



CREATING AN INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Lessons Learned and Future Implications

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We believe that our volunteers must reflect our community and that we must welcome and respect people of all backgrounds to ensure that a diversity of voices is heard in support of wildlife and nature.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, zoos, aquariums, and other cultural institutions have made great strides in creating accessible and inclusive experiences for their guests. Woodland Park Zoo, like many other organizations, is evolving to foster inviting spaces where diversity, equity, access and inclusion (DEAI) remain at the forefront. By doing so, we positively transform the lives of individuals and our communities within our spheres of influence. However, DEAI is a continuum, not a journey with an end destination. If done right, there is no finish line we are aiming to cross, no checklist we are trying to get through and complete. There is and always will be work that needs to be done. As a result, we must collectively take action and continuously recommit ourselves to furthering DEAI initiatives.

At Woodland Park Zoo (WPZ) in Seattle, Wash., inclusion is both a core value and strategic principle. **We believe that including diverse ideas, perspectives, and voices in every aspect of our work—from staff to volunteers to guests to partners—is not only the right thing to do, but essential for realizing our mission and vision.** If we are to truly inspire our community to support our work, we must build upon and go beyond our traditional role as a destination of wildlife wonder and exploration by creating welcoming, accessible and relevant experiences for everyone.

We hope the information presented here will help other cultural institutions – zoos, aquariums, museums, etc. – to further DEAI initiatives, specifically with respect to access for individuals with disabilities in volunteer engagement opportunities. This document outlines the work WPZ has done to include volunteers with disabilities, lessons we have learned along the way and implications for future work. It is by no means exhaustive but can serve as a starting point.

Woodland Park Zoo saves wildlife and inspires *everyone* to make conservation a priority in their lives.



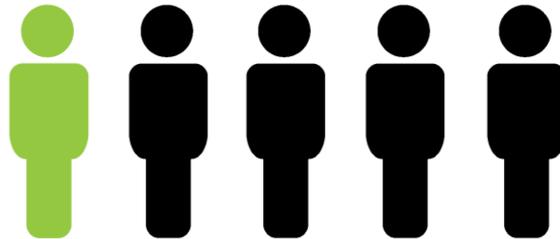
OUR MISSION

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is aimed at volunteer engagement professionals as well as any individuals seeking to improve access within volunteer programs and related service opportunities.

VOLUNTEER INCLUSION PROGRAM

There is a need for more inclusive volunteer programs and overall engagement at major cultural institutions. For context, roughly 22% of adults in Washington state identify with a disability, amounting to 1,296,016 individuals overall (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). However, few volunteer programs are at parity with county or state levels when it comes to the demographics of their volunteer corps including engaging volunteers with disabilities in meaningful service opportunities.



Approximately 1 in 5 adult Washingtonians have a disability.

In 2018, WPZ applied for and received an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant to initiate a Volunteer Inclusion Program (VIP) to bolster capacity to support volunteers with disabilities in participating meaningfully in conservation. Though we did have individuals with disabilities volunteering at WPZ prior to receiving the IMLS grant, they often encountered unnecessary, time-consuming barriers which we dealt with on a case-by-case basis. As such, through the VIP we sought to take a more intentional approach to inclusion and develop a program where individuals with disabilities could actively serve their community in an accessible and inclusive environment.

Goal and objectives

WPZ's VIP is a comprehensive, first of its kind, organization-wide initiative within the greater Seattle metropolitan area that empowers and enhances the lives of individuals with disabilities by offering social and job skills development opportunities through volunteering. **The overarching goal of the VIP is to create an environment that promotes inclusion and offers meaningful service opportunities for people with disabilities to engage with the zoo.** We accomplished this goal by focusing on two major objectives:

1. Build meaningful partnerships with leaders in the inclusion community; and
2. Create a sustainable volunteer inclusion program.

Program implementation

Over the course of two years, we worked with local organizations, education institutions, and individuals with lived experience to provide insight and training for staff and WPZ at large on the implementation of the program. By leaning on the expertise of our community, the VIP was built in collaboration with the individuals that would be most impacted by the program, thus, creating a sustainable model for future volunteers with disabilities.

The collaborative work included the formation of an Inclusion Advisory Council that meets regularly to discuss accessibility and inclusion within WPZ’s general Volunteer Program. The Inclusion Advisory Council comprises trusted and well established organizations and individuals within the disability community including, but not limited to: **Northwest ADA Center**, the **University of Washington Haring Center** and **Provail**. Additionally, we developed an Inclusion Review Panel (IRP) made up of volunteers at WPZ with various disabilities – physical, cognitive and developmental. The purpose of the IRP is to further our understanding of where we are successful in our mission to increase inclusivity and accessibility and where we still need to make improvements to our Volunteer Program. The IRP has been particularly helpful in providing guidance on our training for all new volunteers.

Overall, community engagement was the driving force of this program as well as constant feedback from volunteers with disabilities directly affected by the changes resulting from the VIP.

(Below) Two WPZ volunteers working on a training activity together. They are both wearing the standard brown uniform shirt for our volunteer corps and are looking down at a paper packet.



CONTEXT: WOODLAND PARK ZOO'S VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Woodland Park Zoo views *all* of its volunteers as dynamic agents who impact the zoo’s work in positive and meaningful ways. The Volunteer Program is structured such that every volunteer, regardless of position, is aligned with our mission and able to meet the diverse and changing needs of the zoo. Program components—recruitment, training, retention and ongoing quality improvement—are designed with this in mind.

Even the base title for WPZ volunteers—zoo ambassador—reflects this vision. Regardless of the specialty position an individual may eventually assume, every WPZ volunteer is seen as an ambassador for the zoo, and by extension, an ambassador for conservation. **All volunteers are zoo ambassadors**, and they retain this title for the duration of their time in the Volunteer Program.

The primary focus of our volunteers is engaging with zoo guests by offering assistance and information, facilitating extraordinary, accessible and inclusive zoo experiences through inquiry-based learning, and contributing to overall financial sustainability by helping at a variety of revenue-generating special events. Once in the program, volunteers also have the opportunity to apply and interview for positions in other aspects of the zoo's operations including animal care, horticulture, education and leadership roles within the Volunteer Program.

DISABILITY AWARENESS

Encountering barriers – physical, economic, geographic, etc. – is an all too familiar occurrence for individuals with disabilities. If you approach your volunteer program from a universal perspective you remove barriers and create better access for all. In the following paragraphs, we will cover various disabilities and some quick tools to assist you in working with volunteers with disabilities.

Volunteer abilities can be extremely diverse, so your approach to designing (or redesigning) your volunteer program should encompass the spectrum.

Woodland Park Zoo approached inclusion and accessibility efforts by involving community members and volunteers with disabilities to spearhead making changes at the zoo. We wanted to encourage and maintain their support and involvement throughout. The formation of an Inclusion Advisory Council (made up of community organizations that support/represent individuals with disabilities) and the Inclusion Review Panel (made up of zoo volunteers with disabilities) advised and provided counsel as we developed new trainings and revised procedures. Their involvement emphasized the importance of including those with lived experience to aid us in creating something that really includes everyone.

A deep review of your cultural institution or organization in collaboration with your community and individuals that you hope to provide an inclusive space for must be undertaken. At WPZ we looked at the facilities, overall zoo grounds, parking, programs, resources and materials provided to volunteers. We conducted focus groups and reviews with our Inclusion Advisory Council to ensure that volunteers with physical disabilities would have the same access as another volunteer.

The key is to build a program that is adaptable and adjusts to the needs of each volunteer. Often the phrase “reasonable accommodation” is brought up in redesign efforts. WPZ started an ongoing effort to design our volunteer program from a holistic perspective. Drawing from elements of Universal Design, we sought to embrace the variability in our volunteers. In our journey to better understand the variations of abilities of our volunteers we worked towards understanding different disabilities and how our programs could include individuals regardless of disability. The following is a brief overview of more common disabilities that comprise both our guests and volunteer audiences. Please be aware that this is not a comprehensive list meant to outline all disabilities, as some disabilities do not fall into a single category. For example, individuals with autism¹ may not fit into a defined category and some individuals may have intersectionality that further changes how they may identify their disability. The categories below represent who we considered when we envisioned a universal volunteer program; however, there may be areas and individuals that we can further evolve our programs as we involve more collaboration and strive for more equitable inclusion. If you would like to further your reading on disability awareness, please look at our additional resources at the end of the document.

¹Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication (Autism Speaks).

Cognitive disabilities

In Washington state, 21.3% of individuals have a cognitive difficulty (WA Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, 2017). Cognitive disabilities can be congenital, developmental or as a result of a traumatic injury. Since individuals with a cognitive disability present in many fashions, universal consideration and adaptability are key to creating a space in which volunteers feel comfortable and included. Important things to consider are the sensory concerns of an individual or how material is presented (i.e., providing instructions in the form of social stories).

There are functional classifications that focus on an individual's cognitive abilities. We highlight these areas below as things to consider when designing a role for a volunteer, from how they access the built environment to how they interact with staff and guests.

EXAMPLES OF COGNITIVE DISABILITIES



Attention

Individuals with ADHD or ADD who may have difficulty staying on focusing or staying on task.



Memory

Immediate, short-term or long-term memory difficulty. Some individuals may have difficulties with one, two or all three.



Math comprehension

Mathematical expressions can present challenges for individuals with cognitive disabilities. Conceptual explanations with equations can give individuals further context to understanding.



Reading, linguistic and verbal comprehension

The ability to understand written and spoken language or the ability to recognize letters and words.



Problem-solving

The ability to reason, prioritize and plan.



Visual comprehension

The ability to recognize symbols, photos or other images and put them into context.

Physical disabilities

In our region, 52.1% of individuals with a disability have a physical disability (WA Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, 2017). Physical disabilities (ambulatory, visual, or hearing), whether from birth or occurring later in life, are variable and diverse. From visual disabilities, auditory or motor function abilities, a volunteer program will want to consider how an individual accesses spaces, presents to guests or works in other capacities in your program.

EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL DISABILITIES



Ambulatory

Abilities affecting an individual's limbs or movement. Examples include limb difference, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injury.



Visual

Individuals with low vision, blindness or a degenerative eye condition.



Auditory

Affecting one's ability to hear, individuals may identify with being part of the Deaf community and may or may not use American Sign Language or other techniques like lip reading to communicate.

Other disabilities

Other disability considerations should be made for volunteers who may have a temporary disability, whether from an accident or illness to age-related disabilities creating complications with the role the volunteer plays in your organization.

Volunteer programs often comprise retired individuals who may have age related disabilities. The ADA National Network reports that 30% of people over the age of 65 have some type of disability (ADA National Network, 2018). Additionally, volunteers in the course of volunteering for your program may encounter a temporary disability. With accessibility in mind, rather than dissuading volunteers from contributing to your organization, these volunteers can be included and contribute to your mission.

