

## **Docent Program Description**

Welcome to the UC Davis Tahoe Science Center inside the Tahoe Center for Environmental Science (TCES) building and the UC Davis Eriksson Education Center at the Tahoe City Field Station building. Thank you for joining a wonderful group of individuals to help provide the best possible environmental science education programs and enjoyable visits for our guests.

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

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

- Facilitate tours of the Tahoe Science Center (Incline Village).
- Provide green building tours of the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences.
- Facilitate tours of the Eriksson Education Center (Tahoe City).
- Provide tours of the native plant demonstration garden (Tahoe City).
- Be available to explain to visitors the various exhibits and science topics.
- Assist science education center visitors with hands-on science activities.
- Assist in outreach programs for schools and community events.
- Help host field trips for student groups.

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

Sincerely,



Heather Segale  
Education and Outreach Director  
UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center

## Important Contact Information

Heather Segale – Education and Outreach Director

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AmeriCorps Members

(775) 881-7560, Ext. **7474** and/or Ext. **7483**

SNC Facilities (Layne Sessions)

(775) 831-1314, Ext. **7453**\*

Parking (Will Hoida)

(775) 831-1314, Ext. **7450**\*

**\*If calling from the front desk or docent room, just use 4-digit extensions.**

## Emergency Procedures and Phone Numbers

- 911 (for life-threatening emergencies)
- Emergency Guidelines at <https://www.sierranevada.edu/resources/emergency/>
- Campus Security (775) 223-3107
  - Call is routed to Student Affairs, On-call Resident Advisor, or Facilities
  - Security is available 11 pm—7 am (when SNC is in session only)
- SNC Snowline (775) 881-7597
- First aid kit in Docent Room
- AED in Lobby
- In case of fire: Pull alarm & evacuate
- In case of earthquake: Drop, cover & hold on
- Meet in Director's parking space in parking lot or Hyatt parking lot

## **Docent Roles and Service Excellence**

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

### **Treat Your Visitor as Your Personal Guest**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Introduction**

Introduce visitors to the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center (TERC); explain its background and its mission. Welcome them inside the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences (TCES) building. Differentiate between TERC and TCES. Highlight the TCES building's LEED Platinum certification, along with the special activities, lectures, and events hosted by TERC. Make sure to describe the function TERC serves in the community to provide objective science-based information for the protection of Lake Tahoe and its watershed. *It is very important to not include opinions; docents provide the information that allows people to make informed decisions.*

## **Let Visitors Know You**

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

## **Know Your Subject**

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

## **Know Your Audience**

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

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

## **Who's in Charge?**

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

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

## **Let Visitors Know Your Plan**

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

## **On the Tour**

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

- What makes Lake Tahoe unique?
- What are the environmental challenges we face at Lake Tahoe?
- What does science tell us about possible solutions?
- What can you do to protect Lake Tahoe?

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

## **Style and Presentation**

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

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

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

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

### **Enjoy Yourself**

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

### **Younger Visitors**

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

### **Hold Visitors' Attention**

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

### **How to Finish a Tour**

It is tempting to tack on more facts and stories once you realize that the end of the tour is approaching. From the visitor's point of view however, the last minutes are better spent reiterating the theme and recapping the main points. Invite visitors to

describe information that surprised them or how they will incorporate what they learned into their daily lives. Push children to think about the importance of a specific point, one thing they learned, or what they liked or disliked. Try to relate comments back to your theme. Ask if anyone has any final questions.

Ask your group to complete a **Visitor Exit Survey**. Explain that this information helps us understand our audience and improve our programs and interactive media. Interested visitors can sign up to receive additional information about events and new research. Visitors may also leave reviews on Trip Advisor, Google, and/or Yelp. Tactfully note that donations are welcome (point out the donation buoy). Lastly, be sure to **thank** visitors and encourage them to return with other family members or friends.

### **Successful Interaction**

Be an active listener—pay attention without interrupting or making judgments. Try to use positive rather than negative terminology. For instance, instead of saying “I don’t know,” try “That’s an excellent question; I’ll try to find the answer for you.” Practice reflective listening, which means repeating back what a visitor has said. It will help you understand and clarify.

Never enter into a debate. Simply try to be respectful of visitor’s opinions, no matter what the circumstance.

### **Interacting with People with Disabilities**

#### **Keep in mind:**

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

#### **Vision:**

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

### ***Hearing:***

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

### ***Wheelchairs or Walkers:***

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

### ***Speech Difficulties:***

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

### **How to Handle Complaints:**

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

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

### **Docent Duties**

For Drop-in Visitors or Small Groups:

- Have visitors fill out ***Visitor Exit Survey***.
- Log tours in ***Visitor Tracking Form*** located in Docent Room.
- Wear your name tag.
- Show up for all scheduled tours, or if unable to attend, find a substitute. If you can't find a sub, be sure to contact the TERC Docent Coordinator.
- Show up in advance of your scheduled tour.



- Finish your tour on time and if there is a school tour, bring students to the proper exhibit..
- Submit ***Volunteer Hours Report***.

For School Groups:

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

**Sources:**

- The Docent Handbook, sponsored by the National Docent Symposium Council. For more information, visit <https://www.nationaldocents.org/docent-resources/docent-handbook>.

