

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TOHONO CHUL'S VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Volunteers and Docents are at the heart of Tohono Chul, an essential part of day-to-day operations. Each year, our volunteers and docents contribute tens of thousands of hours of service to the gardens and its programs — is it any wonder we love our active and vibrant community of volunteers and docents!

Volunteers are active in all areas of Tohono Chul. Our Museum Shops and Greenhouse operations are open 7 days a week. On any given day, we may be staffing 20+ volunteer positions — not counting docent activities and special events. See the job descriptions under **Volunteer Positions** on page 2 for more information about the daily activities of volunteers.

In addition to the volunteer needs at Tohono Chul, our docent corps provides guests with guided tours and community outreach to schools and adult groups. To learn more go to the **Docent Program** on page 8.



What do we expect of prospective volunteers and docents?

- New volunteers are required to attend a *New Volunteer Orientation* within 3 months of beginning their volunteer service. Prospective docents must complete an 18-week training course offered on Wednesdays from 9am-4pm beginning the first Wednesday in October and continuing through the end of February.
- Volunteers and docents are expected to work 12 hours/month. Volunteers commit to remaining active for at least one year following training, while the active period for docents is two years following graduation (see the **Docent Program** for more information). During times of peak activity (February through April) and especially as we prepare for major events, volunteers who are able often contribute many more hours.

- Volunteers must be dependable, meeting scheduled commitments. Most opt for a regular weekly assignment; others elect to be substitutes, remaining “on-call” for openings that occur each month due to illness, vacations, etc. During the summer when visitation slows and many seasonal volunteers leave town, we may consolidate shifts and cut back on certain assignments. We are always willing to accommodate volunteer seasonal travel, vacation, and other scheduling needs.
- Be proactive! The Volunteer Coordinator is dealing with literally hundreds of volunteers and schedules that change daily. Check Volgistics (our web-based scheduling program) frequently for openings — if there are openings you can fill, jump in! If you receive an email asking for help with a project or special event and you are able to assist, jump in! Don’t wait for a personal call and plea for your time. Volunteers (and docents) who fail to log any hours for one year without an authorized leave of absence will be dropped from the volunteer program. Volunteer benefits are for active volunteers only.
- Volunteers and docents often make more of a lasting impression on guests than any other aspect of Tohono Chul. Volunteers should be enthusiastic, able to work with others, and willing to treat guests with courtesy and respect.
- Keep informed of the activities and events offered at Tohono Chul in order to provide guests with current information on ways to make the most of their visits, and to take advantage of them yourself! As a Tohono Chul Member (complimentary for active volunteers), you will receive the bi-weekly digital newsletter, the *Desert Corner Express*. As a volunteer, you will also receive weekly email updates of news of note from the Volunteer Services Coordinator.

Are there job descriptions for Tohono Chul Volunteer Positions?

General Information

Yes. Volunteers staff a variety of regular, daily operations at Tohono Chul, and each position is described below with sample job duties and expectations. Placement of any volunteer is based on

the availability of position openings and a person’s interests. Each person’s abilities will be matched to the needs of Tohono Chul and once accepted, volunteers are considered to be an integral part of Tohono

Chul and its mission. As a volunteer, you are encouraged to try different areas and find those that interest you. Volunteering

is a component of lifelong learning, an extension of your social network and a great way to contribute to your community!

Museum Shops

Tohono Chul has three Museum Shops – **La Galeria** in the Exhibit House, **La Fuente** next to the Garden Bistro and **La Entrada**, the garden shop associated with the Retail Greenhouse. The three shops each feature different merchandise from the focus on Native American crafts, Day of the Dead folk art and Southwest books in La Galeria, to foodstuffs, cookbooks and contemporary ceramics in La Fuente, and garden books and tools, hummingbird feeders and outdoor art at La Entrada.

Volunteers interact with the public in a retail setting, assisting staff with duties including Point of Sale (POS) cash registers, stocking, cleaning and displaying merchandise. Of course, the most important aspect of working in the Shops is customer service! Volunteers may also be needed for special craft sales.

The Shops are open daily from 9am to 5pm. Volunteer duty shifts are four hours (9am-1pm / 11am-3pm / 1pm-5pm) and two to three volunteers are scheduled each day in overlapping shifts. The dress code is business casual.

On-the-job training is provided by Retail staff. Volunteers in the Shops will be supervised by Retail staff, including the Director of Retail and the Assistant Manager.

Greenhouse

Tohono Chul has two separate greenhouse operations, retail and propagation, and both are great places to learn about native and arid-adapted plants. Volunteers working in the **La Entrada Retail Greenhouse** interact with the public in a retail setting where customer service is key. In addition to duties such as watering/fertilizing, stocking, labeling and arranging incoming plants, the number one priority of volunteers is to assist guests with plant



selection and advice. On-the-job training includes the operation of the Point of Sale (POS) cash register. Volunteers are also actively involved in Tohono Chul's bi-annual **Spring/Fall Plant Sales**.

The Retail Greenhouse is open daily from 9am to 5pm with the same four hours shifts (9am-1pm / 11am-3pm / 1-5pm) and several volunteers are scheduled each day. Volunteers are supervised by the Retail Greenhouse staff.

