

School Docent Program Roles and Responsibilities

August 2015

Introduction

This Roles and Responsibilities document:

- Supports the goals of the single-visit school tour program by defining responsibilities and expectations for both school docents and staff.
- Reflects the National Gallery's commitment to student and teacher audiences, to excellence, and to creating and nurturing a positive work environment.
- Describes how school docents and staff work together, placing particular value on communication and professionalism. School docents and staff support teamwork and collaboration, for example, through the Volunteer Council, chairs/vice-chairs/staff meetings, and piloting new tours.

A detailed explanation of docent program policies and benefits can be found in the Volunteer Guidelines and Lead Docent Guidelines document.

School Tours Goals Statement

Thematic single-visit school tours are designed to introduce students to the museum experience and to the National Gallery's collection of American and European art from the late Middle Ages to the twenty-first century. Docent-led tours are structured to encourage careful observation, foster an open exchange of ideas, and cultivate connections between art and life. Through close communication with the teacher, school tours enhance classroom learning and curriculum objectives. The National Gallery's goal is to nurture a life-long love of art museums.

Our goals for the single-visit school tour will be achieved by:

- Creating a positive and welcoming learning environment
- Utilizing teaching strategies which may include writing, sketching, and group activities that meet the needs and interests of diverse learners
- Valuing students' ideas and experiences in the interpretation of art
- Connecting to, supporting, and extending classroom learning
- Engaging in continuing education about art, school audiences, and the learning experience
- Conducting on-going program assessment
- Committing to high standards of service and professionalism

Docent Responsibilities and Organization

National Gallery of Art School Docents are museum educators who are expected to conduct high-quality, age-appropriate tours at all times. They should be able to communicate effectively with tour groups in voices that can be heard clearly at the back and edges of the group. Docents must be fully prepared in all aspects of tour-giving. On tours, docents must provide accurate information, be familiar with tour routes, use engaging and stimulating teaching methods, and be flexible. After tours, docents should reflect on the tour's strengths and challenges and consider how these ideas might improve future tours.

School docents are organized into two committees for administrative purposes. Each committee elects a slate of officers annually. Chairs select nominating committees who put out a call for nominations at least 30 days before the vote, and a slate is sent out to committee members at least 7 days prior to the vote. Members may vote on the slate of officers at the last meeting or via electronic voting.

Tours

Each year between October and May, the Gallery will offer approximately 30 weeks of scheduled school tours. Except in special circumstances, docents are expected to be available to give two tours between the hours of 10:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. on **at least 25 of their assigned tour days** and must be available on **at least nine tour days during the months of March, April, and May**.

If a docent will not be available on a scheduled tour day, the School Tour Scheduler must be notified at least four weeks in advance. If a docent is not available after a tour has been assigned, that docent is responsible for obtaining a substitute and notifying the School Tour Scheduler and the Lead Docent. The School Tour Scheduler will not arrange for substitutes, except in cases of serious emergencies such as sudden illness, injury, or death of a family member.

On the day of the tour the docent should be at the Gallery in time to “walk the tour” and to meet the Lead Docent, at the tour start location, at least 15 minutes before the scheduled start of the tour. On tour days the docent’s schedule should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate groups that are delayed, per the Lead Docent Guidelines.

Docent Education

Docent Education reflects the Gallery’s high standards of excellence and presents current research and best practices in the fields of museum education, art education, art history, and other related disciplines.

Several formats will be used to advance docent learning, including: in-gallery walk-throughs, lectures, workshops that cover a variety of practical and educational topics, discussions and modeling of best practices in teaching and applied theory, and pre- and post-session readings. Most education sessions take place in the galleries, focus on the Gallery’s permanent collection, and require active participation.

Docents are required to attend all scheduled education sessions and committee meetings. Not more than three excused absences are permitted during the year. School programs staff must be notified in advance of planned absences, and docents who miss scheduled education sessions are responsible for:

- obtaining notes from fellow docents
- making use of digital audio files, if available
- obtaining training session handouts
- following tours based on the missed sessions, when applicable

Docents who miss more than three education sessions will be required to meet with a member of the staff to discuss their commitment to the program.

Evaluation also provides important opportunities for docent learning and includes: self-reflection, audience assessment, as well as staff observation and mentoring.

Lead Docent

The Lead Docent is responsible for organizing a tour, selecting the works of art to be discussed, constructing tour rotations, and communicating in a timely fashion with the teacher and other docents on the tour, as well as other Lead Docents, adult program docents, and staff who will be conducting simultaneous tours. (See Lead Docent Guidelines for details.)

Staff Responsibilities

The school tour and school docent programs are the responsibility of selected staff members in the Department of School, Family, and Adult Programs, part of the Division of Education. Staff members provide support to the single-visit school tour program by:

- Managing school tour and school docent programs at the National Gallery of Art.
- Supervising day-to-day operations of the school tour and school docent programs.
- Establishing and implementing the goals of the Gallery's Division of Education and the Department of School, Family, and Adult Programs.
- Researching, planning, developing, implementing, teaching, and evaluating the single-visit school tour program, in keeping with the Gallery's high standards of excellence and current research and best practices in the fields of museum education, art education, art history, and other related disciplines.
- Supporting the work of school docents by providing an effective educational program that balances content about our audience (students and teacher), art, and teaching.
- Participating in and guiding the evaluation process. Staff will regularly observe docents leading school tours and will discuss these observations with the docents. Any additional follow-up is individualized according to the needs of each docent. Staff also receives and reviews teacher-chaperone feedback forms and follows up as necessary. Staff also supports docent self-reflection and peer learning.
- Periodically evaluating, both formally and informally, the school tour and school docent programs.
- Working collaboratively with school docents, via the School Chairs and Vice-Chairs, and Volunteer Council to confer on policies and issues that directly impact the school tour and docent program.
- Maintaining clear, consistent, and frequent communication with school docents on matters that directly impact the planning and implementation of school tours; a variety of modes will be used including: email (most frequently used), postings on the docent website, telephone, in person, and mailed documents (infrequently used).
- Maintaining school docent service records and statistical information about school tours.