- Division of Education Docent Program, Summer 2005

- Lawrence Hall of Science, Public Service Excellence

## **Docent Task List – Tahoe Science Center (Incline Village)**

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

### **TERC Docent Signage:**

*Science Center Flags* - Please feel free to put the flags outside along driveway, flag holders are in place so you can just place them in the holder. However, if you do not have time or find the flags are too unwieldy, this is not imperative. You can also request an AmeriCorps member to help with this task.

*Quiet please, tour in progress* sign\* - Make certain that this sign is visible to all foot traffic to alert people when you're conducting a tour.

\* Quiet sign in a silver stand in the lobby.

### **During Tours:**

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

### **During shift:**

- Clean 3-D glasses in UV cabinet for 15 minutes, if there are fingerprint smudges please use the provided all-natural cleaning product and microfiber cloth
- Clean video exhibit screens (special cleaner in docent room for plasma screens)
- Check that all surveys are on desk area and pens are available
- Check that all handouts (surveys, newsletter, brochures, etc.) are stocked
- Review any *Recommended Reading* items in the stackable tray or binder
- If more handouts or surveys are needed please contact someone from the TERC Education Team upstairs

### **At End of Shift:**

- Bring flags in from the road (can request AmeriCorps help with this)
- Turn off both 3D theater projectors and the 3D Viz monitor, but leave the computer on
- Turn off the front desk computer
- Turn video exhibit system off (please only use Lab side panel)
- Turn microscope monitor off (make sure to return any zooplankton to their home)
- Cover microscope
- Tidy exhibits (i.e. jars are in proper places on shelves, any pipettes and petri dishes are put away, etc.)
- Record your volunteer hours on the *Docent Hours Log*
- Record any tours (if you haven't already) you gave during your shift in *Visitor Tracking*

## **Docent Task List – Eriksson Education Center (Tahoe City)**

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

### **TERC Docent Signage:**

- Sandwich Boards* - Please feel free to put the sandwich boards outside (by the curb and bike path). However, if you do not have time or find the signs are too heavy, this is not imperative. These must remain out of the Caltrans right-of-way and 18" from the edge of the bike path.

### **During Tours:**

- Request visitors to complete *Visitor Exit Survey*
- Record visitors on *Visitor Tracking Form*
- Report collected phenology and water quality data to online database
- Donation box

### **During shift:**

- Clean video exhibit screens when necessary (special cleaner for touch-screen)
- Check that all surveys are on desk area and pens are available
- Check that all handouts (newsletter, brochures, etc.) are stocked
- Check that all informational sheets for docents are stocked
- Review any *Recommended Reading* items in the stackable tray
- General gardening work such as weeding or pruning is welcome
- Collect phenology and water quality data
- Contact someone from the TERC Education Team if more surveys, tracking forms, etc. are needed

### **At End of Shift:**

- Bring sandwich board in from the bike path
- Turn Docent computer off to save energy
- Tidy exhibits and Eriksson Education Center room as needed
- Record your volunteer hours on the *Docent Hours Log*
- Add any Suggestions to the *Suggestion Box*
- Make certain that door between Eriksson Education Center and Hatchery Great Room is pulled shut (listen for "click").
- Make certain all other exterior doors are locked and dead-bolted
- Make certain gardening tools are returned and boat house is locked

## **TERC Docent Pledge**

### **Our Pledge to You:**

We will...

- Provide you with appropriate training, space, materials, support, and equipment
- Communicate with you openly and often about ongoing opportunities for volunteer involvement
- Always maintain an open door policy where docents are welcome to visit/email/call the Education and Outreach Director and/or the Docent Coordinator to discuss any questions or concerns.

### **Docent Pledge:**

You agree to...

- Attend training sessions
- Fulfill 48 hours of service per year (12 docent shifts per year)
- Respond promptly
- Abide by the general rules of access and conduct
- Accurately record your volunteer hours
- Help us track visitor attendance

# Visitor Tracking Form

Please complete this information for each group that visits the science center.

## EXAMPLE OF VISITOR TRACKING FORM

Date	Event (Ed Ctr Tour, Field Trip, etc.)	Number of Visitors	Scheduled or Drop-In	Check if included						Length of Tour (in minutes)	Comments	Docent Volunteer (s)
				Boat	Lab	3-D Viz	Green Building Tour	Activi- ties	Sand- box/ Other			
5/31/2017	ECT	3	DI	X	X	X			X	75	Adults visiting from Minnesota	Toy
5/31/2017	ECT	7	DI	X	X	X			X	60	4 kids and 3 adults. One family from Sac the other from Reno.	Toy
5/31/2017	ECT	4	DI			X			X	30	One local bringing guests from Bay Area	Toy, Griffiths
6/1/2017	FT	27	SCH	X	X	X		X	X	180	3 <sup>rd</sup> graders from Glenshire	Segale, Toy, Tran
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## Example of Docent Hours Tracking Form

Please complete this each time you volunteer at either science center.

Name	Date	Science Center Tours	School Field Trips	Training	Lectures or Workshop	Office or Library	Shadow	Total Hours	Docent on Duty Initials*
Alison Toy	6/22/2018	X						4	ANT
Christine Limon	6/22/2018	X					X	4	ANT
Heather Segale	6/23/2018		X					5.5	HS