



## Visitor Services Volunteer (VSV) Guidelines

March 2024

These guidelines are provided to help ensure the best possible experience for volunteers *and* visitors while at Hillwood.

**Looking for help?** Our doors are always open, and we want to hear about your volunteer experiences. Please direct your questions or feedback to [volunteers@hillwoodmuseum.org](mailto:volunteers@hillwoodmuseum.org).

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# VSV Shift Overview

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## Primary Responsibilities

A volunteer's goal, as is Hillwood's, is to provide the best possible visitor experience. Visitor Services Volunteers or "VSVs" are an integral part of the Hillwood community and serve several important roles:

- Greet and orient visitors at the tour desk in the visitor center.
- Help visitors and answer questions in the mansion and auxiliary buildings.
- Assist with special events and public programming.
- Assure a positive, enjoyable visitor experience.

## Onboarding

Volunteers-in-training will transition to active VSVs once they have successfully completed the orientation sessions. Once completed, VSVs will be given access to Volgistics, Hillwood's volunteer database and scheduling software, via an email containing:

- Link to Volgistics
- Temporary password for accessing Volgistics at home along with instructions for creating a permanent password.
- Instructions to update their volunteer profile and sign up for VSV shifts via the online schedule.
- Pin number to manage volunteer hours via the iPads on-site at Hillwood or using the mobile app.

## Shift Time & Structure

- Four-hour shifts are scheduled from 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 1-5 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday. Time is equally split between the visitor center and mansion. Please note: The general operating hours of the estate are 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday-Sunday.

### Morning Shift

#### 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Arrival: 9:15 a.m. Report to the volunteer lounge or visitor center to sign-in  
Breaks: Breaks are taken during slow periods in the visitor center and/or mansion  
Departure: 1:30 p.m.

### Afternoon Shift

#### 1 p.m.-5 p.m.

Arrival: 12:45 p.m. Report to the volunteer lounge or visitor center to sign-in  
Breaks: Breaks are taken during slow periods in the visitor center and/or mansion  
Departure: 5 p.m.

- VSVs typically work in teams of four to five volunteers per shift, with 2-3 VSVs stationed in the visitor center and mansion, respectively.
- Volunteers serve two to four shifts per month equating to approximately 100 service hours annually. Volunteers are assigned to either a fixed or floating schedule depending on Hillwood's scheduling needs. Please note: All new volunteers are assigned to a floating schedule.
- Volunteers are regularly required to stand for extended periods of time and move between buildings and the campus grounds.
- We encourage volunteers to serve additional hours and recognize those that exceed the standards. Extra hours are available through Hillwood's on-site programs. Volunteer duties for these shifts typically include serving on-station in the mansion and auxiliary buildings, providing check-in/orientation in the visitor center, or offering wayfinding throughout campus.

## Scheduling

- VSVs submit their monthly availability in a timely fashion via Volgistics, Hillwood's online scheduling software.
- Please see the Volgistics User Guide document for step-by-step instructions on the self-scheduling procedures, cancellation, leave of absence, and inclement weather policies as well as other features offered through Volgistics.

## Arrival & Departure for Each Shift

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### Entering, Driving, & Parking

- All volunteers will enter Hillwood through the upper gate and choose to park either along the back railing behind the café, C.W. Post center, and administration building or along lower gate drive. Please be mindful to observe the 15-mph speed limit while driving on the estate and be aware of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. A [map detailing the volunteer parking plan](#) is available on the volunteer website.

### Back Rail Parking

- To access the back railing parking, please drive through the visitor center parking lot and follow the road to the parking area behind the café and administration building.
- At the back rail, volunteers are welcome to park in any **un-numbered spaces** during the week.
- During the weekend, volunteers can park in any numbered spaces behind the café, C.W. Post center, and administration building with the exception of spaces 20-23, which are reserved for the weekend café staff.
- **Please note:** The first spaces on the left are reserved for bus parking.

### Lower Gate Drive Parking

- To access parking on lower gate drive, volunteers are encouraged to drive the access road or perform a three-point turn at the lower gate.
- The south access road (a soft left immediately following the rail parking behind the café and administration building) will take you on a scenic drive along the perimeter of the estate and passes behind the Adirondack building and dacha, below the Japanese-style garden, and will eventually terminate at the lower gate. Continue driving uphill on the lower gate drive.
- For volunteers wishing to complete a three-point turn at the lower gate, make a right at the first stop sign after entering the upper gate. Make another immediate right, going downhill and away from the mansion. **Use utmost caution when driving towards the lower gate, staying alert for oncoming traffic and pedestrians.** At the lower gate, safely perform a three-point turn, driving back up the hill.
- Volunteers will park on the lower gate drive on the left side starting at the spot closest to the crossroad (but not blocking the crossroad) and fill in working back from there.

