



Garden Docent Guidelines

April 2024

These guidelines are provided to help ensure the best possible experience for docents *and* visitors on guided tours.

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.

Contents

Garden Tour Overview.....	2
Primary Responsibilities	2
Onboarding	2
Tour Structure.....	2
Tour Timeframe.....	3
Visitor/Docent Ratio	3
Docent-led Garden, Gardener’s Focus, Private and Custom Tours.....	4
Scheduling.....	4
Arrival & Departure For Each Shift	4
Entering, Driving, & Parking.....	4
Back Rail Parking	4
Lower Gate Drive Parking	5
Identification	5
Volunteer Lounge.....	5
Coats & Personal Belongings	5
Recording Volunteer Hours	5
Daily Schedule & Groups Report	6
Garden Tour Routes and Maps	6
Docent-led Garden Tour Procedures	8
Docent-led Garden Tour Guidelines.....	8
Docent Leader of the Day	8
Additional Docent Shift Notes.....	9
Hillwood Accessibility.....	10
Tips for Leading an Accessibility Tour	10
Volunteer Interactions.....	10
Feedback.....	11

Garden Tour Overview

Primary Responsibilities

A docent's goal, as is Hillwood's, is to provide the best possible visitor experience. Garden docents are an integral part of the Hillwood community and serve several important roles:

- Conduct garden tours.
- Assist with public programs and special events leading 20-minute garden room talks or serving on-station in the gardens, as needed.
- Assure a positive, enjoyable visitor experience.

Onboarding

Docents-in-training will transition to active docents once they have successfully completed their qualifying tour. Once qualified, docents 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 docent-led tours via the online schedule.
- Pin number to manage volunteer hours via the iPads on-site at Hillwood or using the mobile app.

Tour Structure

- Docent-led tours are "highlights" tours, intended to give a general overview of Hillwood and the gardens centered on overarching themes and distilled information, rather than on minutiae.
- Docents use frameworks and interpretive messages to craft their tour's structure and content.
- A docent-led tour is but one point of entry for a visitor into a quality Hillwood experience. Depending upon the visitor's learning style and needs, other options, such as a self-guided experience or the mobile audio tour, may be more appealing. The gardens are open to all types of visitors, and those self-guiding or listening to the mobile audio tour could potentially tag along on your tour, or already be in the garden rooms when you arrive with your group.
- Docent-led garden tours are offered regularly Tuesday-Sunday from 10:30-11:30 a.m. and 12:30-1:30 p.m. during the garden touring seasons: Spring (April-June) and Fall (September-mid-November). The general operating hours of the estate are 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday-Sunday. Hillwood is closed on Mondays, most national holidays, and several weeks in January.
- Garden tours take place in rain or shine, except during severe weather conditions, like lightning or a heat advisory. Hillwood staff will determine if a tour needs to be shortened or cancelled due to inclement weather and will notify the docents scheduled. This mostly happens on the day of with docent consultation. Docents are expected to confirm notice of any canceled tours by responding to emails sent by the volunteer management team.
- Docents serve a 4-hour shift (10 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday), which allows for a lunch break between tours.
- Docents serve a minimum of two shifts per month equating to between 50 and 92 service hours annually. The majority of docents are assigned to a floating schedule, with some in a fixed schedule, as dictated by Hillwood's scheduling needs. Please note: All new docents are assigned to a floating schedule.

- We encourage docents to serve additional hours and recognize those who exceed the standards. Extra hours are available through group requests (leading private or custom tours) and during programming (conducting garden room talks during public programs and special events).
- Only Hillwood docents and staff are permitted to lead guided tours of the mansion and gardens. Outside tour guides/operators are not permitted to tour groups on Hillwood property. If you encounter an unauthorized tour, please notify visitor services staff in the visitor center at your convenience.

