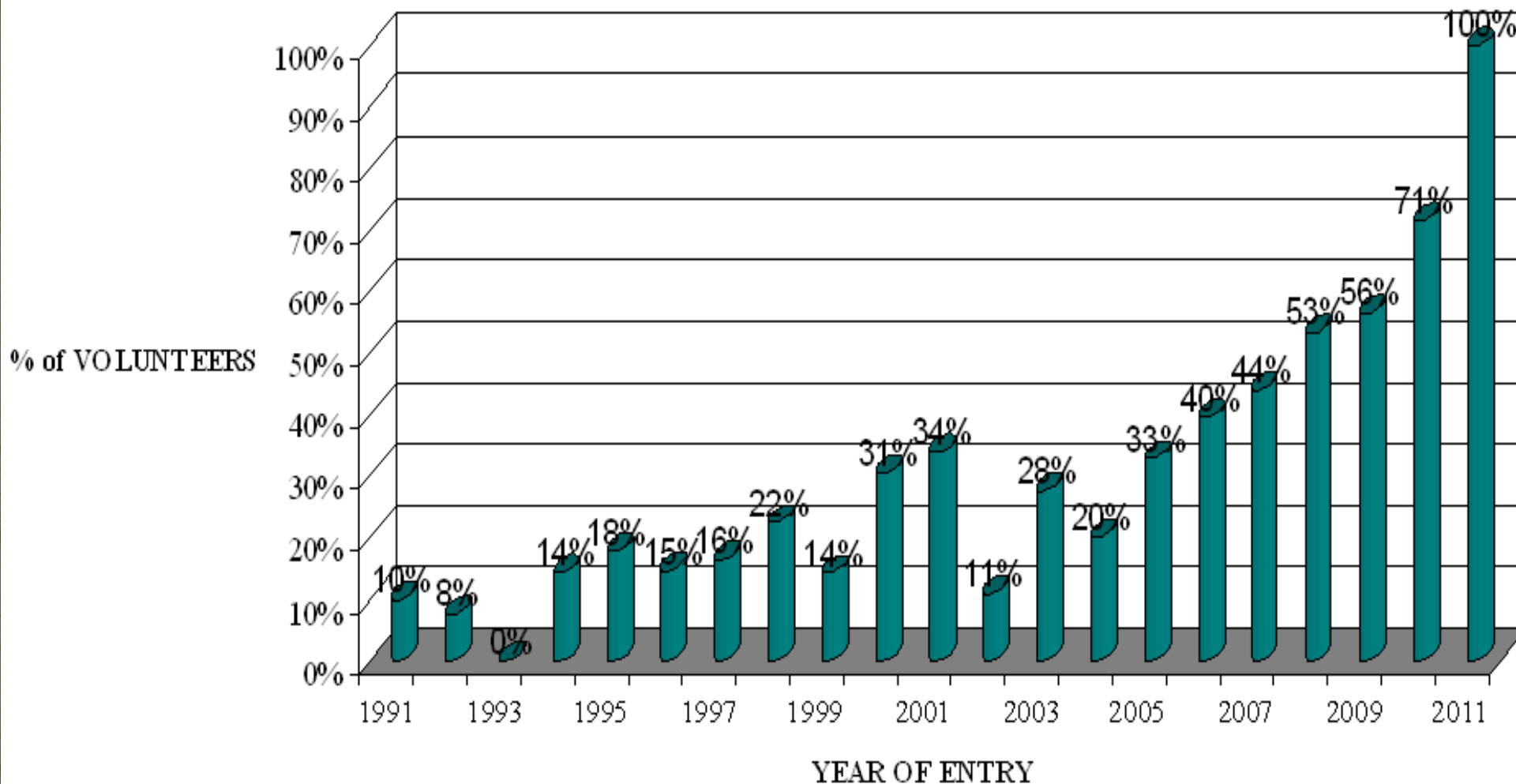


Figure 3. Percentage of remaining volunteers from each year

Summary

- Steepest rate of decline happens within two years
 - People who've volunteered for more than 4 years are more likely to stay
 - Volunteers may leave but return later on
 - Without volunteers, the Smithsonian museums may have to charge entrance fees
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- Bonus: What is the full name of the Smithsonian's original benefactor?

James Smithson



What can you find under the Smithsonian?



*Thanks for
listening!*

Questions?

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