At the end of your shift, please exit along the upper gate drive and out the upper gate. As always, please use extreme caution, especially in those areas where many do not expect to see vehicular traffic.

### Identification

- Volunteers will be given a nametag and volunteer ID badge to wear during their shifts. These will be distributed as nametags and ID badges are available.

### Volunteer Lounge

A new volunteer lounge will be opening in Spring 2024 in the Butler's House, adjacent to the cutting garden. This will serve as a central location for all volunteers to reconnect with one another, recharge during breaks, and access the volunteer library resources. Until the new lounge is completed, volunteers will

continue to utilize the existing volunteer lounge located on the second floor of the mansion until further notice.

### Coats & Personal Belongings

- **Volunteer Lounge:** A closet and cubbies (with locks) are available for volunteers to store their personal belongings while at Hillwood.
- **Visitor Center:** Hooks for coats are available in the visitor center kitchen. VSVs are welcome to store their personal belongings in the lower cubbies at the tour desk.
- **Cell Phones:** Volunteers are welcome to keep their cell phone with you in case of emergencies, but we discourage volunteers from using their cell phones (calling or texting) while volunteering at Hillwood. If a volunteer receives a call they must take, please step outside or into the visitor center kitchen.

### Recording Volunteer Hours

- Volunteers are given a pin number to use to manage their volunteer hours and have two options when recording your volunteer hours from Hillwood:
  1. Scan the QR code located in the volunteer lounge, visitor center kitchen, or greenhouse and follow the prompts to sign in and out for a shift.

**-or-**

  2. Use the iPad in the volunteer lounge, visitor center kitchen, or greenhouse to enter your personal PIN number to record your arrival and departure time at Hillwood.
- If the iPad is not working, please:
  - Notify a staff member in visitor services or volunteer management.
  - Record your hours from home using your Volgistics account. See the Volgistics User Guide for step-by-step instructions for entering volunteer hours via the "Service" page.

### Daily Schedule & Groups Report

- After logging in using Volgistics, volunteers should review the daily schedule, briefing notes, and groups report to learn their volunteer assignment and make note of updates/news for the day. These resources are available at the volunteer lounge, mansion coat check (located off the entry hall), and visitor center tour desk.
  1. The **daily volunteer schedule** includes:
    - Number of pre-registered visitors for day
    - Tour space availability for mansion and garden tours
    - Groups and/or members pre-booked for a guided tour
    - Volunteers scheduled for the day
  2. The **volunteer briefing notes** include:
    - Updates and reminders regarding the volunteer and visitor experience
    - Programs and events scheduled for the week.
  3. The **groups report** will provide details on any groups pre-booked for the day and includes:
    - Group name
    - Group size
    - Group itinerary (touring method such as guided or self-guided, café reservations, etc.)
    - Special notes regarding a group (accessibility needs, etc.)

**Please note:** if no groups are scheduled for the day, then the group report will not be printed.

# Visitor Center Shift Procedures

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## Tour Desk Overview

VSVs provide one of the first impressions guests receive at Hillwood. Once a visitor checks in with the visitor services staff at the front desk, they are directed to the tour desk for an orientation where a VSV will:

- Welcome and greet visitors.
- Provide the visitor orientation and review the estate map.
- Review the daily touring and programming options.
- Distribute brochures to visitors.
- Distribute tickets for mansion and garden tours, when available.
- Explain the operation of Hillwood's dynamic mobile app tours.
- Answer Hillwood-related and general questions.

## Tour Desk Guidelines

While stationed at the tour desk, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Once you've signed in using Volgistics, refer to the daily volunteer schedule for your shift assignment, groups report, and check in with the visitor services staff for updates regarding the day's activities or programs.
2. If needed, restock the tour desk with printed material/brochures. Supplies, located in the credenza behind the front desk, include all Hillwood brochures as well as large, printed materials and information in Braille for visitor requests.

Brochures available at the tour desk include:

- Visitor Guide and Map with Audio Tour, available in:
    - English
    - Russian
    - French
    - Spanish
    - Mandarin
  - Treasure Hunts:
    - Outdoor Art and Architecture
    - Russian Art
    - French Art
    - Marjorie Merriweather Post
  - Picnic Guideline and Map
  - Woodland Trail Map
  - Special exhibition rack cards, when available
3. Once guests have been checked in with the visitor services staff and are directed to the tour desk, welcome them in a friendly, gracious manner and provide a visitor orientation (see below for an example).