The **Propagation Greenhouse**, in contrast, is normally closed to the public. Volunteers here are engaged in propagating a variety of native plants otherwise not available in local nurseries. Plants raised are offered for sale in the Retail Greenhouse and during special sales. Duties include primarily watering/fertilizing, as well as planting/transplanting, pruning, and checking for pests and disease. In addition, volunteers are actively involved in the preparation and set-up for the **Spring/Fall Plant Sales**.

The Propagation Greenhouse is active daily. While three or more volunteers are scheduled each day, shifts are flexible and seasonal, many more hands are needed each summer to help with watering. On-the-job training and supervision is provided by the Propagation staff.

Grounds

For people who love to work with their hands, there are special volunteer project areas associated with the care and maintenance of Tohono Chul's living plant collections, gardens and public facilities. Some volunteers have adopted gardens as their calling while others help with building and maintenance projects. Especially helpful are volunteers with experience in desert gardening or particular skills such as carpentry or painting. Volunteer duty shifts are flexible and seasonal. Volunteers are supervised by the General Services/Maintenance staff.

Exhibit House

For those with an interest in art and meeting new people, volunteers in the Exhibit House staff the Welcome Desk at the entrance to the galleries. Volunteers welcome guests, answer questions about Tohono Chul and specifically the current art exhibits. The Welcome Desk is another area where customer service is vitally important. For many guests, their most lasting impression of Tohono Chul is of the volunteers who assist them – enthusiasm is infectious! Volunteers in the Exhibit House are expected to keep current with Tohono Chul activities and events and attend scheduled orientations on each new exhibit to be better able to share their knowledge about the artwork.

Open daily, shifts at the Welcome Desk are three hours (10am-1pm / 1pm-4pm) and two volunteers are scheduled each day. On-the-job-training and supervision are provided by the Exhibits staff. Dress is business casual.

Administration

Administrative volunteers perform a variety of clerical tasks in Tohono Chul's main office. Duties include telephones, mailings, event preparation, etc. While computer skills are not necessary, accuracy, attention to detail and good telephone skills are required. Supporting the Office staff, the primary responsibility is answering Tohono Chul's main telephone line, responding to general and specific questions about hours of operation, location and upcoming events, taking reservations for events and transferring calls to appropriate staff.

Open 8am-5pm Monday through Friday, duty shifts in Administration are flexible. On-the-job-training and supervision is provided by the Office staff.

Special Events and Special Assignments

General Information

Tohono Chul is a 501c (3) tax-exempt organization dependent on private support from memberships, donations, retail sales, admission and program fees. Special events are essential fundraising tools and a very important part of our outreach to the community. All are staffed by volunteers.

There are no special skills or qualifications needed to participate in most events. Upcoming events will be announced well in advance to remind volunteers to keep the dates open. As the event approaches, notices and emails are sent listing specific duties and times and inviting volunteers to respond. See below for more information on specific special events.



Volunteers have also been placed in various special assignments because of their previous job experience, training, expertise or interest, assignments that range from phenology studies of plants in the collections to public relations and fundraising.

Spring/Fall Plant Sales

When is it?

The Plant Sale is held twice each year, in March and October. Each sale begins on a Wednesday afternoon (open to Members only), and continues on Saturday and Sunday (open to the public).

What is it?

The Plant Sales are very important to our fundraising efforts and constitute more than half of the Retail Greenhouse budget each year. Held in the main parking lot off Paseo del Norte, these sales are one of the ways Tohono Chul works to promote the use of water-conserving native and arid-adapted plants in local landscapes. Attendance is free and open to the public.

What do volunteers do?

In the weeks leading up to the Plant Sale, volunteers are needed to help with preparation and set-up, unloading, labeling, displaying and caring for the plants. During the event, knowledgeable volunteers assist buyers with plant selection and advice. Additional volunteers greet customers, operate POS machines, help customers load plants, and guide foot traffic.

In addition, each summer we open the grounds to many of our local plant providers and allow them to sell directly to the public. This event is called Monsoon Madness and occurs in late July. Volunteers help with set-up, serve as cashiers and help customers load plants.

Bloom Night

When is it?

Held sometime between late May and late July, this is one of Tohono Chul's signature events and one with no set date. Bloom Night is called when staff judges the potential for the highest number of blooms is greatest.

What is it?

Tohono Chul is home to the largest collection of the Sonoran Desert's native night-blooming cereus cactus (*Peniocereus greggii*) in the world. Looking very much like a dead stick much of the year, once each summer buds appear on the cactus and on one special night open to reveal stunning, white flowers. Known as the "Queen of the Night", the cactus and its flowers are the subject of much history and folklore. This event is free to members and is attended by close to 2,000 visitors.

What do volunteers do?

In the weeks prior to a potential “Bloom Night”, volunteers help place solar-powered lights along the trails. Once the night is called, volunteers are positioned at various locations along the trails to guide and assist guests, sell cold water and ice cream, or staff the Retail Greenhouse and Exhibit House which will remain open for the evening.