EXAMPLES OF OTHER DISABILITIES



Age-related

These are disabilities that are associated with aging and can include many of the previously discussed disabilities above like hearing, vision, ambulatory or cognitive disabilities occurring as one ages.



Temporary

Injuries, sickness or diseases can affect an individual's ability. These disabilities will present challenges in the short term for an individual.

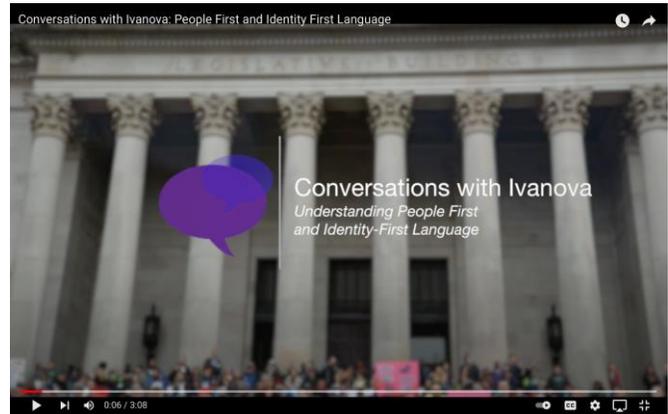
The key element is to review your volunteer program, the roles you have and consider how a volunteer navigates their job/task. If you can consider a universal approach initially, no matter who decides to volunteer at your organization, you can have roles that address individual variabilities.

We want to end this section by providing a simple toolkit highlighting some basic things to consider when incorporating individuals with disabilities in your volunteer program.

Accessibility toolkit

Person first and identity first language

- ✓ **DO** use an individual's preferred language! Here we highlight two main types – person first and identity first. For a more detailed explanation, check out this helpful video on the right that dives into the difference between people first and identity first language.
- Person first language puts the *person* before their disability. For example, referring to someone as “a person with autism” or “someone with a disability.”
- Identity first language positions the identifying word front and center and does not separate a disability from an individual's personhood. For example, referring to someone as an “autistic person” or a “disabled person.”
- ✗ **DON'T** assume everyone is the same and, therefore, has the same preferences. No two people are alike. Instead, ask individuals their language preference and use it.



YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ddcl-yA88MU>

Approaching accomplishments

- ✓ **DO** focus on achievements reached within their scope of work or related to their program performance.
- ✗ **DON'T** center the attention around an individual's ability to overcome obstacles. Do not put them on a pedestal based on their ability.

Communication

- ✓ **DO** follow the golden rule of treating others the way you want to be treated. Be an active listener. Treat adults like adults. If someone has a caregiver or a parent with them, address the individual rather than talking around them.
- Physical disabilities: Treat their personal space with respect and never move or touch someone's assistive device without getting permission. Engage in level eye contact and adjust your positioning to meet someone where they are at. If you have trouble understanding someone with a different speech ability, ask for clarification and do not make assumptions. For individuals with varying hearing abilities, ask them how they prefer to communicate and speak in a clear/expressive manner. For someone that has low vision or blindness, speak directly to the individual and identify yourself before speaking and announce that you are leaving a space. If providing directions, be specific about the surrounding environment like curb heights or steps.
- Cognitive disabilities: Again, treat adults like adults and do not make assumptions about an individual. Ask how they would prefer to communicate and use social stories or activity cards to prompt actions or tasks if auditory perceptual abilities vary. Sensory concerns can be over stimulating, so work to reduce "background noise" if possible. Give individuals time to respond in conversation.
- ✗ **DON'T** be afraid to make a mistake! Learn from them so you can grow and improve.



(Above) One of our volunteers with disabilities facilitating play with young zoo guests.

THE PATH TO INCLUSION

So, how can you improve access within the service opportunities you offer at your institution?

Onboarding and training

One of the first steps in making your volunteer (or intern) program more accessible is to review and inventory your onboarding processes – from recruitment and screening to training and placement. **Your onboarding processes are a reflection of your program as a whole. If individuals cannot easily navigate joining your program, they will likely continue to face barriers as active participants within your program.** By developing an accessible pathway for people to volunteer and become more involved with your organization, you not only foster a cultural norm where diversity and inclusivity remain at the forefront, but you also set your program up for success in the long term because "inclusion begets additional inclusive practices and policies." Improving access for people during the onboarding process will allow you to apply inclusive best practices more effectively into other parts of your program.

Evaluating and modifying your onboarding processes may seem daunting, but you can start by making a few small, quick changes!

1

Take an inventory of your training curriculum and pinpoint areas where you can make quick, easy modifications that improve learning and engagement for all.

You likely start your recruitment period(s) by reviewing past years' training agendas and curriculum and updating information and protocols accordingly. Use this time to identify a few areas where you can make quick modifications that promote participation and learning for more ability levels and learning styles. Notice how we said "quick modifications" and not "a complete overhaul of your curriculum." Making things accessible to a broader audience does not always necessitate a complete revamp. It is often the small things that add up to build a well-rounded, inclusive experience.

A few things to ask yourself during this process:

- Do I share information in a way that is balanced for different learning styles? (e.g., visual, kinesthetic, auditory learners).
- Do I explain concepts in the most simple and clear way possible?
- Where can I use pictures and other visuals to explain training concepts more effectively?
- Where can I incorporate role-playing activities to provide opportunities for learning by doing?

WHAT WE DID

During our review process, we noticed that most of our icebreaker activities, informational handouts and PowerPoint presentations were overwhelmingly text-based (and text-heavy). As a result, we were not providing multiple means for learning and engagement to those who process information best through seeing, hearing and/or doing. So we made quick, easy changes!

We pivoted to picture-based icebreaker games; modified our training presentations to include more pictures and closed-captioned videos; gamified our customer service training in the format of *Jeopardy!*; and inserted time for discussion and role-playing whenever possible.

Overall, **these modifications were simple, straightforward and, most importantly, effective.** Though our training content remained unchanged, our volunteers' level of participation, enthusiasm and inclusivity were unparalleled. People of all abilities and backgrounds – low vision, Deaf, English as a second language and more – were able to engage with the training and support one another in their learning.

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From the parent of a volunteer-in-training with a disability:

"I really loved [and] appreciated the real life inclusion that I witnessed at the Zoo Ambassador Training...Not just for my son, but for many others. It was one of the few times, few communities when I felt like inclusion for all was a way of life, not an inconvenience that was tolerated."

2

Set up clear expectations and make information available in advance.

From the volunteer perspective, onboarding, particularly training, can be a bit intimidating. They must learn a lot in a relatively short amount of time, especially if they are not already familiar with your organization or field of work. Luckily, you can help provide a smooth, enjoyable training experience for everyone by offering a simple accommodation – provide copies of your training materials in advance when possible! Better yet, share your content with *all* volunteers, not just with individuals with disabilities that request it.

By the time individuals are accepted into your training program, it is likely that you already have your materials and presentations planned out and ready to go. As much as possible, leverage your preparedness by sharing content with individuals ahead of time. Doing so shows that you are not only organized and intentional with your content, but also sets up clear learning expectations and allows individuals who may rely on screen readers or assistance from job coaches to review the content ahead of time so they can be more present during your actual training. If volunteers have a sense of what they will learn *before* training, they can be more present and focus on the how and why *during* training. Of course, this will all depend on how you host your training – in-person, online, or hybrid – but still, if there is information you can share in advance, share away! (It is important to note that sharing too much may do more harm than good. So be intentional – share things that need little to no context, don't share things that do.)

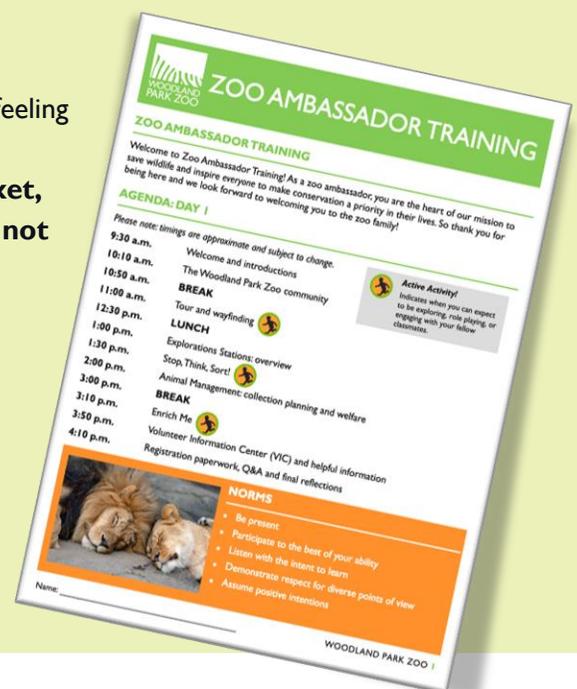
WHAT WE DID

We created a 16-page packet that contained the most relevant, important information from our two-day in-person training program – from the agenda and staff contact information to screenshots of important PowerPoint slides and a schedule of upcoming volunteer social events. We sent out an electronic copy of this packet to volunteers one week before their training and printed physical copies for everyone to use during training. We also helped set up clear expectations of our training program by marking the activity-based portions of training. This was extremely helpful for individuals who have difficulty sitting down for extended periods of time in a classroom setting; they were better able to watch a lecture-based presentation knowing they would be doing an active activity shortly after.

Before creating this packet, we handed out several separate text-based documents throughout training which only fueled volunteers' sense of feeling overwhelmed and that they had to "know it all" to be successful. **By consolidating the most essential information into a single packet, volunteers could focus on the presentations and speakers and not worry about constantly writing down notes.**

Additionally, we saved PDFs of all of our more readily understood PowerPoint presentations and sent copies to any volunteer who asked for them. This was particularly helpful to one of our low vision volunteers who could open up PowerPoints on their electronic device and follow along during presentations by enlarging text as much as they needed to.

(Right) The front page of our new and improved Zoo Ambassador Training packet.



3

Plan active portions intentionally and with different ability levels in mind.

You may be inclined to transform your entire training into scavenger hunts, role playing and other learn-by-doing activities. Still, it is important to do so strategically and with different ability levels in mind. Pay attention to the following:

- How far am I asking volunteers to travel in a scavenger hunt or other exploratory learning activity? Can someone using a wheelchair or walker participate? If you are unsure, walk your proposed route and adjust your plan to avoid physical barriers and obstacles.
- Am I mindful of sensory considerations? Do I offer opportunities for learning to those who prefer to stay away from noisy or smelly environments?
- How long are the activities I have scheduled? Are they long enough to foster understanding but short enough that individuals who need frequent breaks can still participate?

