



### Guest Author Guidelines for *Smithsonian Voices* Blog

Thank you for contributing your voice to the Smithsonian Affiliations profile page on *Smithsonian Voices*. Telling your story helps us share your organization's impact in your community and across the nation. These guidelines will help you create a dynamic story to share.

#### What is *Smithsonian Voices* Blog?

The blog shares the unique voices that make up the chorus of ideas at the Institution. Smithsonian Affiliates are currently the only organizations outside of the Smithsonian invited to join the hundreds of Smithsonian scholars, researchers, and curators, each with an amazing story to tell about their work, their quests, and their passions on this platform.

Much like *The Affiliate Blog*, *Smithsonian Voices* is another platform we offer to Affiliates to show the impact our partners have in local and national communities. *Smithsonian Voices* content doesn't necessarily have to have a Smithsonian connection—although having one is encouraged. Here we want to show the incredible work Affiliates are doing every day, how they are engaging their communities, and demonstrate the importance of our Affiliate network in catalyzing critical conversations and reaching people where they are. **Please note, the Blog is not a bulletin board.** We will not post promotional openings, press releases, or events without meatier content. We are looking for those stories that share our mission of "the increase and diffusion of knowledge."

*Smithsonian Voices* is not an academic or research publication. While we adhere to traditional grammar and style guides, we are less formal in our writing style than that of an academic publication. We want to hear our Affiliate's voice in our stories and learn first-hand about the amazing things that are happening in their communities and beyond. Our goal is to show the importance of our partnerships, and through your stories we know we can!

#### What are the story guidelines?

**Background:** Before jumping in to writing, check out a few examples from the *Voices* blog. The *Curator's Corner* is a good place to start. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/curators-corner/>

**Length:** Since this is an online platform, there really is only a minimum word count—500 words. If your story can be told in 500 words, that's great, but if you need more space for a more in-depth story, that's ok too. It is more important to get the story right and give it the attention it needs. If you have something that is short and punchy, that can work too. Making sure it is a good story is the important part. *Please note- Smithsonian Affiliations does have the right to edit content to meet our [terms of use](#) and to make sure our messaging is consistent.*

**Images:** For a really beautiful blog, the images should ideally be 1500 pixels wide for good clarity, but sometimes bloggers use 960 or so and they seem to hold up. Files higher than 3000 pixels will slow the page load so they will be reduced before publishing. Please make sure all images have appropriate permissions, captions, and credit information. In addition, video and audio files can also be included.

**Author info:** Each story gets its own author profile page. Please let us know what your byline should be, including title and organization, and send a short bio, headshot, and any social media tags/websites to include for the author and to direct back to your Affiliate's information.



## Smithsonian Affiliations

**Headline:** Please draft a catchy headline. How will it grab readers? How does it reflect or relate to the conversation of the day? The headline draws readers to your story. And everything is about the headline. Your story ultimately supports the headline. We may edit the headline a bit ultimately, but it helps you as the writer to think structurally about your article when you have a headline in mind.

**Style and the basics:** The Smithsonian is always Smithsonian Institution, never Institute. Please always make sure to mention in the text you are a Smithsonian Affiliate. Titles of artworks, books, plays and musicals, newspapers and magazines, movies, operas and symphonies are in italics. We put quotes around the names of exhibitions, poems, songs and TV shows. And we don't use serial commas. There is never a comma before the and in a series.

### Tips:

- **Pick a Story to Tell.** A lot of our work can be scholarly and hard for readers to relate to. By focusing on one specific narrative, you'll be able to hold your readers' attention. Don't try to tell too many stories in one. Pick one riveting story with a beginning, rising action, climax, and resolution. Readers are coming to Smithsonianmag.com because they know that it is steeped in history, arts, science and culture and so they crave the Smithsonian's authority. That means they are looking for our Affiliates to have that same expertise. At the same time, readers are a fickle and fast clicking bunch and we've got to satisfy their desire to be instantly entertained, and we need to capture their attention, so we need to get inside their heads and think the way they think. What is your story going to be, but more importantly, how are you going to relate it to our audience?
- **Make your story singular in focus.** Develop one point, find anecdotes, quotes and details to enliven your story. Don't just focus on the work of your organization. Think broadly and globally about how other researchers are involved in the topic. And links are important. We need links to support all of the above. If you reference books, see if you can't find the citation in Google Books. Always, link back to resources and archives, especially yours. Use Smithsonianmag.com as a tool to draw our readers deeper into the content that you have developed over the years at your site.

### Strategies for starting to write

- Use your own voice. The story will be more impactful coming from you than "the museum." You don't have to be overly personal, but you do have to be approachable and accessible. The tone of the story should not be overly institutional.
- Be concise. Just as much can be said in a few words as in many.
- Don't be afraid of a little drama. An exciting introduction hooks readers and sets the stage for all the great information to follow.
- Write for an audience that has no prior knowledge of the topic. Define any specialized vocabulary and avoid using lots of acronyms. Explain why your topic is important in the bigger picture of your institution or community.

### Strategies for turning an exhibition into a story

- Write as if there is a singular narrative, do not describe the exhibition room-by-room. Start with one singular idea that will hook the readers. Delve in to a particular piece, describe scenes, tell a unique story, anything to hook those readers!
- Break up the story with little vignettes throughout—get curator quotes to put the exhibition in context; ask them what they find the most compelling of the exhibition; what are their lasting thoughts about what it all means?



## Smithsonian Affiliations

- Look for the bigger picture of what the exhibition story is trying to tell. Don't write as if it is a press release. Information about how long it is on view and where it is can be integrated in to the story in the middle or end, but the meat of the text should not be about its opening or programmatic material.
- Have a look at these blogs when considering writing about an exhibition:  
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/nature-and-artifice-collide-2020-renwick-invitational-180976193/>  
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-girls-have-brought-political-change-america-180976070/>  
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/women-writers-who-shaped-20th-century-american-literature-180975872/>

### Questions to consider when organizing your thoughts

- Who is involved in this story?
- What do you want the reader to walk away knowing?
- What is significant about the artifact/program/exhibition?
- Is there a quirky, little known aspect to your story that people wouldn't normally know?
- Are there any dates you want people to know?
- Where did you get the idea?
- Where can we learn more information?
- Why did this happen at this time?
- Why is your story unique?
- How does your topic impact your community/organization/mission/goals?

### Smithsonian Voices general audience and potential reach information

- Readers are general interest, predominantly 25-65+ years old, and split fairly evenly between males and females.
- Stories are occasionally featured on the magazine's homepage and then picked up in the daily newsletter, [At the Smithsonian](#), which has a distribution list of 63,000 – 69,000 email addresses. [Sign up for the newsletter here.](#)
- The Smithsonian Voices blog sees about 130,000 page views per month.
- Stories related to current events, stories from curators/historians, stories related to historical anniversaries, stories that provide historical context for popular tv/movies, little-known and did-you-know types of stories all do well.
- Stories on Smithsonian Voices are also amplified through the magazine's social media accounts:  
Twitter: @SmithsonianMag, <https://twitter.com/SmithsonianMag>  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/smithsonianmagazine>  
Instagram: @smithsonianmagazine- <https://www.instagram.com/smithsonianmagazine/>

***Please note, stories will be edited by the Smithsonian Affiliations team for tone, voice, context and that they meet our [terms of use](#).***

For questions, please contact Elizabeth Bugbee, Communications and Professional Development Manager, 202.633.5304 or [BugbeeE@si.edu](mailto:BugbeeE@si.edu). If Elizabeth can't be reached, please contact your National Outreach Manager (<https://affiliations.si.edu/about-us/meet-our-team/>).