## Sample Visitor Orientation

*Hello; welcome to Hillwood. Is this your first visit?*

**Note:** If yes, cover the estate map. If not, ask if they would like a refresher on the estate map before you continue with the tour options of the orientation.

*Allow me to review the map with you as well as the options for your visit today:*

- *You're located here in the visitor center. When you're ready to begin your visit, you'll take the stairs behind the front desk or use the elevator and exit from the second floor.*

- Make sure you save some time for the museum shop located on the second floor!
- Once outside, the mansion is located on your right surrounded by the formal gardens.
- The greenhouse, located to the left of the visitor center, is open to the public.
- The Merriweather café is also located to the left of the visitor center. You can visit Hillwood's website to learn more about our dining options.

A 10-minute orientation film is available in the theater behind us plays every 15 minutes starting at 9:30 a.m.

There are a few choices for your visit today depending on your timeframe and learning preference:

- We offer guided and self-guided tours. Guided tours of the mansion are available at 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. (and 3:30 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays). The tour lasts one hour and provides highlights of the collection.
- During the spring (April through June) and fall (September through mid-November) months, guided tours of the gardens are available at 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. The tour lasts one hour and provides highlights of Hillwood's gardens.
- We also offer self-guided tours, which include a print tour brochure and mobile app: both provide information on the mansion and gardens. The mobile app is the most comprehensive option available to our guests with several hours of information programmed. There is no additional fee for any of these options.

Let me know how you would like to visit today, and I'll be happy to assemble your brochures and get you on your way.



4. When visitors select the printed tour, please note the estate map is located in the front flap of the brochure.

5. When visitors select the [mobile app](#), instructions for downloading the app are available in signage at the tour desk and on Hillwood's website. For more information, review the [Tips for Using Hillwood's Mobile App](#).
  - Note: The mobile app is available in English only.
6. As visitors depart for the day, ask if they enjoyed their visit to Hillwood. For those looking for a return visit, membership is a fabulous option for staying engaged with Hillwood!

### Tips for Visitor Flow

- During busy days, visitors may come to the tour desk first before checking in. Kindly redirect them to the front desk to check in with the visitor services staff. Visitors receive an admission sticker once they have checked in and provided the suggested donation.
- If a line of visitors form at the tour desk, have them gather into a large group for your orientation. Review the estate map and tour options to the gathered group. At the end of your orientation, provide each individual the appropriate materials and brochures. This will offer the guests a speedier start to their visit.
- While our visitation is typically made up of adults, we welcome and encourage families to visit Hillwood. We ask families to explore the mansion and exhibitions together by holding hands. The youth audio tour and family treasure hunts are perfect for families to help engage the smallest of visitors. **Helpful Tip:** Provide children with their own copy of the treasure hunt.

### Frequently Asked Visitor Questions at the Tour Desk

Offered below are a list of frequently asked questions volunteers receive when stationed at the tour desk.

**Friendly Reminder:** The visitor services staff are here for you if you have any questions or concerns regarding a visitor, your shift, or Hillwood in general.

- **Where can I watch the orientation film?**

The 10-minute orientation film is shown every 15 minutes in the visitor center theater from 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. The film is also available on Hillwood's website under "[Plan Your Visit](#)"—an ideal option for visitors with limited time.
- **Can I make a reservation on-site for a future visit?**

Yes, visitors are welcome to make a reservation for a future visit via online, by phone, or at the front desk with the visitor services staff. **Please note:** To minimize lines in the visitor center on high volume days, we recommend guests to visit Hillwood's website or call the information office to make a reservation for a future visit.
- **Can I purchase a membership while on-site at Hillwood?**

Yes, visitors can purchase a membership from staff at the front desk in the visitor center as well as apply their admission towards a membership. The museum shop is **not** able to apply admission to a membership. **Friendly reminder:** Visitors can purchase a membership via [Hillwood's website](#).
- **Are wheelchairs available for visitors?**

Yes, wheelchairs are available for guests to use free of charge and are sanitized between each use. Direct visitors who request a wheelchair to the visitor services staff at the front desk.

  - We request volunteers to familiarize themselves with Hillwood's estate and mansion guidelines as well as the accessibility guidelines (available in the Volunteer Handbook and Hillwood's website). **Helpful Tip:** If you need a refresher of the mansion and estate guidelines while stationed at the tour desk, the printed tour brochure features the guidelines in the back of the brochure.

