

# **Adult Program Docent Roles and Responsibilities**

December 2014

## **Introduction**

This roles and responsibilities document:

- Supports the goals of the guided tour program by defining responsibilities and expectations for both docents and staff.
- Reflects the National Gallery's commitment to our visitors and tour participants, to excellence, and to creating and nurturing a positive work environment
- Describes how docents and staff work together, placing particular value on communication and professionalism. Docents and staff support teamwork and collaboration, for example, through the Volunteer Council, the chairs/vice-chairs/staff meetings, and by piloting new tours.

This document should be read in conjunction with the NGA Division of Education Volunteer Guidelines and the NGA Volunteer Handbook.

## **Goals Statement for Guided Tours led by Adult Program Docents**

Tours are designed to introduce visitors to the museum experience and to the National Gallery's collection of American and European art from the late Middle Ages to the twenty-first century. Docent-led tours are structured to encourage careful observation, foster an open exchange of ideas, explore art as historical and cultural expression, and cultivate connections between art and life. The National Gallery's goal is to nurture a life-long engagement with art and the museum experience.

Our goals for the guided tour will be achieved by:

- Creating a positive and welcoming environment for Gallery visitors
- Utilizing teaching strategies that meet the needs and interests of diverse visitors
- Valuing visitors' ideas and experiences in the interpretation of art
- Engaging in continuing education about art, museum experiences, and the learning experience
- Conducting on-going assessment of tours and docent programs
- Committing to high standards of service and professionalism

## **Docent Responsibilities and Organization**

National Gallery of Art Adult Program docents are museum educators who are expected to conduct excellent tours at all times. They should be able to communicate effectively with tour participants in voices that can be heard clearly at the back and edges of the group. Docents must be fully prepared in all aspects of tour-giving. On tours, docents must provide accurate information obtained from training provided by the Division of Education, the NGA systematic catalogues, the NGA web site, NGA curatorial files, or other reliable sources. They must be familiar with tour routes, use engaging and stimulating methods consistent with current best practices in museum teaching, and be flexible. After tours, docents should reflect on the tour's strengths and challenges and consider how they might improve future tours.

Adult Program docents are organized into three committees for administrative purposes – Weekday (APD), Weekend (APW), and Foreign Language (FLD). Elected officers on each committee may

include a chair, vice-chair, and treasurer/secretary. Responsibilities are determined by the chair of each committee, but traditionally have been as follows:

#### Chair

- Plans and conducts committee meetings
- Selects sub-committees and appoints their leadership as deemed appropriate (e.g. Enrichment)
- Represents committee on the Volunteer Council
- Maintains regular email communication with committee members
- Meets regularly with staff program manager and other Adult Program committee chairs and vice-chairs
- Serves as a conduit to the staff program manager for feedback and question on behalf of the committee
- Collaborates fully with other committee officers
- Appoints a nominating committee of at least 3 committee members annually in January

#### Vice-chair

- Serves as chair of the docent candidates
- Assists the chair in his/her duties
- Attends Volunteer council meetings
- Attends chair/vice-chair meetings with the program manager
- Fulfills the duties of the chair in the absence or incapacitation of the chair

#### Secretary/Treasurer (these positions may be divided)

- Keeps minutes from committee meetings and distributes them via email
- Presents minutes for approval at committee meetings
- Attends to committee correspondence
- Collects voluntary contributions and administers these funds
- Presents a financial statement to members at committee meetings

Each committee elects a slate of officers annually. A nominating committee will put out a call for nominations at least 30 days before the vote, and a slate will be sent out to committee members at least 7 days prior to the vote. Only active members are eligible to serve as officers or to vote. Members vote on the slate of officers at the final meeting on the calendar, typically in late May or early June. Officers will be elected by a simple majority and serve a term of one year.

Committees will meet at least 3 times per year.

#### **Tours**

The Gallery offers a number of guided tours, as noted in Attachment A. Adult Program docent candidates validate for *Early Italian to Early Modern: An Introduction to the West Building Collection* during their first year of training, and for *1900 to Now: An Introduction to the East Building Collection* during their second year at the Gallery. Successful candidates agree to a minimum five year commitment to the program. To remain active in the program, docents are expected to grow in their knowledge of the collection and continue to validate for additional tours. The order of validation should be dictated by the needs of the guided-tour program at any particular time, as determined by program staff.