Tour Timeframe

- Tours last 60 minutes in length. The tour time of 60 minutes strikes a balance between the needs of the visitors for a comfortable and convenient length of time to be on a guided experience, and the museum and docent's desire to provide a quality educational interaction centered on the design, features, and Marjorie Post/museum today framework. The allotted time for each garden room on the tour includes travel time from one garden room to the next, as well as time for the introduction and conclusion at the beginning and end of each tour.
- Docents should be comfortable telling visitors that if they want to learn more than what is discussed on the tour there are multiple ways to do so, including: taking the mobile audio tour, taking a docent-led mansion tour, visiting the special exhibition or the greenhouse, joining as a member, or attending a public program.
 - Instruct visitors to inquire at the visitor center for more information on a specific topic or visit Hillwood's website at www.hillwoodmuseum.org, where they can learn how to deepen their engagement with the museum.
- When docents do not adhere to best practices during their tour (i.e.: running significantly over or under the 60-minute timeframe), they will unintentionally disrupt their fellow docents and visitors. Most likely these actions result in docents overlapping and wanting to be in the same room. We recommend graciously and calmly acknowledging this both during and after the tour.
 - **Responding in the moment:** Graciously make eye contact and get acknowledgement (i.e.: a head nod or thumbs up) that the docent understands they need to move to their next room. You may choose to enter the room (space allowing) or gather somewhere adjacent.
 - **Responding after the tour:** Graciously discuss the matter directly with the docent. The conversation may start "Thank you for flexing with me in the (room name). It seemed like our timing became mixed up and both ended up there." The conversation can then continue to a problem-solving discussion of ways to help prevent that situation next time. If the concern continues, notify volunteer management staff so they can assist in the conversation.

Visitor/Docent Ratio

- Each docent will generally guide between 1-15 visitors on a tour. Flexibility will be required of docents to structure their tour according to group size. Groups may expand to as many as 20 visitors per docent, but this is a rare occurrence.
- Groups of 10 or more, as well as Hillwood members, have the privilege of reserving a docent-led tour in advance. The remaining tour tickets are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis at the visitor center tour desk.
- Docents should expect to see a diverse audience on a tour: visitors will vary by age, life experience, culture, interest in Hillwood, physical capability, and in other ways. Docents will have to accommodate and strive to engage each group.
- Additional visitors or, as we sometimes refer to them, "hangers-on," may join a tour once it has started. Unless the tour is a private or custom tour, each docent should aim to be flexible and gracious to additional visitors. Most often these types of visitors may listen in for one or two garden rooms, and then self-select to continue with their self-guided experience.

- On occasion, if there are not enough visitors for all the docents scheduled, the docents discreetly decide together who will lead the tour(s). The docent not leading a tour due to low visitation is encouraged to stay in the motor court 5-10 minutes past the tour start time—it is not uncommon to have a late arrival inquiring to take the tour. If there are no takers and the docent is scheduled for a second tour, the docent may opt to fill that time by returning to the volunteer lounge for self-study or exploring the garden, mansion and/or exhibition (walking the estate with the mobile audio tour is a great refresher). If the docent not needed has no more scheduled tours for the day, they are welcome to end their shift early and sign out.

Docent-led Garden, Gardener’s Focus, Private and Custom Tours

- Another reason garden highlights tours should be 60 minutes is because other tours occur before and after the highlight tours.
- Docent-led mansion tours are offered Tuesday-Sunday from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and 1:30-2:30 p.m. with an additional tour offered Friday-Sunday from 3:30-4:30 p.m. year-round.
- Gardener’s focus tours (a type of public program) led by horticulture staff highlighting seasonal blooms/garden rooms are offered at various times throughout the year. For more information, visit the Events and Program page on Hillwood’s website.
- Private and custom tours happen at various times before and after the highlights tours.
 - Private tours are groups paying an additional cost for a private garden tour booked outside of the regularly scheduled tours offered for groups and the public.
 - Custom tours are groups paying an additional cost for a private tour where the group has requested a customized experience, such as an altered tour route and/or tour focus. Information regarding the group’s request is emailed in advance to the scheduled docents.
 - Some groups may also request a private or custom tour led by Hillwood staff. These are accommodated based on the staff’s availability and other tours scheduled for the day.
 - If you are leading a private or custom tour and general visitors inquire or try to join the tour, please gently explain the tour is private and additional ways to learn in the gardens (brochures, mobile audio tour, etc.) are available in the visitor center.

Scheduling

- Docents 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

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 once the docents-in-training have passed their qualifying tour.

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.
- **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.

Recording Volunteer Hours

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

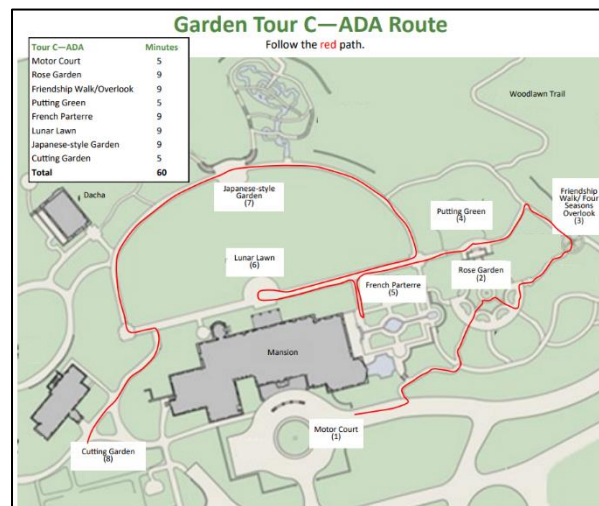
- After signing in using Volgistics, volunteers should review the daily schedule, briefing notes, and groups report to learn their volunteer assignment and make note of updates/news for the day. These resources are available at the volunteer lounge, mansion coat check (located off the entry hall), and visitor center tour desk.
 - 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
 - The **volunteer briefing notes** include:
 - Updates and reminders regarding the volunteer and visitor experience
 - Programs and events scheduled for the week.
 - 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.
- After each tour, docents write the number of visitors they had on their tour on the **tour attendance log** provided in the volunteer lounge. These numbers help Hillwood track trends in visitor attendance on guided tours.

Garden Tour Routes and Maps

- The same eight garden rooms are included on each tour route: each tour visits the same rooms, but in a different order.
- [Detailed maps of the garden tour routes](#) are available on the next two pages and on the volunteer website.
- The maximum number of tours at one time is three, and they are well choreographed, so they move easily around each other.
- In order to move easily around each other, each room has a specified time allotted, with the total tour lasting sixty minutes.
- The time includes travel time from one garden room to the next, as well as time for the introduction and conclusion at the beginning and end of each tour.
- Each docent will generally guide between 1-15 visitors on a tour. Flexibility will be required of docents to structure their tour according to group size. Expect variation on each shift, based upon weather, season, etc.

- Docents help their tour visitors understand all that is available to visitors, including garden rooms that are self-guided like the dog cemetery and greenhouse, exhibitions in the dacha or Adirondack building, mansion, museum shop, and Merriweather café.

Tour A		Tour B		Tour C (ADA)	
Intro/Motor Court	5	Intro/Motor Court	5	Intro/Motor Court	5
Cutting Garden	5	French Parterre	9	Rose Garden	9
Lunar Lawn	9	Rose Garden	9	Friendship Walk	9
French Parterre	9	Friendship Walk	9	Putting Green	5
Rose Garden	9	Putting Green	5	French Parterre	9
Friendship Walk	9	Japanese-style Garden	9	Lunar Lawn	9
Putting Green	5	Lunar Lawn	9	Japanese-style Garden	9
Japanese-style Garden	9	Cutting Garden	5	Cutting Garden	5
	60		60		60