WHAT WE DID

Before the VIP, we had volunteers participate in several scavenger hunts and other very mobile activities to become familiar with our zoo's grounds. Often, volunteers had to travel to areas spanning the entire zoo and traverse gravelly, inclined paths. These activities also frequently required trainees to enter high-sensory environments. Although these were great exercises for new volunteers to learn where certain animals, exhibits, restrooms, and food locations are across the zoo, they did not foster an accessible learning environment for individuals with mobility limitations or different sensory needs.

We strategically mapped out our explorative activities with volunteers with disabilities in mind to create more universal learning activities. Fortunately, our zoo has a comprehensive **Accessibility Guide** that describes trail conditions and accessibility considerations (e.g., all-gender restrooms, sensory concerns), and we used it to our advantage. We quickly mapped out scavenger hunts that could be completed (and enjoyed!) by wheelchair users and individuals with service animals using this guide. We also had routes that did not require people to travel through particularly smelly or loud exhibits to ensure those with sensory considerations could still participate.



Active Activity!

Indicates when you can expect to be exploring, role playing, or engaging with your fellow classmates.

(Above) A snapshot of the "Active Activity" icon we used to communicate to volunteers when they could expect to be moving around during training.

Communicating when volunteers can expect to participate in learning activities is just as crucial to accessibility and inclusion as developing the activities. By sharing clear expectations, you allow for individuals with disabilities to have a better understanding of their role in training and the accommodations they might need to fulfill that role. To do this, we included an "Active Activity!" icon in our training agendas to indicate when volunteers could expect to be exploring, role-playing or actively engaging with others in training. To maintain consistent messaging across the zoo's

resources, we took the icon from our **Sensory Map** indicating Romping Ranges, or places where guests can move their bodies. Several individuals in training commented on how useful it was to have this icon on their agendas; it was beneficial for volunteers with sensory considerations and difficulty learning in a classroom setting.

4

Identify the portions of your training that are required and those that are optional.

Ideally, everyone can fully and successfully participate in your training regardless of their abilities. **Realistically, the path to a wholly inclusive and accessible training program is a long and winding road. It will take time, patience, lots of trial and error, and a continuous cycle of analyzing, designing, implementing, evaluating and redesigning to create a truly universally inclusive training.** In the meantime, identify which portions of your training are absolutely required for all volunteers – think safety, customer service, etc. – and those that individuals with disabilities can opt out of and still become successful volunteers.

WHAT WE DID

We communicated with several volunteers and their support persons/job coaches which portions of training were required and which were optional. As a result, volunteers with disabilities knew when they could opt out of training without needing to ask for such accommodation. They could quietly remove themselves during the optional parts, take a stimulation break, and return to the next required part of training rejuvenated and ready to pick up where they left off. In our case, providing reasonable accommodations was as much about offering opportunities for volunteers to step back based on their needs and abilities as they were staff offering alternative ways for volunteers to engage more.

Overall, these small, simple modifications to our training program resulted in a much more accessible and engaging experience for everyone involved. Volunteers of all abilities learned together and from one another in a safe and supportive learning environment where everyone was viewed as qualified to represent and serve on behalf of Woodland Park Zoo. Though we still have many more improvements to make to our training program, this was an essential first step for inclusion that will undoubtedly radiate further inclusive strategies into all facets of our Volunteer Program.

(Below) A group of volunteers-in-training on one of our more intentional, inclusive scavenger hunts.



Recognition and other events

Volunteer appreciation is crucial to maintaining a volunteer corps that feels valued and committed to your cause; increasing overall retention; and building trust and community between volunteers and staff. As the saying goes, “Never underestimate the power of saying thank you.”

There are many ways to show your appreciation for volunteers, but one of the most obvious and far reaching is through an organized volunteer appreciation event. Whether you plan to host such an event in-person, online, or in a hybrid format, it is important that you keep accessibility and inclusion at the forefront. It is easy to get comfortable in the annual (or biannual) routine of planning your appreciation event, and as a result, easy to forget whether your plans for showing your gratitude can be authentically received and felt by volunteers with disabilities. **From choosing the venue and sending out the invitations to scheduling speakers and coordinating food and beverage, you can incorporate inclusive best practices into your appreciation event so that all volunteers feel valued and recognized for their service.**

Follow the checklists below to set yourself up for success before and during your event. It is by no means exhaustive but includes things we found particularly helpful to reference when coordinating our annual Celebration of Volunteers event.



PART I: Planning Your Event

Choose an accessible format for the event.

Some things to ask yourself at this stage:

- If you plan to host it **in-person**, can people with disabilities safely and easily travel to the venue? Is there a ramp for wheelchair users? Is ADA parking available? Are there ADA compliant restrooms on site?
- If you plan to host it **online**, are you using a platform that allows for live captions (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams)? How many of your volunteers have access to an electronic device they can use to join your virtual event? Can you connect volunteers who have access to the internet with those who may not so more can attend?
- If you plan to host a **hybrid** event, do you have the infrastructure (i.e., staff, skills and necessary training) to facilitate both the virtual and in-person components? Can volunteers tuning in from home leave feeling just as appreciated and included as those who attended in person? And vice versa?

□ Invite volunteers through multiple means.

- Invite your volunteers in a variety of ways! Don't simply rely on sending an email, as you may leave out those individuals with disabilities who do not have access to such technology or have other preferred methods of communication. Instead, use electronic, physical and/or verbal means to invite your volunteers! Think physical invitations, phone calls, impromptu conversations with volunteers before or after their shifts, etc. Doing so not only ensures volunteers with disabilities get the news about your event, but also emphasizes that you want them there. Too often we assume that by creating an accessible event, it is de facto inclusive, but that is not always the case. True inclusion takes time and effort, often on the individual level.

□ Schedule speakers and activities.

- You do not have to go overboard here! As professionals in the volunteer management field, we often try to outdo ourselves and make each event even better than the last. You may be saying to yourself, "But my volunteers are awesome. I have to do *something* extra to thank them!" It's true, volunteers are awesome, but trying to fit too much into a single event can be overwhelming for you and those in attendance. Be mindful of how long you are asking volunteers to stay in one place, how much stimulation you are assuming they can handle, etc. Sometimes, it is better to dial plans back so you can be more intentional and impactful with fewer speeches and presentations. You may find that by doing so, you can set aside more time for breaks, if hosting online or for volunteers to socialize and bond with each other, which is often a big part of why people choose to volunteer in the first place.
- On that note, plan activities that people of all abilities can participate in. One such activity that is frequently used in online events is trivia, and for good reason! It is fun, can be easily tailored to your specific timeframe, and can be played in-person, online, or through a combination of the two. Just be mindful of giving volunteers multiple ways to engage. For example, if playing online give volunteers the option to answer by typing into a chat box, clicking radio buttons in a poll feature and writing down their answer on a piece of paper and holding it up in front of their camera.
- Additionally, take stock of who you are asking to help host the event. Target individuals who regularly demonstrate and embrace inclusion for their participation in your event, as they will be responsible for helping to set the tone for your event.

WHAT WE DID

We designed and printed physical invitations for our annual recognition event to ensure that our volunteers who do not have regular access to a computer could attend the festivities. We mailed out the invitations to every single one of our volunteers. *They loved it!*

We included a QR code on the backside that directed volunteers to the website we made complete with the evening schedule, accessibility considerations and Zoom link.



(Above) Screenshots of the physical invitation we made for our annual recognition event.

□ Create an event program and/or website with accessibility resources clearly laid out.

- Similar to social stories, you can use an event program or website to set up clear expectations for volunteers so they know what to expect and when. Include a schedule as well as a short description for each portion of your evening. This will help those with disabilities plan for your event and request reasonable accommodations if needed.
- Better yet, include an accessibility page in your program or on your website to lay out what you already plan to do to make your event accessible! Explain if you will have ASL interpreters, if you plan to use closed captions for shared videos, the types of activities you have planned and what accommodations you can make for them, etc. Too often, people with disabilities have to actively seek out this information, and if it is not easy to find they may choose to opt out with the assumption that it is not accessible. So do the work for them and clearly lay out the accessibility considerations you already plan to incorporate, and how volunteers can contact you to request others if needed.
- If hosting an event online, designate a tech support person from your staff to help individuals with disabilities log on. Provide the email and phone number for the tech support person and make it readily available should a volunteer need help in joining.

WHAT WE DID

We created an entire website dedicated to our annual recognition event! See a snapshot of one of the pages below.

Celebration of Volunteers

Home RSVP Honorees **Accessibility** Zoom Link & Schedule Libation Station

ACCESSIBILITY

NEED ACCOMMODATIONS?

We hope to make this year's event as accessible as possible.

To ensure the Celebration of Volunteers is inclusive we will:

- Have ASL interpreters spotlighted during all speaking portions
- Include closed captioning on all videos
- Read out loud any text sent through Zoom's chat feature
- Create interactive segments catered toward different learning styles and abilities

If you need any accommodations not listed above, please do not hesitate to reach out to staff at volunteer@zoo.org or 206-548-2450.

If you need assistance joining the Zoom meeting on February 25, starting at 5:30 p.m. Volunteer Program staff will be on-call to provide technical support: (206) 548-2546.

Photo description: An illustration of gorillas Kitoko and Uzumma looking adorable and melting hearts like usual.

(Above) A screenshot of the accessibility page we created to explain what accommodations we planned to provide, and who to contact if volunteers needed additional modifications or services.

PART 2: During Your Event

☐ Be descriptive and provide regular introductions.

- All speakers and presenters should introduce themselves and provide a brief description of what they look like for blind and low vision volunteers (e.g., hair color, clothing, facial hair, skin color, etc.). If hosting your event online, they should also describe their surrounding or virtual background. If switching from speaker to speaker, they should say their name to qualify who is speaking each time there is a change.

☐ If ASL interpreters are present, ensure they are visible.

- If hosting your event **in person**, make sure ASL interpreters are under adequate lighting so the person they are interpreting for can see them. Plan accordingly if you intend to dim or shut off lights entirely during certain portions of your event.
- If hosting **online**, spotlight the ASL interpreters rather than ask the Deaf or hard of hearing volunteers to pin the interpreters themselves. This eliminates the need for volunteers to do the work at an event where they are supposed to feel appreciated, and also normalizes the presence of ASL interpreters for others in your volunteer corps.

☐ Utilize microphones, closed captioning and/or make transcripts of planned speeches available.

- Depending on the size of your event, volunteers may or may not have a hard time hearing or seeing speakers and presentations. Either way, you can help ensure volunteers hear what you have to say so they leave feeling appreciated – which is the goal!
- If hosting your event **in person**, *always* use a microphone. If you already have your speaking segments laid out, make the transcripts available for Deaf and hard of hearing volunteers as well as others who prefer to follow along by reading.
- If hosting your event **online**, *always* use live transcripts/closed captioning. And the same goes for transcripts here! Share them right before your event so those volunteers that need this accommodation can attend and feel included.

Again, this list is not exhaustive and you will need to adjust based on the needs of your volunteer community, but we hope this serves as a useful planning tool!

