

From curiosity to research: enhancing citizen science in museums through virtual assistance

Citizen science, or Public Participation in Scientific Research (Shirk et al., 2012), can be explained as the participation of citizens in scientific research. It is the practice of science by volunteers who are not professional researchers, but they work together with professional researchers.

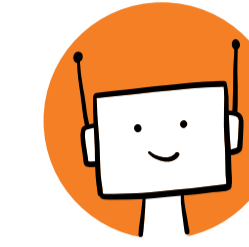
Alan Irwin states that citizen science aims to bring science and the public closer together. To involve the public more in dialogue and in decision-making around issues related to the environment (Irwin, 2002). This involvement can lead to an increased understanding of a scientific context.

The goal of this design project was to support the co-creation and execution of a citizen science project with volunteers and museum researchers. This is done by lowering the barrier for volunteers to start collaborating on citizen science projects, and to help the volunteers formulate a research question.



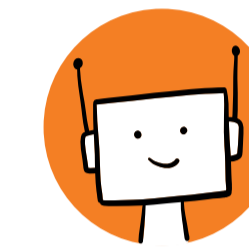
Professor Probe is a virtual research assistant developed and supported by the National Museum of Scotland. Its primary purpose is to help a volunteer set up a citizen science project. It does so by helping to find a topic the volunteer is enthusiastic about and formulating a good research question. This results in a good starting point for the volunteers when they pitch their ideas to the museum researcher. It helps them feel more in control of the project by making them a part of its creation.

Hi Professor Probe. I want to start a new citizen science project with the museum, can you help me out?



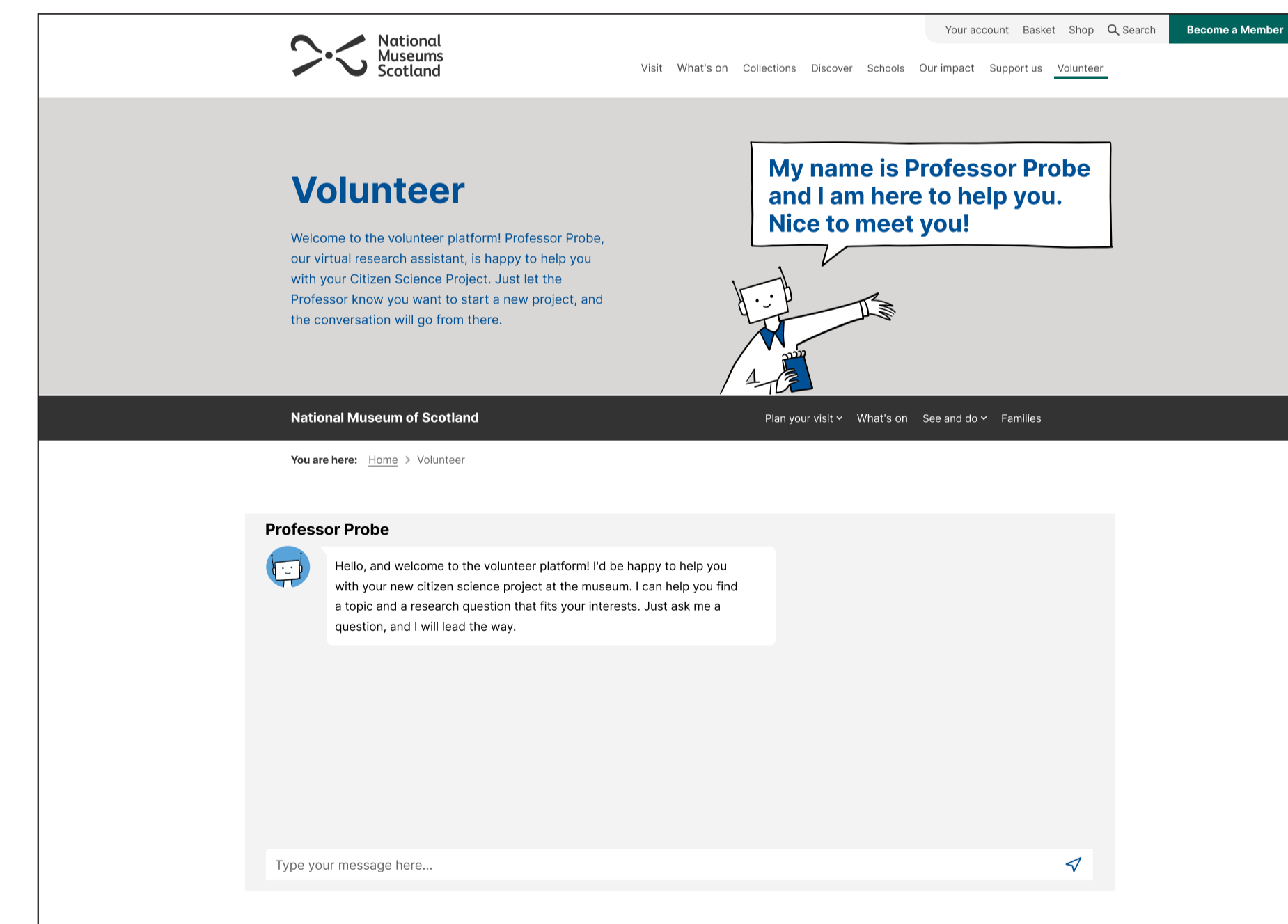
Hello! Of course, I'd be happy to help you with your new citizen science project at the museum. Do you have any ideas in mind for a topic?

No, not yet



That's alright! Let's start by thinking about what you enjoy or find interesting. Do you have any hobbies or interests that we could explore as a potential topic for your citizen science project?

Uhm, I like....



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Design for Interaction

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