

Welcoming All: Creating an Inclusive Tour Experience

Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

2026 Mansion Docent Training

Visitor engagement creates opportunities for better communication. To ensure we provide an inclusive experience for all on a tour, the following information provides education around DEAI terms and guidance on how to counter unconscious bias.

1. Read Below: Actions to Counter Unconscious Bias

- **Identify your own bias and how they may impact you.**

As humans our brains are wired to make snap decisions based on how someone looks – are they part of my tribe or not? **Unconscious bias:** Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

- Learn more about your unconscious bias by taking the Harvard Unconscious Bias Test at: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/user/agg/blindspot/indexrk.htm>
- When interacting with visitors, staff, or other volunteers, question your thinking and challenge your assumptions. Would you draw the same conclusions if this scenario involved someone of a different gender or race?
- Don't be defensive. Just listen. If you feel defensive during an interaction, use it as a learning opportunity. Ask why are you feeling defensive, what is challenging you, is it based on an unconscious bias?

- **Encourage fellow volunteers to hold each other accountable in positive ways.**

Relying on others for support is a great way to help identify generalizations or microaggressions that can be challenging to catch on your own.

Microaggressions: Everyday slights, indignities, put-downs, and insults that members of marginalized groups experience in their day-to-day interactions with individuals who are often unaware that they have engaged in an offensive or demeaning way. When this kind of inappropriate behavior is accidental or thoughtless, it's often the result of unconscious bias. Examples of microaggressions can include mispronouncing a person's name repeatedly, excluding someone from participating on a tour, failing to give validation or praise when it's due, or misgendering visitors.

Hold yourself accountable when unconscious bias and microaggressions surface. Everyone at Hillwood is part of a team and we all work closely together. Ask your colleagues to share with you if you have made a generalization.

- **Be inclusive.**

One way to address these challenges is with **micro-affirmations:** simple, respectful behaviors that affirm the worth of our visitors and fellow volunteers and the fairness of our workplace.

- **Listening** | Be an active listener by making eye contact, paying attention to what others have to say, and not interrupting when others are speaking.
- **Including** | Invite visitors to participate in the tour, ensuring that different voices and perspectives have a chance to share. Be mindful of language; what you say and how you say it. Avoid using generalization, such as using "house" instead of "home" when referring to a visitor's residence, gendered greetings, such as "you guys" or cisgendered (denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex) examples, "this object is a token of love and would be given to the opposite sex."
- **Valuing** | Give validation and praise where its due. Inquiry shows us our visitors are invested in the tour content and trust us with their questions. Be responsive to the visitors' questions and observations shared during the tour.

- **Engaging** | These small, but impact gestures go a long way to creating a welcoming and safe environment for visitors to participate, such as saying hello and goodbye, being friendly, and asking everyone for their input.
- To further broaden your perspective and counter the effects of unconscious bias, continue to expand your circle while volunteering and outside of Hillwood.
 - Ask yourself, “Who didn’t I ask for advice, and why?”
 - Proximity shatters stereotypes. Seek diversity in your interactions.
 - Take risks on others – particularly those that are different from you. Think of a time when someone took a risk on you, how did that make you feel? How can you pay forward that experience?
- Consider how understanding our unconscious bias could inform our docent-led tours. Bring your ideas to April 1’s class and we’ll discuss.

2. Hillwood has additional resources you may wish to engage with.

Please see the volunteer training [Being an Active Upstander video](#) and accompanying [training handout](#) and [survey](#) for a deeper dive on DEAI terms and tactics for fostering an inclusive workplace. While this training is using the context of the workplace, the tactics and tools discussed can be applied to the tour experience a docent manages.