



Chicago Zoological Society

Inspiring Conservation Leadership

CHICAGO ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY 2018 DOCENT TRAINING PROGRAM

WHAT IS A DOCENT?

The word "docent" is derived from the Latin word *docere* which means "to teach." In the United States, the word is frequently used to identify trained volunteer educators in zoos, national parks, museums, and similar organizations.

The Chicago Zoological Society's Docent Program was established in 1977. Literally hundreds of people over the past 41 years have contributed their time and talent to us as a docent.

In 2001 and 2010, our Docents proudly hosted the Association of Zoo and Aquarium Docents & Volunteers (AZADV) National Conferences which brought hundreds of volunteers from zoos and aquariums across the country together to build relationships with like-minded stewards of animals and nature.

At Brookfield Zoo Docents engage guests in conservation education by interpreting animal exhibits throughout our entire zoo. Interpretation of our animals and their habitats inspires our guests to celebrate animals and nature.

*** Please note: Our volunteers do not handle animals, do not work directly with animals, and are not involved in animal husbandry. If you are interested in gaining hands-on experience working with animals for your career development, and are currently enrolled in a university degree program, consider our 12-week Internship Program. If interested, please visit the [College Experiential Learning Opportunities \(CELO\) webpage](http://www.czs.org/internships) at www.czs.org/internships or send an e-mail to interns@czs.org.*

WHO ARE THE DOCENTS?

CZS Docents come from all walks of life and range in age from Millennials to nonagenarians! Some have college degrees; many do not. Some live close to the zoo; others live quite some distance. Their passion for animals and wildlife is what motivates them to volunteer at the zoo. If your passion is talking with people about animals, nature, and conservation, then we have a great volunteer program just for you!

QUALIFICATIONS

- You need to have an active interest in, and a demonstrated commitment to animals, nature, wildlife conservation, and conservation education.
- You need to be willing to commit the time and effort required to complete the Docent Training Program and certification process which generally takes 6-12 months.
- You need a friendly personality, excellent communication skills, and the desire to talk with people of all ages and backgrounds.
- You need to be dependable, reliable, and able to make a **regular commitment of service** to the Society.
- Docents spend most of their day standing and walking, and enjoy being outdoors, especially during the summer months. During colder weather, docents are stationed in the indoor exhibits. (*We can accommodate persons who use electronic convenience vehicles or wheelchairs.*)
- Note: Due to the challenging requirements of our Docent Training Program, we do not accept full- or part-time undergraduate or graduate students in the program.

SCHEDULES

- Weekday Docents volunteer weekly on either a morning shift (10am-2pm) or an afternoon shift (1-5pm); weekend Docents volunteer every other Saturday, or every other Sunday, on your choice of a morning or afternoon shift.
- Openings are available for both weekday and weekend Docent Trainees this year, especially on the afternoon shift (1-5pm).
- Once you have completed the docent certification process, flexible scheduling is available.

2018 DOCENT TRAINING PROGRAM COHORT SCHEDULE

- The format for our Docent Training Program has transitioned from a classroom-based lecture-style format to an on-line, self-directed format.
- Our 2018 Fall Docent Training Program Cohort will begin with a full-day **mandatory** introductory workshop on **Saturday, October 6** from 9am-4pm led by our Docent Program Coordinator, Jason Theuman.
- From October through December 2018, you will work at your own pace, completing approximately 15 on-line natural history training modules and also writing a brief research paper on an assigned animal.
- **The deadline to complete all on-line modules and the research paper is Friday, January 4, 2019.**
- The cohort will meet again for a full-day **mandatory** workshop on **Saturday, January 5, 2019**, from 9am-4pm to review the training content and prepare you for your in-park service.
- Attendance at the October 6 and January 5 workshops is **mandatory**.
- After completion of all on-line modules and your research paper, Docent Trainees are partnered with experienced Docent Mentors to complete the on-site portion of the training process and your docent certification.
- You will begin your in-park service with a Docent Mentor on your chosen duty day starting the week of January 14, 2018. (If you are a *snowbird*, you will begin your in-park service when you return.)

DOCENT TRAINING PROGRAM FORMAT

To become a Chicago Zoological Society Docent, you must complete the Docent Training Program, facilitated and coordinated by CZS staff.

