



Chicago Zoological Society

Inspiring Conservation Leadership

CHICAGO ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY 2020 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 similiar organizations.

The Chicago Zoological Society's Docent Program was established in 1977. Literally thousands of people over the past 43 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.

Is the time right for you to join the Docent Program? We hope so!

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](#) 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 Gen Z 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, and you are an enthusiastic lifelong learner, then Brookfield Zoo has a great volunteer program just for you!

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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, a 4-hour shift either once a week or two weekends a month,** to the Society.
- You need to be able to make a minimum two-year commitment to the program, including the training and certification process.
- 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.*)
- You must be able to volunteer in buildings with varying degrees of temperatures and humidity levels throughout the year (*indoor animal exhibits are generally not air-conditioned*);
- 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 once a week on the same day each week on either a morning shift (10am-2pm) or an afternoon shift (1-5pm); weekend Docents volunteer each month 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.
- Once you have completed the docent certification process, flexible scheduling is available.

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2020 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 2020 Fall Docent Training Program Cohort will begin with a full-day **mandatory** introductory workshop on **Saturday, October 10** from 9am-5pm led by our Docent Program Manager, Jason Theuman.
- From October through December 2020, 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 8, 2021.**
- The cohort will meet again for a full-day **mandatory** workshop on **Saturday, January 9, 2021**, from 9am-5pm to review the training content and prepare you for your in-park service and Docent certification process.
- Attendance at the October 10 and January 9 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 18, 2021. (If you are a *snowbird*, you will begin your in-park service when you return.)

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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 on-line training modules, to be completed in any order you choose, may include (*topics subject to change*):
 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 provided to you at the first Cohort Workshop on October 10. A required interpretation of this animal on-site in the zoo will be part of your certification process in 2021.
- 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!

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- 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 Manager, 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 2020, you will choose your duty day, i.e., the day of the week you regularly plan to volunteer.
- You will begin your Docent service in the park on your chosen duty day beginning the week of January 18, 2021 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 (*exhibits subject to change*):

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

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- Your final step is an on-site interpretive coaching session with our Docent Program Manager, Jason Theuman or a specially-trained member of our Docent team, 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 CIG 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 Special Events Volunteer Program or Guest Guide Volunteer 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.

Interview Process

- If your application meets the qualifications to become a Docent, you will receive an invitation from Ms. Regi Mezydlo, Director/Volunteer Engagement, to attend a required New Volunteer Recruitment Meeting.
- At the New Volunteer Recruitment Meeting, you will learn specifics about our current available volunteer opportunities, including the Docent Program. You will also engage in dialogue with Regi and current volunteers to gauge your readiness and willingness to become a volunteer.
- Please understand that acceptance to the Docent Training Program is not automatic or guaranteed.
- After the New Volunteer Recruitment Meeting, Regi will let you know whether or not you have been moved on to the next step.
- If you are selected to move on to the next step, you will return for a Shadow Day before the training program begins in October. On your Shadow Day, you will shadow a current Docent in the park so you can be absolutely certain that our Docent Program is the right volunteer choice for you. As part of the Shadow Day, there will be an additional interview with Jason Theuman, Docent Program Manager and facilitator for the Docent Training Program, to ensure the Docent Program is the right choice for you.
- Shadow Days and interviews will take place in summer 2020.
- Shadow Days will be generally be available Tuesdays through Saturdays from 9:30-3:30pm.

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Training Program Fee

- There is a \$100 course fee for the Docent Training Program. The non-refundable fee will be due prior to the first cohort meeting on October 10. *(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!
Questions?: Please contact us at volunteers@czs.org