Incorporating these checklist items into our annual Celebration of Volunteers served us well. We were able to host a 200+ virtual event for our volunteers of all ability levels – Deaf, hard of hearing, low vision, autistic, cognitive and development disabilities – that was perceived as not only accessible, but inclusive. Of course, we hope to do even more next year to make the event that much better, but inclusion is not a destination, it's a journey. **We are committed to doing better time after time to ensure volunteers with disabilities feel valued, appreciated and part of the volunteer community.**

VOLUNTEER STORIES

The following stories are meant to highlight the lived experiences of some of WPZ's volunteers with disabilities.

Zoo ambassador, Addie

Written by: Karen Ofsthus, Learning Coordinator at WPZ

Note: The following piece was written by a WPZ staff member who has worked closely with our volunteers with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author interviewed one of our volunteers with disabilities for this article. Though the following is not entirely from the volunteer's perspective, we feel the piece captures the volunteer's lived experience and demonstrates the positive impact of inclusive volunteer opportunities.

Addie is a bright, 25 year old, with strawberry blond hair, a quick smile and vibrant personality. In her zoo ambassador role, there is nothing she loves more than being helpful and talking with our guests about our animals. Volunteering two to three times each week for the past 4 ½ years, Addie has gifted the zoo with nearly 1,700 hours of outstanding service. Addie also identifies with having a disability. "Having a disability doesn't define who you are," she says. "It's your actions that define who you are." When asked what made her decide to volunteer at the zoo, Addie said, "I figured I wanted to do something instead of being by myself, so I decided to see what it was like, what the options were, what I needed to do to get chosen to be a volunteer. So, I went for it!" Building a welcoming environment is a grand, first step to inclusion.

Historically, people with disabilities have fewer opportunities to participate in service, which perpetuates higher rates of unemployment, loneliness and isolation (Holzworth, 2021). "Making new friends has been a big part of my time here, because I get to see my zoo friends when I'm volunteering," she says. "My zoo friends support me, and I support them. As a zoo volunteer, you help each other out. [People will help me] if I get confused or need help answering questions I might have, or just talking about what your day was like."



(Above) Addie in her volunteer uniform. She is standing and smiling, with a green WPZ logo on one sleeve brown shirt and a khaki vest on top.

Increasing opportunities also heightens the diversity of voice, perception, opinion and the variability of contribution on behalf of wildlife conservation. "I feel like every day I learn something new. Even though I am a full volunteer, I still feel like I'm in training, because other volunteers that have been here longer than me also help me to learn. As a volunteer, I tell people about the zoo and the animals and tell stories I've heard from others. I can add to their understanding about animals and their habitat. It makes me feel like I'm doing something positive in the world. I get to see how guests react to what I'm saying, and to tell them how they can help out, no matter how small their participation is."

In her article "Disability is Diversity," author Tany Holzworth writes, "There is a persistent stigma around what people with disabilities can and can't do, and a dogged narrative that people with disabilities are supposed to receive help, not deliver it."

(Holzworth, 2021). Addie's presence and enthusiastic participation as a volunteer vaporizes this archaic view. A most recent notable was her work as a "New Zoo" Ambassador. This role was created as a modified volunteer return-to-service during the pandemic.

During this time, "New Zoo" Ambassador volunteers managed their normal duties of assisting guests with wayfinding, educating and providing excellent customer service as needed. However, with pandemic requirements for wearing masks and maintaining adequate social distancing, they absorbed additional duties to ensure guest compliance and thus, safety for themselves as well as our staff and guests. These additional duties were critical if the zoo was to maintain the ability to keep its doors open and remain viable. Addie was instrumental in creating a beautiful strategy to assist our guests' compliance with these new requirements.

While engaging our guests in front of an animal habitat, Addie, like a *maître d'* at a fine restaurant, ushered guests into areas along the fence line with each group perfectly socially distanced from the other. As families would flow in and out, she anticipated their arrival, determined the best location for the size of their group and continued to place people into empty spots along the viewing area. She made the entire interaction look easy and as if she was selecting a special spot just for them. Watching this, it became apparent that she was there for our guests and their safety was her top priority. Smiles and "Thank yous" from guests replaced the frustrated responses that often came with the challenges of social distancing in public spaces.

"Addie's Way" was a stunning example of positive and personalized customer service that also helped maintain protocols and keep everyone safe. Not surprising, this strategy and the positive responses to it, was used as a training tool for other volunteers onboarding to the modified "New Zoo" Ambassador duties during the pandemic. **Addie was teaching us how to serve our guests' needs, not the other way around.**

Increasing opportunities also means finding ways to increase the level of responsibility in a role. We all grow at our edges – at the areas of our experience where we have less knowledge, training or practice. Only by offering tasks in which someone can try something new and increase responsibility, do we gain valuable skills. This certainly was true for Addie.

On a day when we had few available staff, opportunity came knocking. We asked Addie if she would take on some additional responsibilities by assigning zone locations to other volunteers in her group. The request was met with a raised, somewhat skeptical eyebrow. "I was surprised that you asked me to assign zones," she said, "because I've only been here for less than five years, and there were other volunteers there that have more experience than me...and you chose me out of everyone." In that moment, however, Addie received an enthusiastic response of support and encouragement from her fellow volunteers, who collectively agreed they would help her if she needed it. "I knew they were my friends and that they were behind me no matter what. I thought, I'll just do the same thing that the staff does...picking names and writing them down on the schedule." Not surprisingly, when asked after her shift how everything had turned out, she was thrilled with the success of having taken on something new. "Extra responsibility helped me realize that no matter how small the responsibility is, it can make a big impact on those around you." Addie, like all of us, is building new skills with every new task. And, she is also becoming a leader.



(Above) A group of our "New Zoo" Ambassadors before starting their shift! Addie is in the middle, surrounded by her supportive co-volunteers.

When asked what she would say to another person with a disability who was interested in volunteering at the zoo, Addie said, "If they want to join the zoo family and volunteer, I would tell them that there are great opportunities here. We have so many activities we can do. If someone doesn't think they can do it or believes there is no place for them here, I would tell them that they shouldn't let their disability get in the way. They should go for it! It doesn't matter what disability they have, everyone is welcome here no matter what."

Addie goes on to say, "I got accepted for who I am. I just be myself because [I know] I am around people who love animals just like me. We all have something in common, not because of my disability, but because I share a love of animals just like everyone else".

Without question, Addie is an asset to the volunteer corps at Woodland Park Zoo, and benefits from the Volunteer Inclusion Program. "Since I became a volunteer, my social skills have improved. I learned how to approach people, how to talk to people and tell them about the animals. I learned how to do that here. I have more friends, have tried new things, and have a lot more practice at knowing the bus route to the zoo! I also have a lot more knowledge about our animals here and everything we can do to help them."

Her passionate love of animals, desire for meaningful service, and mere presence and engagement with guests signal an end to archaic ways of thinking about people with disabilities and to the erroneous narrative about their capacity for contribution. From the guest perspective, especially one who may have a disability themselves, seeing Addie in action communicates possibility. Perhaps, they may think, there is a place here for me as well.

Holzworth is right. Disability IS Diversity. **Open your doors, identify and eliminate barriers, create opportunity and remarkable people will join you.** Then watch as your organization grows and thrives in an environment intentionally designed to be more diverse, accessible and inclusive for everyone.

ADDITIONAL INCLUSION EXAMPLES FROM WPZ

In addition to the examples listed previously in this guide, over the last few years we have taken even more steps to expand opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in conservation as volunteers in positive,

meaningful ways. See below for even more inclusion examples that may help to make your service opportunities that much more accessible.

Standard language

We added standard language to all applications and public facing webpages and documents to indicate that we will provide reasonable accommodations to all qualified applicants interested in our Volunteer Program. Not only does this ensure interested individuals are aware that we will work to support them in all aspects of their volunteer onboarding and experiences thereafter, but it saves them the time and effort of having to ask about accommodations in the first place. Furthermore, we have found that the more we publicize our inclusive practices, the more diverse applicant pool we achieve during recruitment. See below for the language we use as part of our program:

“Woodland Park Zoo is committed to providing access and reasonable accommodation in its services, programs, activities, education and employment. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for the Volunteer Program without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, genetics, disability status, protected veteran status or any other characteristic protected by law. If you need accommodation in the application, interview and/or training process, please contact Volunteer Engagement staff at volunteer@zoo.org or call 206.548.2450 for assistance.”

Training for mentors

After completing the classroom portion of training, our volunteers are paired with experienced mentors to continue learning about WPZ and their role as zoo ambassadors. **Mentoring sessions** are opportunities for new volunteers to become familiar with zoo grounds and to begin to interact with our guests.

Each year, we recruit and train mentors so they are prepared to support incoming volunteers by reinforcing WPZ’s most important initiatives at any given time. **Since inclusion is both a core value and strategic principle, we carved out an entire section of mentors’ training devoted to cultivating a supportive, welcoming and accessible training environment for volunteers.** Two important learning outcomes for everyone that takes our mentor training now include:

1. Be able to describe how you can model inclusion in your role as a zoo ambassador mentor.
2. List at least two modifications you can make to meet your mentee’s needs.

Overall, these training efforts set mentors up for success in supporting new volunteers who may have disabilities.

Assess and modify volunteer spaces

We hired specialists to assess our Volunteer Resource Center for ADA compliance and overall accessibility. And wow! It was worth it! We received numerous recommendations that helped us eliminate physical barriers, promote a culture of inclusion and improve our volunteer common space for everyone. In summary we:

- Reconfigured all furniture to ensure wheelchair users could navigate the space.
- Lowered all hooks, bulletin boards and advertising materials to the ADA standard of 48”.
- Reserved a subset of lockers specifically for volunteers with disabilities so that wheelchair users could access them.
- Created an “Inclusion Resources” bulletin board where we highlighted all access related WPZ resources such as the zoo’s: Whole Zoo Social Story, Sensory Map, Accessibility Guide and more.
- Purchased adjustable seating and desks complete with locking castor wheels to better support individuals with mobility impairments.
- Increased the physical size of all paper postings to 11x17 paper, with font no smaller than 20, for low vision individuals.



(Above) Our Volunteer Resource Center after the accessibility remodel. The lockers reserved for volunteers with disabilities are marked with bright blue signs.



Accessible volunteer parking

Every so often we have volunteers with temporary physical disabilities that require parking spaces as close to zoo entrances as possible. In the event they are not able to acquire an official ADA parking placard, we created our own “Volunteer Accessible Parking Permit” in collaboration with zoo personnel who oversee parking lots and applicable fees. We issue these temporary permits to any volunteer who needs one. It allows them to park in any open parking space free of charge. Normally, the zoo charges a parking fee for all spaces not designated for accessible parking permits and requires that staff and volunteers park in the farthest spaces.

