

Docent Program Description

Welcome to the UC Davis Thomas J. Long Foundation Education Center at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Science (TCES)! You have joined a group of individuals who are helping to make possible the best in science education and enjoyment.

The UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center (TERC) has initiated this Docent Program in order to connect the talents of community volunteers to the needs of visitors and students.

After completing your docent training program, you will be able to select which subject areas and types of responsibilities you will want to take on. The range of activities available to docents is varied. Examples of opportunities include:

- Facilitate tours of the Thomas J. Long Foundation Education Center exhibits.
- Be available to explain to visitors the various exhibits at the center.
- Assist science education center visitors with hands-on science activities.
- Provide green building tours of the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences.
- Assist in outreach programs for schools and community events.
- Work in the Docent Office. Help with filing, typing, mailings, phone and e-mail correspondence.

We hope to attract thousands of visitors, locals and tourists alike, to the Thomas J. Long Foundation Education Center every year. As a docent, you will help these visitors to have an enjoyable, educational experience through which they will learn about Lake Tahoe and environmental problems affecting it. We hope our program offers you unlimited opportunities for enjoyment, enrichment and personal satisfaction.

Sincerely,



Heather Segale
Education & Outreach Coordinator
UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center

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Docent Application

After completing this form, please hand in to the Docent Volunteer Coordinator or mail to:

*Docent Volunteer Coordinator
UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center
Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences
291 Country Club Drive
Incline Village, Nevada 89451*

The following information is requested in order to process your application to be a docent at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences. It will be made available, when appropriate, to those involved in the Docent Program.

New docents are asked to complete at least one year of service within the Center. Please consider whether you will be able to fulfill this commitment before completing this application.

Please print or type information on the front and back of this form. Thank you.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Mailing Address: _____ Phone: Home _____

_____ Zip Code _____ Business/Cell _____

E-Mail Address _____

In case of emergency, notify _____

Education _____

Special Skills/Interests/Hobbies _____

Foreign languages spoken (fluent/limited) _____

Availability

Please indicate (check and circle) times you might expect to volunteer:

- Weekly Shift: AM / PM/BOTH Summer Fall Spring Winter
- Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday
- On Call/Substitute

Docent Opportunities

Please check the areas that you are interested in helping at the education center:

- Tours (Assist with drop-in visitor tours or small groups)
- School Tours (Assist with student group tours—focus on sixth grade—and hands-on activities)
- Special Events (Lectures and Workshops)
- Social (Assist at fundraising and other social events)
- Office/Library (Assist with office needs/Help organize, catalogue, and perform data entry)

How did you hear about this volunteer opportunity?

- Newspaper Email Word of Mouth Other _____

Are you ready to make a commitment to fulfill training requirements and volunteer for at least 72 hours for one year? Yes No Unsure at this time

Notes or Comments: _____

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Thank you for your interest in becoming a docent at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences.

Docent Roles and Service Excellence

During the last two decades the role of interactive education has gained importance as museums and other facilities strive to expand visitor participation in a stimulating learning experience. A docent can expect to encounter both the inexperienced visitor and the sophisticated well-traveled visitor who often expects exhibits to surpass educational television programs and internet media. Therefore, a docent's challenge is to present their knowledge in an engaging and pleasant way, through careful preparation and good speaking.

Treat Your Visitor as Your Personal Guest

In every public interaction, you must remember you are dealing with a whole person with certain needs:

- The need to be understood.
- The need to feel welcome.
- The need to feel important.
- The need for comfort.

Physical comfort involves clear orientation, instructive and legible signage, adequate lighting and comfortable seating. Did visitors arrive following a long trip? Is it necessary to store backpacks and coats? Are there special needs to be considered? Does anyone need to visit the restroom before you begin?

Psychological comfort involves your treatment of the visitor. Be sure to extend a warm welcome and offer help in locating various facilities. Share orientation material and explain floor plans. Friendliness and informative directions can go a long way.