Docent-led Garden Tour Procedures

Docent-led Garden Tour Guidelines

While in the gardens, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Once you've signed in using the iPad, refer to the daily volunteer schedule and volunteer briefing notes (see page 6 for more details) for your shift assignment and updates regarding the day's activities.
2. Ensure you have your cell phone with you; garden docents are required to carry their cell phone while leading tours in case of emergencies, such as medical emergencies or potential threats/concerns regarding the visitors and/or gardens.
3. Arrive at the motor court by 10:15 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. ready to greet visitors. The 15 minutes prior to the tour starting is a great opportunity to build a rapport with the visitors signed-up for the tour. This is a perfect time to learn about any special interests or accommodations that the tour participants may have.
4. The docent scheduled for tour "A" will use their cell phone to call the visitor services front desk at 202.234.3929 at 10:25 a.m. and 12:25 p.m. to determine the number of visitors signed up for the tour. The staff member at the front desk will let you know how many tour tickets have been distributed.
5. Collect tour tickets from garden tour participants and count to confirm the number matches the expected tour size/group. Store the tour tickets in the plastic box on the back of the "Garden Tour Meets Here" sign in the motor court.
6. The docent leader of the day will provide the overall tour welcome and divide the visitors into smaller groups. Before you start your tour and lead them to a specific area of the motor court, confirm you have the correct number of visitors for your tour. See the next section for the docent leader of the day duties.
 - a. If there are visitors missing at the tour start time, divide the present visitors among the docents to begin their tour, ensuring enough docents are staying behind to wait for the anticipated, late visitors. For example, if a group of 30 is arriving late, two docents will wait for the visitors while the third docent begins their tour.
 - b. **Helpful tip:** Tour route C is Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. If you have visitors with mobility or accessibility limitations, please follow Tour Route C.
7. Using the tour framework, lead an engaging, visitor-friendly tour keeping within the 60-minute timeframe.
8. Once your tour concludes, write your total tour number on the tour attendance log in the volunteer lounge.
9. Sign out at the end of your shift using the iPad in the volunteer lounge. Be sure to return your radio to the Security control room in the mansion.

Docent Leader of the Day

- Each day one docent will be designated a "docent leader of the day." The docent scheduled for the "A" tour will serve as the docent leader.
- The responsibilities of the docent leader include:
 1. Ensuring all docents scheduled for service have arrived and are stationed at the motor court by 10:15 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. ready to greet visitors.
 - a. If docents are missing, please notify visitor services (ext. 3929, Tuesday-Sunday) or volunteer management staff (ext. 3943, Tuesday-Friday).

2. Using their cell phone, to call the visitor services front desk at 202.234.3929 at 10:25 a.m. and 12:25 p.m. to determine the number of visitors signed up for the tour. The staff member at the front desk will let you know how many tour tickets have been distributed.
3. Ensuring the tours start at the appropriate time, 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. (i.e. not early or late), and starting their tour last to accommodate late arrivals.
4. Providing additional customer service, as needed, such as accommodating unexpected extra visitors on the tours, graciously welcoming and including latecomers, or assisting visitors with special needs.

5. **Welcome the tour visitors, using this script:**

Good morning/afternoon. My name is _____ and on behalf of the museum and my fellow docents, welcome to Hillwood!

We are about to embark on an hour-long highlights tour of the gardens. At the conclusion of the guided tour, you are most welcome to stay in the gardens as long as you like. The estate will be open until 5:00 p.m.

To ensure we all have the best possible experience, I have a few guidelines to review:

- *You're welcome to take photographs in the gardens, but please refrain from flash photography and videotaping.*
- *Please turn off or silence any cell phones or electronic devices.*
- *We ask that you not walk in the planting beds or pick any of the plants.*
- *If you need to leave the tour at any time, please feel free to do so.*
- *If you need to take a seat during the tour, there is seating in many of the gardens that you are welcome to use.*

We will divide you into X number of smaller groups, each with XX number of people per group. Each group will see the same garden rooms, just in a slightly different order. May I have XX number of people go with (insert docent's name), (and so on...)