- **Are strollers allowed in the mansion or exhibition?**  
Strollers are not permitted in the mansion or exhibition spaces. Instruct visitors with strollers to park their strollers under the porte cochere in front of the mansion and just outside the exhibition spaces.
- **A visitor forgot their umbrella. Does Hillwood have any available?**  
On rainy days, guests are welcome to borrow an umbrella from Hillwood. Umbrellas are stored outside of the mansion and conservatory entrances for guests to use during their visit. We ask visitors to return umbrellas to visitor services staff or one of the umbrella holders outside of the mansion or conservatory.
- **Can I picnic at Hillwood?**  
Yes, picnic maps are available in the center drawer of the tour desk. The map indicates the most appropriate picnic areas for visitors. Waterproof picnic blankets are available to borrow from the visitor center.
- **Is there a courtesy phone on-site I can use?**  
Yes, a courtesy phone is located in the hallway to the restrooms in the visitor center. Information is posted near the phone regarding the Merriweather café (hostess stand phone number and seasonal menu) and instructions for calling a cab. Hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes are available next to the phone for guests after placing a call.
- **I'm looking for a specific staff member. How can I get in touch with them?**  
Business cards for most Hillwood staff members are available at the front desk in the visitor center. Staff contact information is also available on the "Staff Contact" page on Hillwood's website.
- **A visitor would like to leave a suggestion, compliment, or complaint. What is the best way to handle visitor feedback?**  
Direct those visitors to the visitor services staff members at the front desk of the visitor center. Staff will document their feedback and ensure it reaches the relevant department.
- **A visitor would like to share their story or connection to Marjorie Post. Who should they contact?**  
Direct those visitors to the visitor services staff members at the visitor center front desk. They will provide the visitor with the business card for our archives and special collections department, which runs the oral history program. The visitor can also leave their contact information with the visitor services staff as well.

## Mansion Shift Procedures

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### Mansion On-station Overview

With a goal to continue the gracious welcome and assistance from the visitor center to the mansion, a VSV on-station in the mansion will:

- Provides directions to visitors.
- Answers specific questions about the mansion and objects in the collection.
- Explains the mobile app use.
- Facilitates the collection of tickets and movement of visitors for the docent-led tours and throughout the mansion.

### Mansion On-station Guidelines

While stationed in the mansion, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Once you've signed in using the iPad, refer to the daily volunteer schedule for your shift assignment and updates regarding the day's activities.



2. VSVs will rove/circulate from room to room and floor to floor (1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> floors) every 10-15 minutes unless you are assisting a visitor.
3. Be proactive: make yourself available to visitors by smiling, making eye contact, and offering a simple greeting, such as "Hello. Welcome to the mansion. Please let me know if you have any questions."
4. While VSVs are not trained to lead guided tours, they are available to answer questions on the collection, Marjorie Post, and the museum.
5. When responding to visitor questions, feel free to avail yourself of the informational resources available in the mansion coat check, which include the audio tour scripts, mansion resource binder, garden docent resource binder, and Hillwood publications.
6. Assist security with checking in and out coats, bags, water bottles, etc. in the mansion coat check. Refer to a security officer if you have a question regarding the coat check policy.
7. Help ensure visitors follow the mansion guidelines, such as no flash photography or videotaping, no leaning or touching (including walls, door jams, and columns), no eating or drinking, etc.
8. Monitor the rooms to ensure they do not get overcrowded. If they do, encourage visitors to start their visit in another area.
9. Assist guests who need the elevator by walking them to the elevator, pushing the call button, and opening the outer door when the elevator arrives.
10. Be available in the mansion entry hall at 11:20 a.m., 1:20 p.m., and 3:20 p.m. (depending on shift timing) to assist with the start of the mansion tours. Help docents collect the tour tickets. Once the docents have provided an introduction and divided the visitors into smaller groups, return to floating on-station.

### Additional Notes for Mansion On-Station

- For a complete list of resources available to volunteers (both on-site and virtual), please refer to the training document "Resources Available to Volunteers" available on the volunteer website.
- A mansion resource book is available in the coat check and on the second floor of the mansion located in the stanchioned off stairway (can be found on the steps just around the corner).
- Familiarize yourself with Hillwood's estate and mansion guidelines as well as the accessibility guidelines (available in your volunteer handbook and Hillwood's website). **Friendly Reminder:** The security staff is here for you if you have any concerns regarding a visitor or Hillwood in general.
- Clear chairs are available for visitors to sit on in most of the rooms throughout the mansion; they do not have ropes across them. While volunteers are also welcome to utilize the chairs when needed, please continue to move/rove the floors.



A mansion resource binder is available on the second floor located in the stanchioned-off stairway.

- The mansion is wheelchair accessible except for the pavilion, Marjorie Post's bedroom suite, and Second Floor Gallery. Photo albums with images of the rooms are available in the **lower cabinet** in the Russian porcelain room and the lower cabinet just outside the bedroom suite. An iPad, located in the mansion coat room, is also available with images of the rooms not accessible by wheelchair.
  - **Please note:** These are the **only** two cabinets volunteers are permitted to open. An iPad with images of all three spaces is also available in the mansion coat check.



**Photo album:** Pavilion  
**Location:** Russian porcelain room cabinet, to the right of the French drawing room



**Photo album:** Marjorie Post's Bedroom Suite  
**Location:** Cabinet just outside of Post's bedroom, to the right of the bedroom doorway

### Frequently Asked Visitor Questions in the Mansion

Offered below are a list of frequently asked questions volunteers receive while on-station in the mansion.

- **When was Hillwood originally built?**  
 The original house was called Arbremont by the original owners and built in 1926 for Col. Henry Parsons Erwin. The house was designed by John Deibet.
- **When did Marjorie Post purchase Hillwood?**  
 Marjorie Post purchased Hillwood in 1955 and spent two years renovating the mansion and gardens. She moved in once the renovations were completed in 1957.
- **How large is the property?**  
 Hillwood sits on 25 acres near Rock Creek Park. Visitors can explore 13 acres that are open to the public.
- **How many square feet is the house?**  
 25,000 square feet
- **When did Hillwood open as a museum?**  
 Hillwood opened as a public institution in 1977.
- **How is Hillwood supported?**  
 Hillwood is a non-profit museum (classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) public charity). Much support comes from our exciting membership program. Encourage interested visitors to join by stopping by the visitor center front desk or visit [Hillwood's website](#).
- **Are any of the Post family members involved with Hillwood?**  
 Yes, Ellen Charles, Post's granddaughter, is actively involved with Hillwood as President Emerita. Ellen served as President of the Board for 25 years.

- **How many times was Marjorie Post married?**

Marjorie Post was married four times:

- Edward Bennet Close (m. 1905-1919)
- E.F. Hutton (m. 1920-1935)
- Joseph Davies (m. 1935-1955)
- Herbert May (m. 1958-1964)

- **How many children did Marjorie Post have?**

Three daughters: Adelaide (b. 1908), Eleanor (b. 1909), and Nedenia (later known as Dine Merrill) (b. 1923).

- **Did any of the children live with Marjorie Post at Hillwood?**

No, Marjorie Post moved in to Hillwood in 1957 at the age of 70. Her daughters had grown families. They and the grandchildren visited here.

- **Are Marjorie Post's children still alive?**

No, Adelaide died in 1998, Eleanor died in 2006, and Nedenia (Dina Merrill) died in 2017.

- **Why are there so few bedrooms in the house?**

Marjorie Post spent about 8-10 weeks at Hillwood during the spring and fall. She traditionally entertained overnight guests at her other estates, such as Camp Topridge in upstate New York and Mar-a-lago in Palm Beach, Florida. If Post had overnight guests while she was in residence at Hillwood, they would stay at the Shoreham Hotel.

- **Why is there no pool or tennis court at Hillwood?**

A pool and tennis court was included at Arbremont. Marjorie Post removed the tennis court for the cutting garden and the pool for the dacha.

- **Did any weddings take place at Hillwood?**

In 1966, Dina Merrill married Cliff Robertson in the French drawing room.

- **Where is Marjorie Post buried?**

Marjorie Post died on September 12, 1973 at the age of 86. She is buried in the rose garden at the base of the obelisk in the center of the garden. Hillwood's horticulture staff places a floral arrangement on the obelisk to honor her birthday date (March 15, 1887) and death date.

- **What is the current status of Marjorie Post's other estates?**

- Hillwood, Long Island is now part of the Long Island University campus.
- The Tregaron Conservancy maintains walking paths on the former Tregaron estate. The Washington International School operates its middle and upper schools on 6 acres of the former estate, including the mansion and dacha.
- Mar-A-Lago is an exclusive club run by Donald Trump.
- Camp Topridge is privately owned.

## Feedback

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Our doors are always open, and we want to hear about your volunteer experiences. We highly appreciate any insights, takeaways, or questions you may have from your volunteer shifts. Your constructive feedback will contribute to the continual improvement of our programs, ensuring an enriching experience for our volunteers. Please direct your feedback to [volunteers@hillwoodmuseum.org](mailto:volunteers@hillwoodmuseum.org).