Natural History Training

- The Docent Training Program focuses on natural history and conservation content.
- You'll spend about 10-15 hours each week reading, researching, and completing a series of on-line training modules. Each module should take 1-2 hours or less to complete.
- The individual modules to be completed, in any order you choose, are:
 1. *Animal Welfare and Behavioral Husbandry*
 2. *Bears and Bison*
 3. *Big Cats*
 4. *Birds*
 5. *Butterflies*
 6. *Dolphins and Pinnepeds*
 7. *Foundations of Interpretation*
 8. *Giraffe and Okapi*
 9. *Hoofstock*
 10. *Mammals*
 11. *Pachyderms*
 12. *Penguins/Punta San Juan Conservation Program*
 13. *Primates*
 14. *Reptiles, Amphibians, and Fish*
 15. *Nutrition Services*
 16. *Veterinary Services*
 17. *Wild Encounters Exhibit animals*
- As part of your studies, you will also be assigned an animal to research. Your assigned animal will be given to you at the Cohort Workshop on October 6. A required interpretation of this animal on-site in the zoo will be part of your certification process in 2019.
- During the fall months you will also be required to complete one exhibit practicum in the zoo, at a time that is convenient for you.
- As you complete your assignments, you'll delve into the worlds of primates, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and so much more! You'll be amazed at the wonder of the natural world as you learn about ecology, conservation, and animal behavior.
- You'll learn interpretation techniques so that our guests are moved to action on behalf of conservation. The role of Docent is to have a conversation with a guest about conservation. Docents do not lecture facts to our guests; they converse with them!
- Some applicants to the Docent Training Program are sometimes concerned about their ability to handle the assignment portion of the program. Rest assured! The training program is designed so that anyone with a true and sincere interest in animals and conservation can be successful in communicating that information to others. There are no grades; not even a "pass/fail". We'll help you every step of the way! Do not be swayed by Docents who may tell you how difficult the training program is; if they did it, so can you! ☺
- Our Docent Program Coordinator, Jason Theuman, will monitor your progress and will always be available to help you with your studies.

- E-mail access and working on a computer is **required** during the Docent Training Program. If you do not have access to a computer, you can use one at your local library. A free e-mail account can be set up at your local library.

Certification Process

- Once the natural history and conservation content portion of the Docent Training Program is completed, approximately another six to nine months is spent out in the park with experienced and caring Docent Mentors who will guide you through the certification process.
- In November 2018, you will choose your duty day, i.e., the day of the week you regularly plan to volunteer.
- You will begin your docent service on your chosen duty day beginning the week of January 14, 2019 with your assigned Docent Mentor.

Certification consists of satisfactorily completing basic requirements in these four competencies:

1. General Exhibit Knowledge
2. Animal Knowledge
3. Interpretive Skills
4. Hospitality

These four competencies must be demonstrated in each of the following exhibits:

1. Australia House
 2. Big Cats
 3. The Living Coast
 4. Feathers & Scales
 5. Fragile Kingdom (Desert and Clouded Leopard Forest)
 6. Great Bear Wilderness
 7. Habitat Africa! (Savannah and Forest)
 8. Seven Seas
 9. The Swamp
 10. Tropic World
 11. Wild Encounters
- Your final step is an on-site interpretive coaching session with our Docent Program Coordinator, Jason Theuman or a specially-trained member of our docent corps, Certified Interpretive Guides (CIGs). You will interpret the animal that was assigned to you as part of your natural history training for Jason or the Docent assigned to observe you.
 - When your Docent Mentor determines that certification has been achieved, you'll be ready to "fly solo"!

APPLICATION TO THE DOCENT PROGRAM

- Docents are life-long learners who commit to continually improving their knowledge and skills through continuing education.
- The Docent Training Program and serving as a CZS docent requires **COMMITMENT!**
- Because of the personal time and effort invested in the Docent Training Program, you need to seriously consider your other time commitments before submitting an application. Be sure you have the time to give the Docent Training Program the full attention it deserves!
- If you are currently taking continuing education classes, courses for work, travel for your job regularly, work more than 50 hours a week, or have many other family/personal commitments, you may want to consider joining the Guest Guide Program until time allows you to join the Docent Program.
- Due to the challenging requirements of our Docent Training Program, we do not accept part- or full-time undergraduate or graduate students to the program.

Interviews

- After you are invited to and attend a New Volunteer Recruitment Meeting, all applicants interested in the Docent Training Program will return for a Shadow Day and an additional interview with Jason Theuman, Docent Program Coordinator and facilitator for the Docent Training Program, to ensure the Docent Program is the right choice for you.
- All Docent program applicants are required to spend a day in the zoo, from 9:30am-3pm, "shadowing" a current Docent before the training program begins so you can be absolutely certain that our Docent Program is the right volunteer choice for you.
- Shadow Days and interviews will take place July through September.
- Shadow Days will be generally be available Tuesdays through Saturdays. Your interview is conducted on the same day as your shadow experience.
- Please note that acceptance to the Docent Training Program is not automatic or guaranteed.

Training Program Fee

- There is a \$100 course fee for the Docent Training Program. The fee will be due at the first cohort meeting on October 6. *(Should this financial commitment cause economic hardship for you, it can be scaled on your ability to pay.)*

Good Luck and thanks for your interest in the CZS Docent Program!