Intellectual comfort involves hearing and accepting visitors' ideas and concerns as valid. How can you make visitors feel comfortable at their present knowledge level? How can you make them feel confident in their ability to understand and appreciate what they will see and hear?

First Step – Introduction

Introduce visitors to the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center (TERC); explain its background and its mission. Welcome them inside the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences (TCES) building. Highlight the TCES building's LEED Platinum certification, along

with special activities and lectures TERC hosts. Make sure to describe the function TERC serves in the community.

Let Visitors Know You

Introduce yourself and share your background along with some of your interests. Explain the meaning of *docent*, being careful not to describe yourself as an expert but rather a volunteer who will support them in discovering new information. Emphasize that you serve as a connector between visitors and the subject, and that you are embarking on a shared learning experience.

Know Your Subject

An understanding of broad concepts as well as specific information is essential. Acquire an overview of cultural and social history, natural history, science, and botany, as it pertains to Lake Tahoe. Become familiar with the content of special exhibits. Use quotes, anecdotes, and stories to enliven your presentation.

Know Your Audience

The more you know about your audience, the better you are able to match the tour to their interests, needs and abilities. Be aware of language skills and special needs. How much time do they have for the tour? Find out if they have visited the Education Center before. If they have, ask what they remember about the previous visit. If they haven't, what do they expect from the tour? Consider visitors' prior knowledge and attitudes; this will help you structure your tour.

If your participants are students, ask if they have to fulfill certain requirements. You might want to ask students what they are currently studying. Is their visit an introduction to the subject matter or is it reinforcement of their curriculum? Would they like to explore specific topics or themes? Encourage them to ask lots of questions.

Who's in Charge?

You should determine what visitors expect and what they would like to get from your tour. In order to let your visitors play a more active role, you need to give up some of the authority that the lecture method would afford, even though you may be concerned about the progress of the tour. You also might be wondering why you should prepare a detailed tour—after all, letting visitors' interests and responses shape the tour is much less predictable than following

a script. However, having a flexible agenda that allows for spontaneity will empower your audience and open up an entirely new experience for you and visitors.

Visitors want a personally relevant experience. Asking visitors to compare their own geographical or cultural areas to what they see in an exhibit is an easy way to engage them on a personal level. You should try to create an environment that is conducive to sharing personal observations and associations, without value judgments.

Let Visitors Know Your Plan

Briefly discuss your theme for your tour. Explain the logistics: tell visitors where they will go, what they can expect to see, and the approximate time it will take to complete the tour. Explore what connections to everyday life can be made from the content of the tour.

On the Tour

Choose a theme and a few ideas you want to emphasize. The more focused you are, the better your chances are that your group will remember relevant facts. Your theme should be age appropriate and pertain to the exhibit contents. State your theme clearly and reiterate it throughout the tour. For example:

What makes Lake Tahoe unique?

What are the environmental challenges we face in Tahoe?

What does science tell us about possible solutions?

What can you do to protect Lake Tahoe?

Remember to make logical transitions; a transition provides continuity because it builds on the discoveries and observations from one exhibit to the next. Transitions also provide a sense of anticipation during the tour. It can even take the form of a game or activity to reinforce a theme. Don't forget to pause now and then; it allows visitors time to absorb information. It's a good idea to keep abreast of new and ongoing research being done at UC Davis TERC and share it with visitors. There is a "Recommended Reading" file located in the stackable file trays in the Docent Room.

Style and Presentation

Think about your position in relation to your group and the exhibit. Make sure that they can see what you are describing. Use appropriate and objective vocabulary. Be careful not to impart a particular point of view by your choice of words—we are presenting data and scientific information. We should not be advocating any one position.

“...When scientists use their scientific credentials to advocate on behalf of a non-scientific question or one outside their expertise, or use poor methodology, scientists can lose credibility and sometimes harm the causes they aim to support.” (2008 AAAS Forum on Science & Technology Policy)

Use your voice effectively; vary the tone and pace of delivery. Maintaining eye contact is one of the most important factors in establishing a good rapport with your tour participants.