Create accessible online resources

We now include alt text and picture descriptions on all digital content for volunteers. We also created a new volunteer position – Caption Editor – whose primary role is to edit transcripts for any video recordings we produce (we now record all virtual volunteer events). This allows our Deaf and hard of hearing volunteers to receive accurate closed captioning, instead of the often erroneous, autogenerated subtitles many platforms provide to viewers (i.e., YouTube).



Create inclusion-focused volunteer opportunities

We developed a Sighted Guide volunteer position and training program to support WPZ's blind and low vision guests. As a result, blind and low vision guests can now request a trained sighted guide for their visit. With advance notice, staff will arrange a trained volunteer as their guide around the zoo. Our Sighted Guides are prepared to assist with navigation, connect guests with tactile experiences, read signage and provide auditory context about the exhibits and the animals in them.

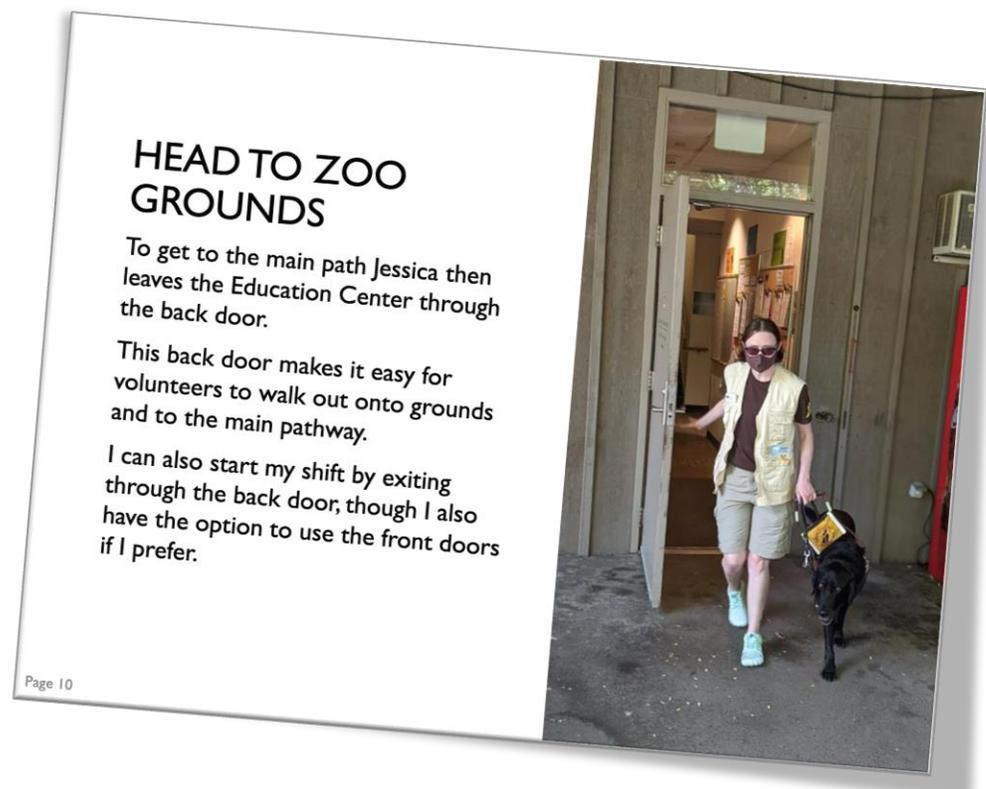
This role not only benefits guests but allows for any interested volunteer to take a more active role in fostering a culture of inclusion.

(Left) A trained Sighted Guide volunteer helping a blind guest at the hippo exhibit.

Create social stories

We worked with current volunteers with disabilities to create **social stories** for our most popular service opportunities such as docent programming! This is particularly useful for any volunteers with disabilities that require clear expectations before participating in a certain service activity. We included sensory considerations and utilized the same indicative icons from the Whole Zoo Social Story to maintain consistency amongst the zoo's inclusion resources.

(Right) A page from one of the social stories we created in collaboration with a current volunteer with a disability. We plan to share this resource with others who may benefit from having expectations and sensory considerations clearly laid out in advance of a volunteer shift.



Even more considerations

A few more examples from our work at WPZ include:

- Advised and collaborated with staff across the zoo to modify roles for volunteers with disabilities
- Worked with volunteers and job coaches/support persons to develop Individual Support Plans
- Created lanyards specifically for people supporting volunteers with disabilities so they are identifiable to zoo staff, and their supporting role is clear during guest interactions
- Created a **Best Practices for Engaging the Deaf Community** document
- Created a **Best Practices for Working Alongside a Job Coach** document
- And more!



RECOGNITION

In 2020, WPZ received two major Association of Zoos and Aquariums awards in recognition of the work we accomplished as part of the VIP:

1. **Top Honors in the Volunteer Engagement Award category**, which recognizes achievement by an AZA member institution in volunteer program development; and
2. **Significant Achievement Award in the Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award category**, which recognizes institutions that have made significant strides in creating influential and transformative programs in diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion – and that serve as catalysts for change for the organization and beyond.

These accolades demonstrate that inclusion and related DEAI initiatives are important, valued and worthy of recognition. We celebrate the improvements we have made to date and look forward to making our Volunteer Program even more inclusive and accessible for all.

See our award acceptance video here. It includes a poem written and recited by Joaquin, one of our volunteers with a disability, about his experience as a zoo ambassador at WPZ.



YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHzAKX052PI>

CONCLUSION

Through this work we have created programming that is more accessible to all audiences, provided learning opportunities, increased representation in our community and improved WPZ's organizational culture. Although we have demonstrated substantial growth with regards to inclusion, we realize this is an ongoing process and are committed to continuously improving and evolving!



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

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Best Practices for Engaging the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

When working to engage any community that hasn't traditionally been included, it is important to be intentional and to listen to that community. With that in mind, we have worked with Seattle's Hearing Speech and Deaf Center to create a set of "best practices" to help you include Deaf and hard of hearing guests, volunteers and staff in making conservation a priority in everyone's lives.

See the next page for the full PDF – **Deaf & Hard of Hearing Community: Best Practices for Engagement.**



DEAF & HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Including diverse communities and perspectives is one of our core values at the zoo. When working to engage any community that hasn't traditionally been included, it is important to be *intentional* and to *listen* to that community. With that in mind, we have worked with Seattle's Hearing Speech and Deaf Center to create a set of "best practices" to help you include Deaf and hard of hearing guests, volunteers, and staff in making conservation a priority in everyone's lives. Learning to be responsive in our interactions with the Deaf and hard of hearing community has positive implications for our communication skills with all communities!

HOW SHOULD I INTERACT WITH DEAF GUESTS/VOLUNTEERS/STAFF?

Deaf and hard of hearing people are not a monolith. While the guidelines listed below can help improve communication with this community, make sure to treat people as individuals. Ask questions and listen to individuals if they suggest ways of communicating that work best for them.

Terminology

- The word *deaf* can have different meanings depending on whether or not the "D" is capitalized. The word *deaf* with a lowercase "d" is a general term that includes all people with significantly reduced hearing. A person who is capital "D" *Deaf* considers themselves part of the Deaf community and identifies with Deaf culture, which has its roots in American Sign Language (ASL).
- ASL is not a gestural form of English, nor is it a universal language used by Deaf people around the world. It is a distinct language that uses visual cues, with its own unique grammatical rules.
- *Hard of hearing* is generally used to describe people with a mild hearing reduction and access to some spoken language fluency. Late-deafened individuals are those that had a significant reduction in hearing after childhood. Some hard of hearing and late-deafened people identify as Deaf, and some do not.
- *Hearing impaired* is no longer an appropriate term for any person with hearing differences because of the negative connotations of the word "impaired."

Speak with and look directly at the Deaf or hard of hearing person

- Eye contact is important in Deaf culture, as facial cues make up much of the language. Facing the Deaf or hard of hearing person will make communication more effective both by improving their ability to hear you if they have some hearing and to understand you visually.
- If an interpreter is present do not speak to the interpreter. Your conversation is with the Deaf or hard of hearing person, so speak directly to them as you would in any other conversation. This is not only respectful, but less confusing!

Get their attention

- Deaf and hard of hearing people process information visually, and it is much easier to communicate with them if you wait until they look at you before you begin. Get their attention so they can see your mouth, facial expressions and body language. If you need to get the attention of someone who cannot hear you, you can:
 - Wave your hand in their line of sight. This is how Deaf people get the attention of one another.
 - Tap them lightly on the shoulder.

- If they have their back turned away from you get the attention of somebody in their line of sight and have that person point at you.
- If you need to get the attention of many Deaf and hard of hearing people at once, turn the lights in the room off and on a couple times.
- To maintain attention it is vital that in group settings people speak one at a time. Set the expectation that people take turns at the onset of your event.

Body language and gestures

- Deaf and hard of hearing people are visual. Gesturing and using clear facial expressions when speaking to a person with hearing differences will help them understand what you're saying.
- Miming is also okay if it helps to get a certain point across, but remember that [mime is not the same as sign language](#).

Using other tools

- *When a microphone is available in a meeting or training use it.* If you are meeting in a large room or with a large group make sure that you make a microphone available to speakers. We have several at the zoo. Ask IT if you need assistance setting one up or using it for the first time.
 - Asking if everyone can hear you or saying, "I project well, I don't need a mic!" is *not* an appropriate alternative. People who have hearing loss should not have to ask to be included. If you want your message to be heard, include everyone in the room by using a microphone.
- A pen and paper, white board, cell phone, or text document on the computer can be used for brief communication if needed.
 - If you write or type with a Deaf person, do not look down on their English skills. Remember that many Deaf and hard of hearing people are deprived of language as children and that English is a second language for many Deaf people.
- Closed captions should always be used on videos, including live stream events. This has been shown to increase engagement from *all* communities. Online, many people are watching on mute and will continue watching if there are closed captions but will not if closed captions aren't present. In person, the atmospheric noise can make it hard for anyone to hear and the closed captions help people engage with your message!
 - It is a [legal mandate](#) that closed captions be available on screens in public locations. If there is video with no speech it would be great to have an image or note indicating that there is no sound, otherwise Deaf and hard of hearing guests will not know if they are missing info or not. This could be interpreted as a failure to provide access.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT USING AN INTERPRETER'S SERVICES?

You may need more than one interpreter

- Interpreting is a mentally and physically demanding task. If an assignment is longer than 1.5 hours or has increased demands (like interpreting for a number of people) a team of interpreters should be used. They will take 15 to 20 minute turns and switch places as needed.

Speak at your normal rate of speech

- Interpreters are trained to interpret many types of speech. Using your normal tone and pace will make the message more coherent and predictable.

Remember to give the interpreter any available materials in advance

- If materials like scripts or PowerPoints will be available prior to the event provide them to the interpreter. This will allow them to prepare and interpret more effectively.

Consider placement and lighting

- Is a Deaf person attending an event? Be sure their seat has a clear view of the interpreter! Having an interpreter at your event? Be sure the interpreter is stationed under suitable light so people can see them clearly.

WHEN TO GET AN INTERPRETER?

If a Deaf person requests an interpreter

- If a Deaf person requests an interpreter it is our legal obligation to provide one. Businesses and community organizations are responsible for paying for sign language interpreting services. The [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) mandates that “title II entities (State and local governments) and title III entities (businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public) communicate effectively with people who have communication disabilities. The goal is to ensure that communication with people with these disabilities is equally effective as communication with people without disabilities.”

If you have invited a Deaf person to attend or speak at an event

- If you know they are Deaf then you know they will need an interpreter. It is our responsibility to provide one. Ask them if they have a preferred interpreter then make the necessary arrangements as soon as possible.

If you want the Deaf community to attend an event or to host an accessible event

- To make events accessible to members of the Deaf community an interpreter needs to be acquired *at the beginning of event planning*. This way the event can be advertised as interpreted and the Deaf community will know they are welcome and that the event will be accessible to them.
- Invitations, emails, and posters should communicate that the event will be interpreted. Otherwise the Deaf community will not know or be interested in attending. If you want to advertise directly to the Deaf community that an interpreted event is coming up, Hearing Speech and Deaf Center (HSDC) is a good place to start!
- Interpreters prefer to interpret for events that have Deaf individuals present. This is because they are excellent advocates for and incorporated members of the Deaf community and want to be sure they are available to serve people who need them.
- Authentic engagement is important to build the zoo's relationship with all communities, including the Deaf and hard of hearing; be sure to prioritize engaging Deaf and hard of hearing audiences above simply appearing inclusive.

HOW DO I GET AN INTERPRETER?

If someone needs an ASL interpreter to participate there is an easy system to request one. Giving as much notice as possible is preferred. Two weeks' notice is standard. Interpreters may not be available with less than two weeks' notice.

Fill out the [online form](#)

- Guests can find the [Sign Language Interpretation Request Form](#) in the [Accessibility Guide](#)

- Staff should also use the [Sign Language Interpretation Request Form](#) to streamline acquiring an interpreter. If a staff member is requesting an interpreter on behalf of a guest or for an accessible event please note in the “Is there anything else you would like us to know?” section and which department to bill to.

Expect to pay the interpreter

- Interpreters are professionals who have a specialized skill set and deserve to be compensated for their time. They are deeply involved in the Deaf community and want to provide access, but it is *not* their responsibility to provide that access for a free or reduced rate.

WHAT ABOUT VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT?

Closed captions increases engagement from ALL communities

- Live closed captioning features are available on most platforms, but they are often inaccurate and can make the content very confusing if you are relying on captions alone. If the event is live you can hire someone to type the captions live ([Caption Access](#) is owned and run by people who are Deaf and hard of hearing). If it is not live you can edit the captions for accuracy before publishing.
 - When editing include punctuation and capitalization. Do your best to break up words and phrases to reflect the way the speech sounds.
 - If multiple people are speaking identify the speakers in the captions.
 - If you are using live captioning that is auto-generated let participants know that the captions may be inaccurate. (e.g., “These captions will be auto-generated, so audio may be captured inaccurately at times.”)
 - After an event where you use auto-generated captions, if you post the content for viewers edit the captions for accuracy first.

You can hire interpreters for virtual events!

- When you request an interpreter for a virtual event, you will need to be specific about what platform you intend to use or be flexible so that you can find the most accessible solution. [Zoom](#) works well and we have worked with interpreters who are familiar with it. If using Zoom, take advantage of the Spotlight feature to ensure that the interpreter is always visible to everyone while you present.
- If it is your first time using an interpreter virtually, ask the interpreter to sign on early with you and practice the setup. Expect to pay them for this time as you would any in-person presentations, events, etc.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Hearing Speech and Deaf Center (www.hsd.org)

- This “Best Practices for Engaging the Deaf Community” document has been adapted from HSDC materials and we have worked with HSDC to be sure the Deaf and hard of hearing community’s voice is reflected in this document. The HSDC has been serving the Puget Sound community for over 80 years. More information about Deaf and hard of hearing services, events and more [can be found at HSDC’s website](#).

Gallaudet University (Gallaudet.edu)

- Gallaudet University is the world’s only university in which all programs and services are specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard of hearing students and a leader in [Deaf culture and advocacy](#).

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) (www.askearn.org)

- This resource helps employers tap the benefits of disability diversity by educating organizations on ways to build inclusive workplace cultures. EARN offers information and resources to empower individuals and organizations to become leaders in the employment and advancement of people with disabilities.

SciStarter Citizen Science Month: Digital Accessibility Webinar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCgM1TQ7CX4>

- This video discusses how to make PowerPoint presentations and online content accessible to all users, including closed captioning. This also goes into detail about accessibility for individuals with vision needs.

Best Practices for Working Alongside a Job Coach

Providing a job coach is one accommodation that can be made for people with disabilities to successfully navigate a new position. The support a job coach provides varies dramatically depending on the employee's support needs. Ultimately, a job coach, or employment specialist, supports an employee with a disability with the final goal of preparing that employee to work independently in their position.

See the next page for the full PDF – **Job Coaches & Supported Employees: The Key to Success.**



JOB COACHES & SUPPORTED EMPLOYEES

THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Employment is a key part of living a meaningful and inclusive life in any community. For people with disabilities, employment can be especially meaningful as they are *more* likely to experience isolation and *less* likely to have job opportunities and experiences. This lack of opportunity perpetuates a cycle that devalues people with disabilities and their contributions to society. People with disabilities may need a range of reasonable accommodations to help them be successful in their role. Reasonable accommodations are defined as any adjustment that allows people with disabilities to have equal employment opportunities as long as the required modifications do not result in “undue hardship for the employer” (Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA], 1990; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2000). Providing a job coach is one accommodation that can be made for people with disabilities to successfully navigate a new position. The support a job coach provides varies dramatically depending on the employee’s support needs. Ultimately, a job coach, or employment specialist, supports an employee with a disability with the final goal of preparing that employee to work independently in their position.

WHAT CAN ONE EXPECT OF A JOB COACH?

To fade into the background.

- If the employee is doing well, the job coach will provide less and less support. This is the ideal! It can appear as though the job coach is not “doing their job” when really they are allowing the employee to take on more responsibility for themselves.

To provide resources for the employee with a disability (and for other staff).

- For example, a job coach may make a task list with visual aids to help the employee stay on task and know what needs to be accomplished. They may also communicate tips and expectations to other coworkers; such as if the employee is off task, coworkers and/or supervisors can ask the employee to look at their list.
- If you think an accommodation may help your employee, feel free to suggest it to the job coach!

To help in problem solving when improvements are needed.

- Job coaches are a resource for supervisors. If there is a specific issue with your employee, the job coach can work with the employee both on site and outside of work to find strategies that are appropriate for the workplace.

A job coach *does not* do the job for an employee with a disability.

- They provide support as needed. Some employees may need a job coach every time they come to work, while others will have a job coach that checks in once a week.
- It is not the job coach’s job to complete the employee’s tasks. If the employee is unable to complete the assigned tasks, they may need additional accommodations. Talk to the job coach about how you can support the employee.

WHAT CAN I DO TO SUPPORT THE EMPLOYEE WITH AN INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY?

Most of the things you can do to support someone with a disability will also help your fellow staff feel supported. Working alongside someone with a disability can help us all to be more intentional, which has positive impacts for the entire team.

Set clear and consistent expectations.

- Remember that people with disabilities often have few work opportunities, so this may be their first job. There may be norms they have never encountered; make them as clear as possible. Be explicit in what you expect from your employee.
- Be fair. For example, if the expectation is that no one uses their phone during work hours, but all the other (non-disabled) staff do so during slow periods, be cognizant that you not hold the employee with a disability to a higher standard.

Get to know your employee!

- By getting to know them you can connect their existing knowledge to new concepts; this will help them retain information as well as help build rapport.

Presume competence.

- Talk to someone with a disability the same way you would other employees. While it can be helpful for some employees to remove jargon and extra language when giving directions, be careful that you do not take on the tone of speaking with a child.
- This does not mean assume they know everything. Supply or activate relevant prior knowledge. Ask them questions to see what they know. Ask yourself, "What does someone need to know to be able to do this?"
- People tend to work up to your expectations, hold high expectations for all staff.

Provide information in more than one way

- If there is a new expectation, think about letting employees know through an email, phone call and in person. Make sure the job coach is also aware of this expectation.

Talk to the employee – *not* to the job coach.

- The job coach should be listening and able to support the employee, but the job coach should be mostly invisible. Do your best to direct comments and feedback to the employee, as you would with any employee. The job coach can step in to help them understand (or to help you understand the employee) if needed.

Presume positive intent.

- People generally *want* to do well. If mistakes are made, address them with the assumption that the employee meant well.
- People process information and communicate differently; if someone's tone or directness in a conversation seems misplaced or inappropriate, assume positive intent. If you take the time to try to understand them, you can also ask that they try to understand your communication style.

Do not talk *about* the employee *in front of* the employee.

- Regardless of how you interpret their ability to understand, all people deserve respect and privacy. If you need to discuss the employee with the job coach, it is best to include the employee in the conversation. If that is not possible, be sure to talk with the job coach in private.
- People with disabilities deserve a spot at the table when decisions about them are being made. See a video from a local self-advocate [here](#).

HOW SHOULD I SUPPORT THE JOB COACH?

Include the job coach on any communications with the employee

- Schedules, rules, expectations, and changes should be communicated both to the employee *and* to the job coach. CC the job coach on important emails.
- If you need to meet with the employee about something one on one, invite the job coach or provide the job coach with an overview of the meeting.

Contact the job coach if you think your employee needs more support for any reason.

- Let the job coach know of any tasks, behaviors, expectations, etc. the employee needs help to meet.
- If you ask for more support, you will receive more support. Funding for supported employment is based upon need – if you find that your employee needs more help than expected, the agency can extend additional support, although it may take some time to do the paperwork.

Encourage your team to make themselves a resource for the employee with a disability.

- One of the skills a job coach will work on with an employee with a disability is to ask for help from one's team. Remember, the job coach is there to support the employee, but likely knows little about the actual job and how it is done in this setting. The job coach will likely encourage the employee to ask their coworkers if they do not know how to do something. We all must develop this skill as we learn to navigate a new workplace.
- Teams who are willing to help one another get more work done with less oversight. Helping your team learn to support an employee with a disability strengthens the entire team.

Provide timely feedback to the employee *and* the job coach for a job well done or on areas of concern.

- Address issues and concerns directly with the employee as they arise; and make sure to let the job coach know that you have had a conversation with them if they were not present.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: Questions and Answers about Intellectual Disability and ADA

https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/intellectual_disabilities.cfm?CFID=8809054&CFTOKEN=1ada6a41685f68b6-423D42D3-BF6F-890D-F67AA90B82DECE24)

- Information about how people with intellectual disabilities are supported by ADA. This reference goes into detail about what types of questions can be asked about someone's disability, what supports they might need, and what constitutes a reasonable accommodation. It addresses many concerns and provides examples of different accommodations that can be made to support an employee with an intellectual disability.

Job Accommodation Network (<https://askjan.org/soar.cfm>)

- This resource allows you to search for accommodation options based on disability, limitation or job function.

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (<http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>)

- UDL looks into how all people learn, and poses how to use those findings to optimize teaching and learning for *all* people. While general, since this framework can be applied to anyone, it can be effectively applied to working with people with disabilities.

Customized Employment (<https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/CustomizedEmployment.htm>)

- Office of Disability Employment Policy outlines what customized employment looks like and provides resources and examples of customized employment in action. A few of the employees supported by job coaches at the zoo are in customized roles that pare out a portion of the work other employees would be doing in a way that sets everyone up for success.

Success Story At Audubon Zoo (<https://rootedinrights.org/video/willing-to-work/>)

- Rooted in Rights is a local organization that produces resources about disability by a staff who experiences disability. Often people with disabilities are not included in the development of programs and resources about them; this organization provides the vital perspectives of people with disabilities.

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) (<http://www.askearn.org/>)

- This resource helps employers tap the benefits of disability diversity by educating organizations on ways to build inclusive workplace cultures. EARN offers information and resources to empower individuals and organizations to become leaders in the employment and advancement of people with disabilities.

Docent Discovery Station Social Story

We worked with current volunteers with disabilities to create social stories for our most popular service opportunities such as docent programming!

See the next page for the full PDF – **Social Story: Docent Discovery Station, Tropical Asia.**



SOCIAL STORY

Docent Discovery Station – Tropical Asia



HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

This visual guide is meant to help docents navigate the Discovery Station for Tropical Asia.

We have included sensory triggers to help prepare those with sensitivities for a successful volunteer shift. Look for these symbols as you get ready to volunteer:



Animals up close/lots
of movement



Smelly



Loud noises

MEET A DOCENT

Meet Michelle. She is a docent at Woodland Park Zoo.

Docents provide hands-on experiences for guests in special areas across the zoo. They typically use biofacts on carts to facilitate curiosity and learning.

Biofacts are natural objects such as bones and pelts.

Follow along to learn how you can participate in your role as a docent!



ENTER THE ZOO

Michelle enters the zoo through a main entrance – either the West or South Entrance. She shows her nametag to staff at the entrance to let them know she is at the zoo to volunteer.

Michelle then heads to the Education Center and goes straight to the Volunteer Resource Center (VRC).

When I sign up to volunteer, I will also use my nametag to enter the zoo at the West or South Entrance. I will then go to the VRC to get ready for my shift.



GRAB A VEST

First, Michelle grabs a khaki zoo ambassador vest in her size from the wall in the Volunteer Resource Center. She puts it on.

If I do not already have my own vest, I will grab a vest from the wall and wear it, too!



STORE PERSONAL ITEMS

Then, Michelle puts her personal items in a volunteer locker to keep them safe during her shift. She keeps the key to the locker in her pocket until she is done with her shift.

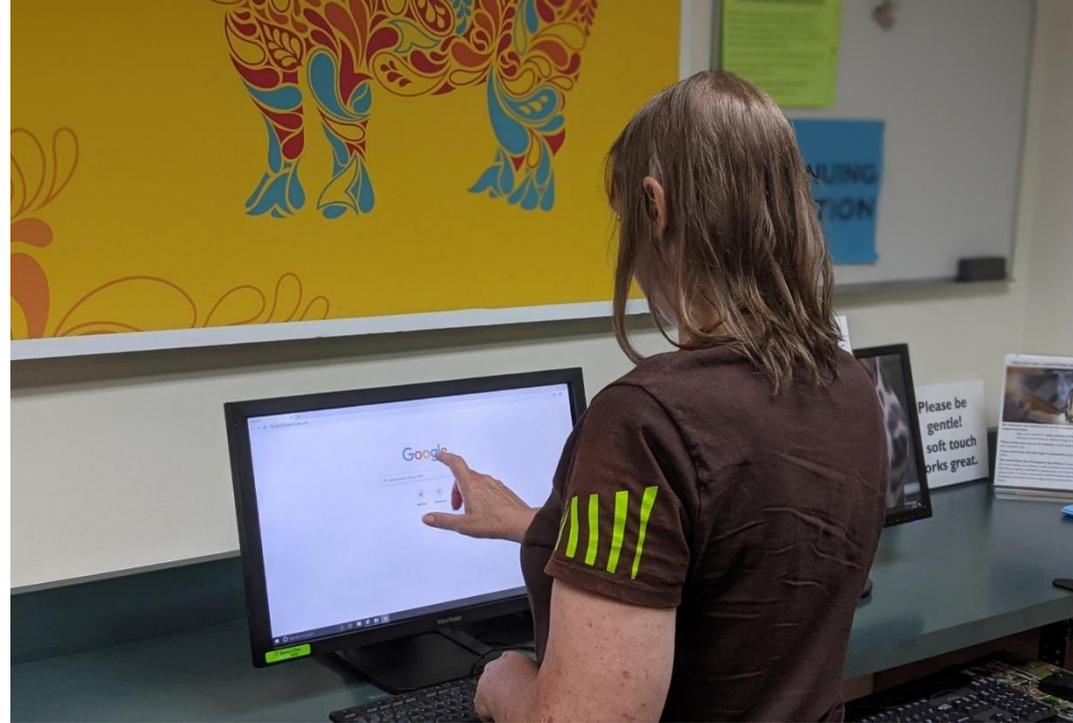
I can do the same! I can use any open locker to store my personal items.



CLOCK IN

Michelle uses the touch screen computer to clock in for her shift under *Toolbox – Tropical Asia*. She types in her PIN to do so. I will also clock in for my shift.

If I forget my PIN, I can ask staff for help, or look it up myself using the VOLUNTEER PIN LIST on the shelf below the computer.



RECORD PRE-SHIFT DATA

Michelle then goes to the docent statistics bulletin board in the hallway outside the VRC.

She writes on a datasheet to show where on grounds she plans to present her cart.

I will also write down where I plan to present my cart. This helps staff and other docents know where certain programs are being used across the zoo.



GRAB KEYS

Michelle goes to the Biofact Storage closet (Room 106) in the Education Center. She grabs keys from inside the closet so she can access the Tropical Asia cart and biofacts that are stored near the orangutan exhibit.

I will grab keys from the Biofact Storage closet, too, so I can access the cart and biofacts.



HEAD TO ZOO GROUNDS

Michelle leaves the Education Center through the back door and heads over to the orangutan habitat where the Tropical Asia cart and biofacts are stored.

This back door makes it easy for volunteers to walk out onto grounds and to the main pathway.

I can also start my shift by exiting through the back door, though I also have the option to use the front doors if I prefer.

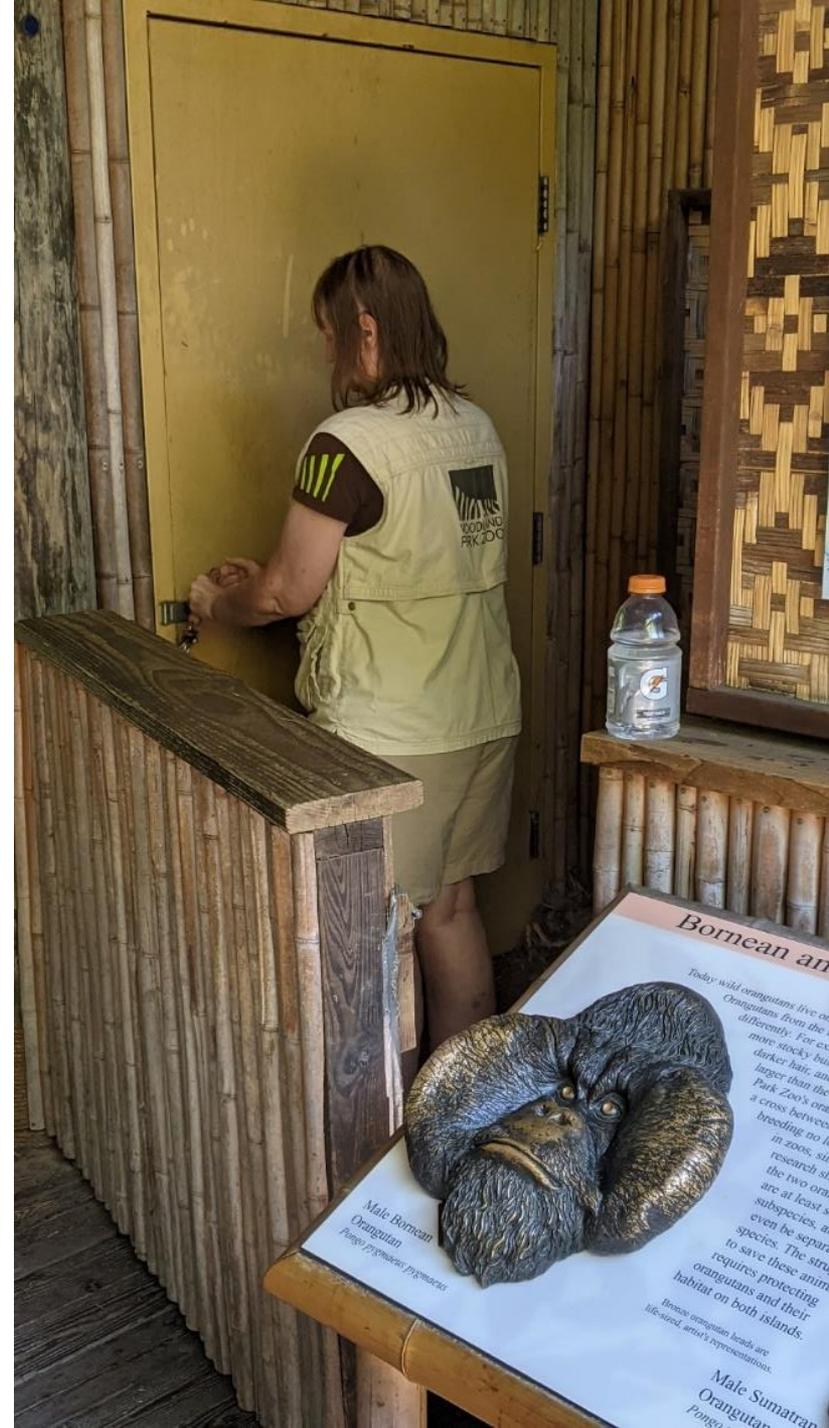


GRAB A CART AND PROGRAM MATERIALS

The Tropical Asia cart and biofacts are stored in a side closet across from the indoor orangutan viewing area.

Michelle grabs the cart and 1-3 biofacts she would like to present for the day. She also grabs a clicker to count the number of guests she engages during her shift.

If I have trouble locating the cart and biofacts, I can contact staff for help!



GO TO CART LOCATION

Michelle then pushes her cart and 1-3 biofacts to the location she will be presenting at for the day. The location should be the same as the one she marked on the datasheet earlier.

Today, she has chosen to present in front of the tiger habitat.

When I push a cart, I will be sure to do so safely and avoid bumping into guests and obstacles.



PRESENT PROGRAM

Michelle presents big cat biofacts to guests in front of the tiger habitat. She encourages guests to ask questions and guide their own learning.

Children are interested in touching and feeling the large tiger skull replica.

When I present a docent program, I will be sure to engage with guests of all abilities and backgrounds and find fun ways to connect them to the animals and exhibits at the zoo!



COUNT GUEST CONTACTS

While presenting her docent program, Michelle uses a clicker to count the number of guests she engages at her cart.

When I present a docent program, I will also use a clicker to keep track of how many guests I interact with during my shift.



RETURN CART AND PROGRAM MATERIALS

At the end of her shift, Michelle returns the cart and biofacts to their storage location (in the closet near the orangutan habitat).

She makes sure to return each biofact to the correct plastic bin so the closet stays organized for other docents.

I will also return my cart and biofacts to the proper locations!



LOCK CLOSET

Michelle uses the key she grabbed from the Education Center to lock the closet when she is done putting away the cart and program materials.

I will also lock the storage closet when I am done putting away the materials I used for the day. By doing so, I help keep the cart and biofacts safe and secure for future use.



RETURN TO THE EDUCATION CENTER

At the end of her shift, Michelle returns to the Education Center.

I will also return to the Education Center when my shift ends! That way I can officially clock out and bring home my personal items that I stored in a locker.



RETURN KEYS

Michelle goes to the Biofact Storage closet (Room 106) in the Education Center. She returns the keys she borrowed so that other docents can use them.

I will return keys I borrow from the Biofact Storage closet, too!
If I have questions on how to return the keys, I can ask staff.



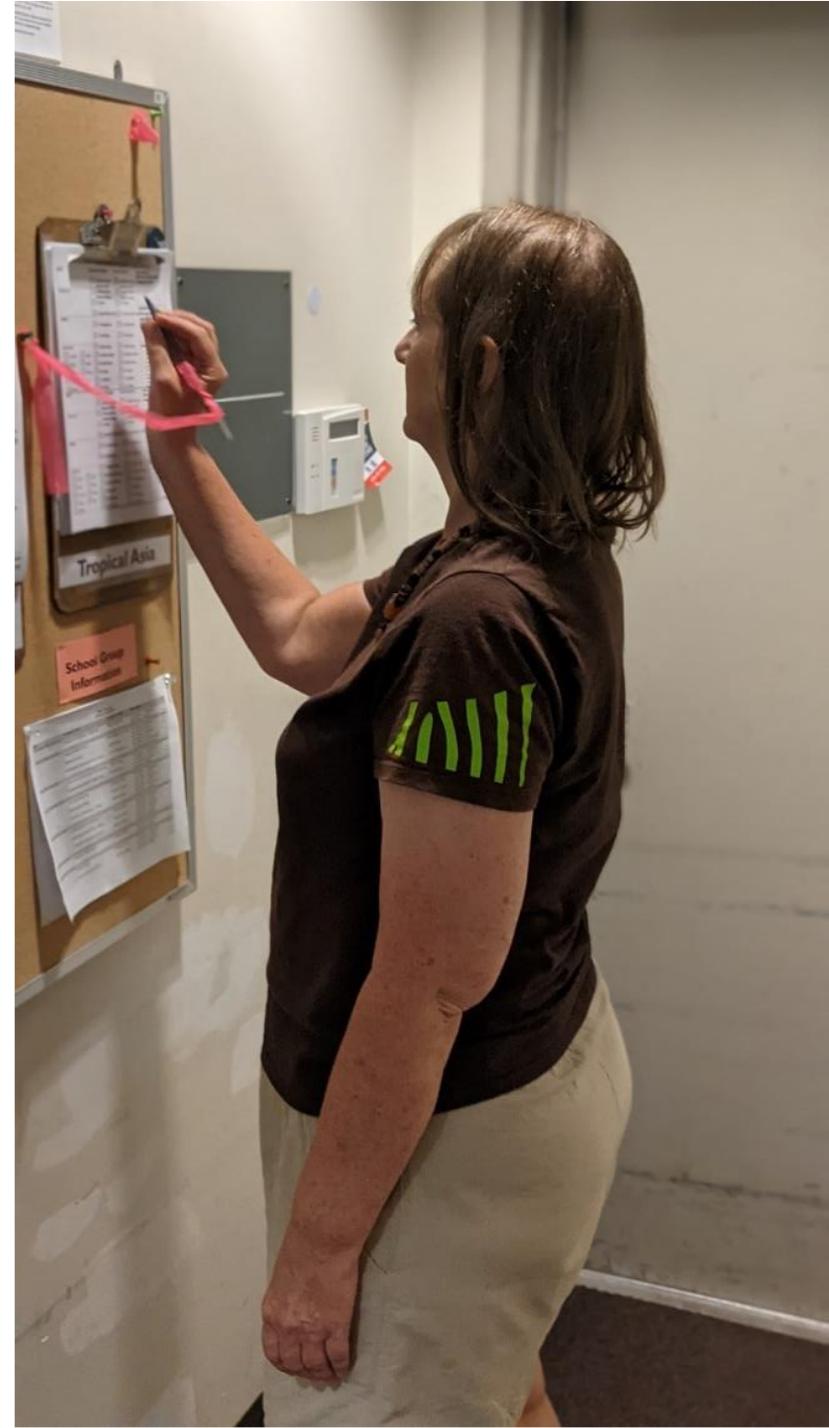
RECORD POST-SHIFT DATA

Michelle then goes to the docent statistics bulletin board in the hallway outside the VRC.

She fills in the post-shift information on the datasheet she started earlier.

Michelle writes down how many guests she engaged, the exact programs she presented and more.

I will record data from my shift as well, so staff can keep track of how many people docent programs reach over the course of a year.



RETURN VEST

Michelle returns the vest she borrowed.

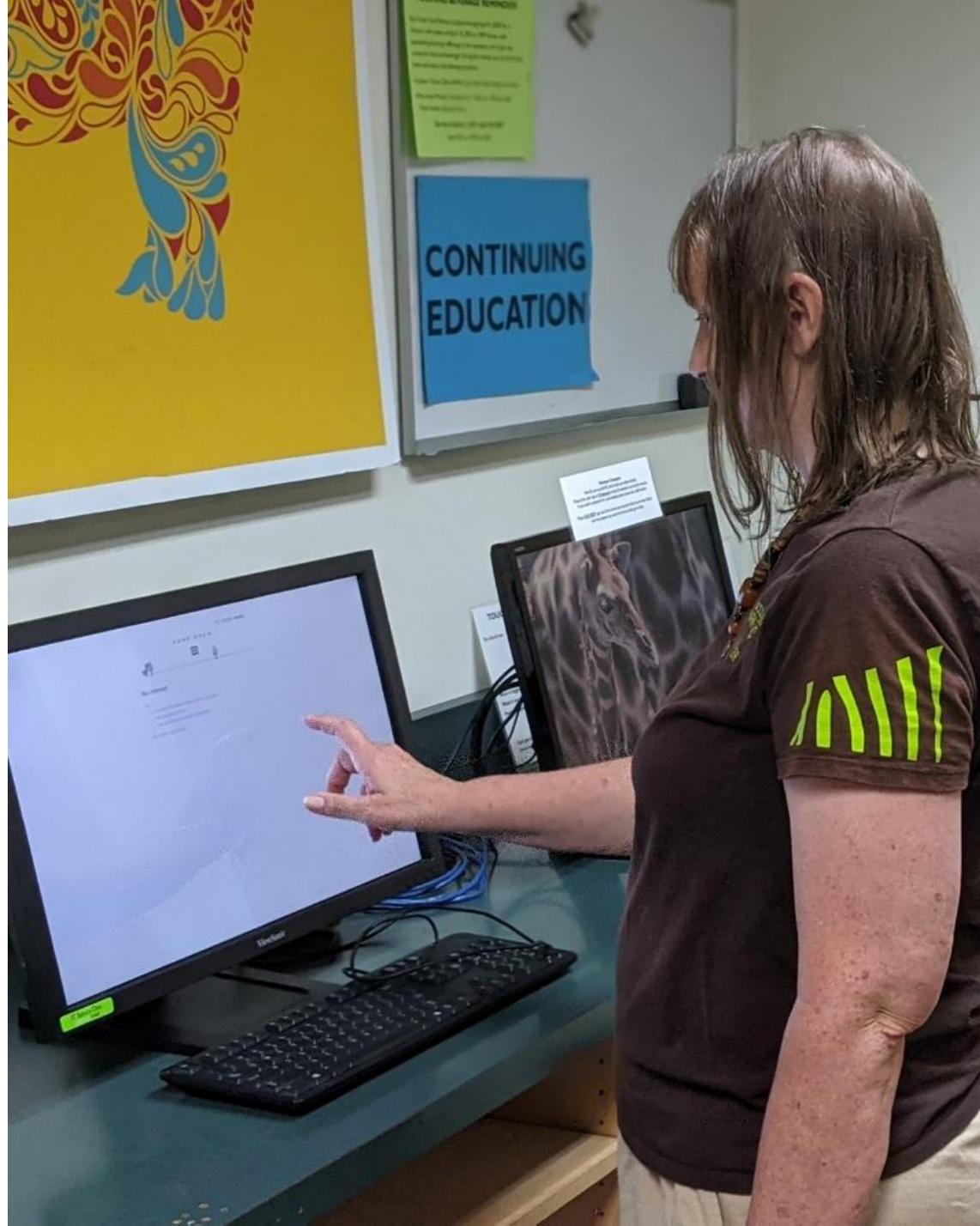
I will also return the vest I used for my docent shift. If the vest I borrowed got dirty during my shift, I will let staff know so they can wash it.



CLOCK OUT

Michelle clocks out on the touch screen computer by typing in her PIN.

I will also clock out for my shift. By doing so, I can make sure my service hours are tracked correctly.



GRAB PERSONAL ITEMS AND GO HOME

Last, Michelle grabs her personal items from the volunteer locker she used. She returns the key to the locker so other volunteers can store their belongings, too.

After, she heads home!

I will also return locker keys before leaving the zoo.