Additional Docent Shift Notes

- Hillwood values visitor feedback and offers a variety of options for guests to share their insights, questions, and suggestions with the staff:
 - **In-person** | For on-site visits, 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.
 - **Email** | Visitors are welcome to email their feedback or questions they may have to info@hillwoodmuseum.org.
 - **Post-Visit Survey** | Visitors who provided an email address when checking in for their visit will receive a ten-question post-visit survey via email within two weeks of their visit. Survey answers are anonymous, so we encourage guests looking for a response to email Hillwood instead.
- For visitors who would like to share their story or connection to Marjorie Post, 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.

Hillwood Accessibility

Everyone is welcome at Hillwood. We are committed to ensuring our facilities, services, exhibitions, and programs are accessible to all audiences and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. For a complete list of accessibility offerings, please visit the [Accessibility page](#) on Hillwood's website.

Provided below are highlights from Hillwood's accessibility offerings available to visitors:

- Manual wheelchairs are available to borrow on a first-come, first-serve basis in the visitor center. Direct visitors to speak to a visitor services staff member to obtain a wheelchair.
 - Note wheelchairs are not easily accommodated in the greenhouse and French parterre.
- Elevators are available in the visitor center and mansion. The Collections & Research Center is accessible from the elevators at the parking deck (by appointment only).
 - Areas of the mansion that are not accessible are: the pavilion, Marjorie Post's bedroom suite, and the Second Floor Gallery: Understanding Post's Legacy.
- The mansion coat room houses an iPad with photos of the pavilion, Marjorie Post's bedroom suite, the Second Floor Gallery, and the current special exhibition that volunteers can share with visitors.
- The Japanese-style garden is the predominant garden tour room that is not easily accessible. A photobook is available for garden docents to utilize on their tour in the mansion coat room.
- Braille and large print resources are available for visitors in the visitor center. Transcripts are also available for each track of the audio tours via the mobile app.

Tips for Leading an Accessibility Tour

- In the 15 minutes prior to your tour while in the motor court, build a rapport with the tour participants. Ask if any visitors would prefer a tour that avoids steps/stairs. This will help you plan and accommodate their needs on your tour.
- Follow Tour Route C, which is ADA compliant.
- For groups who move slowly, decrease the amount of time spent in the garden rooms, allowing more time to travel between rooms. Edit your content by furthering your distillation and focusing on only one or two objects in each room. The visitors will appreciate the pace and can more comfortably enjoy their Hillwood experience.
- The **French parterre** has an entrance at each corner of the room. As you continue along your tour route with your group, you can enter the French parterre at these corners to see the different perspectives of the space without traversing across the rill or gravel pathways.
- Refer to the "**Japanese-style Garden & Accessibility**" handout for guidelines on best to navigate the Japanese-style garden depending on the visitors' needs.

Volunteer Interactions

The volunteer management team is available to assist with any questions or concerns regarding your volunteer experience at Hillwood. With a large and diverse volunteer cohort (350+ people and growing), it is important to remember that we all come from different backgrounds and have unique perspectives. Despite this, Hillwood's volunteer culture is one of goodwill and a genuine desire to support one another. By fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect, we can all work together towards our shared goals.

If you encounter any difficulties or conflicts with a fellow volunteer, the first step is to approach the issue with care and professionalism. Try to understand the other person's perspective and communicate your concerns in a respectful manner. In many cases, a simple conversation may be all that is needed to reach a resolution and move forward.

If the situation persists or becomes unmanageable, please reach out to the volunteer management team for assistance. They will be able to help determine the best course of action to resolve the issue and ensure that

all volunteers continue to feel welcome and valued at Hillwood. It is important to remember that Hillwood is committed to providing a safe and respectful environment for all volunteers, free from intentional or unintentional harassment, discrimination, and violence. For more information on our policies, please refer to pages 9-11 of the Volunteer Handbook.

Feedback

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 docent 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.