Be aware of your body language, your facial expressions, and the messages you send to your audience. A glance, nod, gesture, smile, or frown can communicate and control without interrupting the flow of learning. Use gestures in a restrained, natural manner when speaking and watch your non-verbal cues to ensure that you are holding the group’s attention. Allow visitors to respond to explanations and to express their own observations. Visitors will look upon you as the leader. You should be poised and self-confident, using speaking skills and good grammar. How you present yourself expresses how you feel about yourself and the subject matter. Remember, you represent the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center to the public.

Enjoy Yourself

Thoughtfulness and politeness are important qualities of a docent. Smiles, humor, shared laughter, and steady eye contact are essential. Enthusiasm is contagious. If you enjoy what you are doing and if you are excited about your subject matter, your visitors, fellow docents, and everyone at TERC will know it!

Younger Visitors

Ask children’s names and use them—it establishes a connection. Spell out ground rules before you start the tour, emphasizing respect, paying attention, staying with the group, and asking questions. Also, you may want to suggest some exercises or games for young kids. Ask them to stand on their tiptoes with hands extended and to freeze in that position. Then let them shake out that pent up energy. As they stretch high as they can, ask them to imagine they are some kind of animal or Tahoe Tessie. Keep in mind attention getters such as “Quiet Coyote” or “If you hear my voice, clap once...” Just remember, even for unruly children, physically touching them is inappropriate.

Hold Visitors' Attention

Always engage your audience. Asking questions gives you useful information and sets the tone for the tour. Your questions will indicate that you value visitors' responses and that you want to meet their expectations. Allow younger visitors to act as leaders—to model appropriate behavior and to participate in activities without displaying any favoritism. Heap on the positive attention. For visitors who aren't children, you might find some humorous anecdotes or stories to share. Laughing together relaxes people and breaks the ice. Show interest in your visitors' comments, engage them in discussions, and if necessary gently lead them back to the goals of the tour.

How to Finish a Tour

It is tempting to tack on more facts and stories once you realize that the end of the tour is approaching. From the visitor's point of view however, the last minutes are better spent reiterating the theme and recapping the main points. Invite visitors to describe information that surprised them or how they will incorporate what they learned into their daily lives. Push children to think about the importance of a specific point, one thing they learned, or what they liked or disliked. Try to relate comments back to your theme. Ask if there are any final questions for you.

Ask your group to complete a Visitor Exit Survey. Explain that they help us understand our audience and improve our programs and interactive media. Interested visitors can sign up to receive additional information about events and new research. Tactfully note that donations are welcome. Finally, be sure to **thank** visitors and encourage them to return with other family members or friends.

Successful Interaction

Be an active listener—pay attention without interrupting or making judgments. Try to use positive rather than negative terminology. For instance, instead of saying "I don't know," try "That's an excellent question; I'll try to find the answer for you." Practice reflective listening, which means repeating back what a visitor has said. It will help you understand and clarify. Never enter into a debate. Simply try to be respectful of visitor's opinions, no matter what the circumstance.

Interacting with People with Disabilities

Keep in mind:

- Speak directly to the person who has a disability rather than through a third party, such as the interpreter. You want to draw the person into the group.
- Treat adults as adults.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for the disabled person—let them set the pace in walking and talking.
- Be neither patronizing nor reverential. Don't make an issue of the disability.
- Appreciate what the person can do. Difficulties may stem more from society's attitudes and environmental barriers than from the disability itself.

Vision

- Losses of vision vary in degree. People with this disability may be able to see one thing but not another.
- When greeting a person with severe vision loss, identify yourself and others who are with you.
- When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back of the chair.
- Use the person's name when starting a conversation to indicate to whom you are speaking.

Hearing

- Remember, hearing loss can range from mild to severe and can influence the way a person communicates or responds to sounds and to the speech of others.
- Move away from background noise.
- Look directly at the person and keep your hands away from your face when you speak.
- If an interpreter is present, remember to address the person, not the interpreter.
- Note that both English and Spanish subtitles are available for the boat and lab exhibits. Press the appropriate subtitle button before you start the video file.