Guided tours are offered fifty-two weeks per year, every day but Christmas Day and New Year's Day. The guided-tour program depends on each docent giving a minimum number of tours per year:

- APD Minimum of 36 tours per year
- APW Minimum of 24 tours per year
- FLD The need varies according to language and the number of docents giving tours in that language, but it is expected that once a tour is scheduled, there will be a docent available to give it.

Tour assignments are chosen on a monthly basis, with the schedule for a given month being made available for signup on Volgistics approximately 45 days prior to the first day of that month; docents will sign up for scheduled tours in 2 phases, based on their availability and validation, and on the needs of the program. Special appointment tours are assigned as needed.

If a docent's availability changes once a tour has been assigned, that docent is responsible for obtaining a substitute and notifying program staff via email to [AdultDocents@nga.gov](mailto:AdultDocents@nga.gov) of the change. Staff will not arrange for substitutes, except in serious emergencies such as sudden illness, injury, or death of a family member.

On the day of the tour the docent should arrive at the Gallery in time to "walk the tour". At least 15 minutes before the scheduled start of the tour, the docent should remind the art information volunteers at either the Main Information Desk or the East Building Information Desk that he or she will be doing a tour in 15 minutes, give them a written itinerary for the tour in case they need to send latecomers, and encourage them to advise visitors of the pending tour. At least 5 minutes before the start of the tour, the docent should take a position at the "Tours Start Here" sign in either the West Building or the East Building to encourage and welcome visitors who might be interested in joining the tour.

It is the responsibility of the docent to log tour attendance figures in Volgistics within a week of each tour, in order to allow the Division of Education access to these important statistics.

## **Docent Education**

Docent Education reflects the Gallery's high standards of excellence and presents current research and best practices in the fields of museum education, art history, and other related disciplines.

Several formats will be used to advance docent learning, including: in-gallery sessions, lectures, workshops that cover a variety of practical and educational topics, discussions and modeling of best practices in teaching and applied theory, and pre- and post-session readings. Most education sessions take place in the lecture hall or in the galleries, focus on the Gallery's permanent collection, and require active learning and participation.

Docents are required to attend all scheduled education sessions and committee meetings. Not more than three excused absences are permitted during the year. Adult Programs staff must be notified in advance of planned absences by email to [AdultDocents@nga.gov](mailto:AdultDocents@nga.gov); docents must also notify their committee chair in advance of a planned absence. Docents who miss scheduled education sessions are responsible for:

- obtaining notes from fellow docents
- making use of digital audio files, if available
- obtaining training session handouts
- following tours based on the missed sessions, when applicable

Docents who miss more than three education sessions will be asked to meet with a member of the staff to discuss their commitment to the program.

Evaluation provides important opportunities for docent learning and includes: self-reflection, participant feedback, as well as staff observation and mentoring.

### **Staff Responsibilities**

The program is the responsibility of selected staff members within the Division of Education. Staff members provide support by:

- Supervising day-to-day operations of the program.
- Establishing and implementing the goals of the Gallery's Division of Education and the Department of Adult Programs.
- Researching, planning, developing, implementing, teaching, and evaluating the programs, in keeping with the Gallery's high standards of excellence and current research and best practices in the fields of museum education, art history, and other related disciplines.
- Supporting the work of Adult Program docents by providing an effective educational program that balances content about art history and best practices in museum education.
- Participating in and guiding the evaluation process. Staff will regularly observe docents leading tours and will discuss these observations with the docents. Any additional follow-up is individualized according to the needs of each docent. Staff also supports docent self-reflection and peer learning.
- Soliciting feedback from tour participants.
- Working collaboratively with docents, via the committee chairs and vice-chairs, and the Volunteer Council, to confer on policies and issues that directly impact Adult Program docents and tours.
- Maintaining clear, consistent, and frequent communication with docents on matters that directly impact the planning and implementation of guided tours; a variety of modes will be used including: email (most frequently used), postings on the docent website, telephone, in person, and mailed documents (infrequently used).
- Maintaining Adult Program docent service records and statistical information about guided tours.