Holiday Nights

When is it?

Fridays and Saturdays in December before Christmas; 5:30pm-8:30pm.

What is it?

Transformed by the soft glow of over 1 million Christmas lights in the trees, Tohono Chul celebrates the holidays with multiple music venues, seasonal refreshments, and a special show in the Exhibit House. The Museum Shops and Retail Greenhouse are also open for holiday shopping.

What do volunteers do?

In the weeks prior to the event, volunteers assist General Services staff in stringing lights in trees. During the event itself, volunteers may act as ticket sellers or greeters, assist with performers, act as food/beverage servers, direct traffic or staff the Museum Shops and Retail Greenhouse which will remain open for the evening.

Docent Program



General Information

The original Latin meaning of *docens* is a teacher or lecturer. German universities during the Middle Ages and Renaissance used the word to describe a tutor or don, one step below a professor. In 20th century America, the word *docent* came to mean a person who lectures or teaches in a museum or gallery setting — a unique volunteer with a special role to play.

Often the most lasting impression guests

take away is of the volunteer who assisted them. Here at Tohono Chul our volunteer docents are urban desert interpreters, responsible for representing us on- and off-site. A Tohono Chul docent is the person more than all others who embodies our philosophy for the public, so it is important that the docent understands this mission and, even more importantly, believes in it. An appreciation of the site and the Sonoran Desert underlies the docent's approach.

Environmental interpretation is . . . helping the visitor to feel something that the interpreter feels - a sensitivity to the beauty, complexity, variety and interrelatedness of the environment, a sense of wonder, a curiosity and a desire to know more.

— Harold Wallin, Chief Naturalist, Cleveland Metropolitan Park System

The general objectives of environmental interpretation are:

- to help people better understand and appreciate the natural environment;
- to help them form an awareness that they are co-citizens in an ecological community; and,
- to help them see that their decisions and actions have a definite impact on that community, in either a negative or positive way.

We believe the best way to achieve these objectives is through personal interaction, docents and guests engaged in conversation about not just the **WHAT**, but also the **HOW** and **WHY** of our desert ecosystem and the need to protect it.

In a setting such as Tohono Chul, the urban desert environment is easily accessible to the guest. All species of flora and fauna share similar basic habitat requirements — food, water, shelter and living space. Once these similarities are pointed out, the differences can be viewed as adaptations to a particular environment, the ways in which species learn to survive. In this way the loss of habitat can better be explained and understood. Plants and animals viewed relatively close-up in these beautiful surroundings help to develop the necessary sense of wonder at the variety and fragility of the desert and a greater awareness of our role in preserving and conserving it.

The docent training program offers special educational opportunities in the natural and cultural history of the Sonoran Desert. Docents must acquire a confident understanding of Tohono Chul and an ability to communicate their knowledge creatively. Docent candidates must also be dependable and enthusiastic, with good communication skills and a strong interest in the Southwest and its natural environment. They must be physically able to lead tours of the grounds and exhibits.

Docents are expected to (in addition to the requirements for all volunteers) . . .

- Successfully complete the 18-week docent training course (fee)
- Complete 16 hours of continuing education each year through attendance at scheduled Volunteer Meetings, Curator's Talks, Exhibit Orientations, and/or relevant lectures, classes, workshops or field trips
- Provide guests accurate information, treating them with courtesy and respect

What's in it for me?

Community Involvement

Volunteers at Tohono Chul comprise an active community with diverse interests, and joining this group is often the greatest benefit cited by volunteers. Volunteers and docents can experience the satisfaction inherent in public service, the reward of service to an organization dedicated to the preservation of a unique environmental setting. The fun and friends they make here keeps them coming back.

Personal Growth

Tohono Chul offers a chance to celebrate the Sonoran Desert, enriching daily life through a greater understanding and appreciation of the plants, wildlife, peoples and cultures of our region. Lifelong learning abounds with opportunities for participation in a wide variety of orientation/training programs, as well as Tohono Chul's public programs — lectures, classes, workshops and travel ed-ventures.

Membership, Awards and Other Incentives

A Volunteer's commitment in time and expertise does not go unrecognized, and there are certain perks to being a volunteer or docent at Tohono Chul. Volunteers enjoy a free individual membership at Tohono Chul as long as they remain active. This grants them free admission for themselves, membership pricing on classes, workshops and special events, and 10% discounts in the Museum Shops and Retail Greenhouse. Twice a year volunteers receive a 20% discount in the Museum Shops and Retail Greenhouse, 10% beyond the standard member discount of 10%. Volunteer hours also translate into free guest passes, free or discounted lectures and discounts on workshops and travel. Our annual Volunteer Appreciation Celebration celebrates the year's achievements and is another way in which we say, "Thank you!" We host two celebrations annually.

How do I apply?

Visit our website and fill out an online application at www.tohono-chul.org/support/volunteer or contact our Volunteer Services Coordinator, Kasey Fry at 742-6455 ext. 241 or email her at kfry@tohono-chul.org. For either the volunteer or docent program, you will be asked to complete an application and schedule an interview before placement.

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Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in.”

UNKNOWN