Wheelchairs or Walkers

- Push a wheelchair only after asking permission.
- Don't lean on a person's wheelchair.
- For longer conversations, it helps to sit down so you are at eye level. It is uncomfortable for a person to look up for very long.
- Note the virtual boat exhibit has a wheelchair ramp.

Speech Difficulties

- Give whole, unhurried attention to the person with difficulty speaking.
- Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting.
- Don't speak for the person, allow them time and give help when needed.
- Don't pretend to understand when you do not. Repeat as much as you understood. Let the person's reactions clue you in as to how to proceed.

How to Handle Complaints

1. Listen carefully to the complaint.
2. Repeat the complaint back so that you know you've heard it correctly.
3. Apologize and acknowledge the visitor's concerns.
4. Explain what you will do to correct the problem.
5. Thank the visitor for bringing the problem to your attention.

Never: Insult or embarrass visitors, invade personal space, raise your voice, touch visitors unless in self-defense, use force, or apologize for established policy and rules.

Docent Duties

For Drop-in Visitors or Small Groups:

- Have visitors fill out *Visitor Exit Survey*.
- Log tours in *Visitor Tracking Form* located in Docent Room.
- Wear your name tag.
- Show up for all scheduled tours, or if unable to attend, find a substitute. If you can't find a sub, be sure to contact the TERC Docent Coordinator.
- Show up in advance of your scheduled tour.
- Finish your tour on time and if a school tour, bring students to the proper spot.
- Submit *Volunteer Hours Report*.

For School Groups:

- Be present for group welcome so you can be introduced.
- Take a timer and stay on schedule. Be sure you know the rotation length.
- Help with group rotations.

Sources:

- The Docent Handbook, sponsored by the National Docent Symposium Council
- Division of Education Docent Program, Summer 2005
- Lawrence Hall of Science, Public Service Excellence

Docent Task List

Please help us with the following tasks during your shift. Some of these tasks should be completed each day while others can be completed as time allows. Thank you!

TERC Docent Signage:

- Sandwich Boards* - Please feel free to put the sandwich boards outside (by the curb and walkway). However, if you do not have time or find the signs are too heavy, this is not imperative. You can also request an AmeriCorps member to help with this task.
- Docent Around the Corner sign** - Put this sign up when the TCES front desk attendant is absent or in general, to alert visitors to your presence in the docent room.
- Docent Currently Conducting Tour sign** - Put this sign up on Saturdays (or any day) to alert visitors when you're conducting a tour.

*Signs are affixed to plastic holder.

During Tours:

- Request visitors to complete *Visitor Exit Survey*
- Record visitors on *Visitor Tracking Form*

During shift:

- Clean Visualization Lab 3-D glasses
- Clean video exhibit screens (special cleaner in docent room for plasma screens)
- Check that all surveys are on desk area and pens are available
- Check that all handouts (newsletter, brochures, etc.) are stocked
- Check that all informational sheets for docents are stocked
- Review any *Recommended Reading* items in the stackable tray

At End of Shift:

- Bring sandwich board in from the road (can request AmeriCorps help with this)
- Turn Mac computer and docent computer off (the ViewSpace computer on the far right stays on)
- Turn both 3D Projectors off
- Turn ViewSpace TV off
- Turn video exhibit system off
- Turn microscope monitor off (make sure to return any zooplankton to their home)
- Cover microscope
- Tidy exhibits (i.e. jars are in proper places on shelves, any pipettes and petri dishes are put away, etc.)
- Record your volunteer hours on the *Docent Hours Log*

Docent Time Sheet

Docent Name: _____

Hours Per Activity

Date	Ed Center Tours	School Field Trips	Meetings	Training	Lectures or Workshops	Office or Library	Total Volunteer Hours
1)							
2)							
3)							
4)							
5)							
6)							
7)							
8)							
9)							
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Comments or Suggestions: