

Brookfield Zoo Volunteer Opinion Survey Design and Administration

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ADMINISTRATION

Brookfield Zoo's Docent Program, managed by the Education Department, was established in 1977. The docent corps numbers approximately 250. In recent years, several major programmatic changes had been made to the docent program, including the transition of paid staff reaching classes rather than docents, some tightening of volunteer policies and procedures, the merging of volunteers other than docents into the Education Department, the changing of volunteer name badges to indicate "volunteer" rather than docent on them, and the implementation of an earned membership program. In late 1998, the time seemed right to survey our docents to assess their satisfaction levels with various aspects of the zoo's Docent Program.

Volunteer management staff, drawing on previous experience in the human resources field, designed a survey instrument concentrated on several constructs: motivation, retention, recognition, cooperation, communications, staff relations, docent activities/ assignments, and docent evaluation. With the assistance of the zoo's Communications Research Department, the questions and rating system were finalized.

The Communications Research Department staff agreed to tabulate and analyze the results. A cover letter, survey and return postage-paid envelope were sent to all docents. The survey was returned directly to the Communications Research Department.

The survey received an astounding 76 percent response rate.

This procedure ensured confidentiality for the participants' answers.

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A final analytical survey report was prepared by Communications Research staff members Andrej A. Birjulin, Ph.D., Todd J. Gieseke, and Carol D. Saunders, Ph.D. The results of the survey showed us that, overall, the docents were highly satisfied with our Docent Program. Volunteer management staff held general meetings in March 2000 that were open to all docents, to explain all the results of the survey. We were able to implement some programmatic changes immediately, such as

assigning the docents to their favorite exhibits, and including more bio-facts in exhibit activities. In other cases, it was necessary to explain why certain tasks, such as teaching classes or holding a "pot-luck" volunteer picnic, were no longer feasible.

The docents appreciated our efforts to talk with them about the survey and actually implement some of their suggested changes. Our Docent Opinion Survey yielded valuable information that will serve us well in future strategic planning initiatives.

Since we had such a good response with our Docent Opinion Survey, we decided to use the same basic survey with all of our other volunteers. Knowing that our original survey was scientifically valid and reliable, we simply adapted some of the questions to reflect the operations of the other volunteer

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programs. Using the same cover letter with appropriate word changes, we sent out the opinion survey to 200 volunteers in June 2001. Again, our return rate was a very high 64 percent. However, at this time, Dr. Birjurlin had left the zoo and the Communications Research Department simply did not have the time to analyze this survey in detail. So we turned to one of our docents, Susan Walter, who has a background in management consulting. She tabulated the raw percentages for each question, and from these tabulations, we were quickly able to analyze patterns. The results of this survey also showed that, overall, our volunteers were highly satisfied with the volunteer program.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

1. If you do not have a communication research professional on staff, ask your Human Resources Department if any of their staff have expertise in organizational development and would be willing and able to assist you with this project. HR professionals very often design and administer employee opinion surveys. If not, find out if any of your volunteers or board members have expertise in designing and/or in analyzing surveys. Or ask them if they know anyone who does. Once you have your "pro bono" expert on board, involve them every step of the way.
2. Make the time to design the survey.
3. What do you want to know/measure?
4. Brainstorm questions individually, with staff who work with volunteers, with a volunteer focus group, with your board, with clients, etc.
5. Either individually or with a team (depending on your preferred style), do the following:
 - Review each question. Do you really need to know this information?
 - Choose questions for the survey.
 - Group the questions by interest area, e.g., motivation, recognition, training, "hot issues," etc.
 - Rewrite all questions so they are worded consistently
 - Write the survey draft
6. Let others review the survey—your manager, fellow staff, selected volunteers, etc.
7. Incorporate suggestions and rewrite another draft.
8. Let the people who reviewed the first draft also review this draft.
9. Repeat three previous steps until the survey is just right!
10. Write the final copy of the survey.
11. Proofread, proofread, proofread. Ensure the survey is visually pleasing, i.e., all the questions are formatted consistently. If your volunteer corps is older (over 40) use a font that everyone can easily read.
12. Have the survey professionally printed rather than run off the copy machine. There is probably a printer in your community willing to donate this in-kind service.
13. Decide who will see the surveys when they are returned. The fewer people, the better. People are more likely to be open with their opinions if they know their confidentiality is ensured.
14. Decide who will tabulate the results.
15. Write your cover letter with clear instructions on how the survey should be completed. Include a deadline date. Include a self-addressed, self-stamped envelope addressed to the person who will tabulate the results. Make sure the envelope is large enough to accommodate the survey.
16. The easiest way to analyze results is with raw percentages. The majority of us can easily see patterns and know when 90 percent of our volunteers like or dislike a certain thing.
17. Tabulate results and review answers.
18. Do not take any negative answers personally.
19. Ask yourself if you will make any changes to your volunteer program based on these results? If so, what will you change and how will you change them?
20. Hold a meeting with your volunteers to discuss results and changes.

Now you know, in a true sense, how satisfied your volunteers really are volunteering for your organization.

RESOURCES

- Diamond, J. (1999). *Practical evaluation guide: Tools for museums and other informal educational settings*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Patton, M.Q. (1997). *Utilization-focused evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Smith, M.J. (1988). *Contemporary communication research methods*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Sudman, S., & Bradburn, N.M. (1991). *Asking Questions: A practical guide to questionnaire design*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- American Evaluation Association —
www.eval.org
- Visitor Studies Association —
www.visitorstudies.org

2001 VOLUNTEER OPINION SURVEY

This survey will give us information about your thoughts and opinions on your participation as a Brookfield Zoo Volunteer. It will take you approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Please be sure to read each question and answer it honestly. Please feel free to write in any comments you have for each section as well.

Once the results of this survey are compiled, the Education Department will review the information and make appropriate changes where and when we can. The results of this survey will also help us determine how best to communicate future changes to the volunteer corps.

We sincerely appreciate your taking the time to complete the survey. **YOUR OPINION COUNTS!!**

SECTION I

Below are a number of reasons that some people gave for **ORIGINALLY BECOMING** a volunteer. Please rate the extent to which each reason **WAS** important to you by circling the number that best represents your response.

I **BECAME** a volunteer because:

	A Very Important Reason for Me			Not An Important Reason for Me	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I wanted a chance to be around animals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I had a passion for sharing with others the importance of conservation.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I wanted to meet new people/make new friends.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I wanted to spend time outdoors.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I believed in Brookfield Zoo's mission.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I wanted to volunteer close to home.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I needed to fill up my spare time.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I thought about switching careers to animal care/conservation.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I wanted to learn new things and develop professionally/personally.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I wanted to educate others about animals, their habits, and their habitats.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Other _____	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION II

Below are some reasons given for **REMAINING** in the Volunteer Program. Please rate the extent to which each reason is important to you **NOW** by circling the number that best represents your response.

I **REMAIN** a volunteer because:

	A Very Important Reason for Me			Not An Important Reason for Me	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I like being around the animals.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have a passion for sharing with others the importance of conservation.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I enjoy socializing with the friends I've made here and continue to make.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I like being outdoors.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I believe in Brookfield Zoo's mission.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I like volunteering close to home .	1	2	3	4	5
7. Volunteering here fills my spare time.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I plan to switch careers and need the experience I'm gaining here.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I continue to learn new things and develop professionally/personally.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I want to teach others about animals, their habits, and their habitats.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Other _____	1	2	3	4	5

Section III

Below are about the zoo's mission. For each statement, rate the extent to which you agree by circling the number that best represents your response.

I REMAIN a volunteer because:

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree	
	1	2	3	4	5	
1. I feel that I contribute to the zoo's mission.	1	2	3	4	5	
2. I'm not sure if I really understand the zoo's mission.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. I'm excited about Brookfield Zoo's transition to a conservation center.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. I'm not sure if I know what a conservation center is.	1	2	3	4	5	

Comments:

SECTION IV

Below are statements regarding relations between volunteers. For each statement, rate the extent to which you agree by circling the number that best represents your response.

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree	
	1	2	3	4	5	
1. I feel comfortable interacting with docents and with volunteers in other programs.	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Docents and volunteers cooperate with each other	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Docents and volunteers don't show up for their assignments	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Docents and Volunteers are "cliquish" with other friends and are not particularly friendly to new volunteers or volunteers from other programs.	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Docents and volunteers speak inappropriately about other docents and volunteers.	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Docents and volunteers speak inappropriately about zoo staff.	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Docents and volunteers speak inappropriately about overall zoo management.	1	2	3	4	5	
8. Docents and volunteers would rather socialize with each other instead of completing their assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	
9. Some docents and volunteers seem "burned out"; have an overall negative attitude; "whine" too often.	1	2	3	4	5	

Comments:

SECTION V

Below are a number of statements about communications. For each statement, please rate the extent to which you agree by circling the number that best represents your response.

	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	1	2	3	4	5	
1. I feel the 9:30 Meeting is the best way to communicate important information.	1	2	3	4	5	
2. I feel mailing information to my home is the best way to communicate important information.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. I feel putting information in my folder is the best way to communicate important information.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. I read the monthly Docent Liaison Board Meeting minutes posted on the bulletin board.	1	2	3	4	5	
5. When I miss a duty day, I read the 9:30 Meeting notes from previous weeks to catch up on information.	1	2	3	4	5	
6. I read everything on the bulletin boards in the Volunteer Office.	1	2	3	4	5	
7. I read The Bridge thoroughly every week.	1	2	3	4	5	
8. I read the volunteer newsletter, Zooscape News, thoroughly.	1	2	3	4	5	
9. I refer to my Volunteer Handbook when I have a question about policies or procedures.	1	2	3	4	5	

Comments:

SECTION VI

Below are several suggestions that may help improve interpersonal communications between volunteers and staff. For each statement, please rate the extent to which you agree circling the number that best represents your response.

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree
1. I feel a Volunteer Advisory Council Board that includes all volunteers, not just docents, should be established.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Education staff other than Regi, Dana, Linda, or Carol should conduct 9:30 Meetings on a more frequent basis.	1	2	3	4	5
3. More Education staff should work on the weekends.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Implement quarterly meetings with Keith Winsten, Curator of Education and/or other members of the Education Department.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Implement annual meeting with Dr. Rabb and zoo senior management staf.	1	2	3	4	5
6. There is sufficient contact between volunteer management staff (Regi, Linda, Carol) and volunteers.	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

SECTION VII

We would like to know which tasks and activities are your favorites. If a task or activity does not apply to you, simply leave the response blank.

Please rate the extent to which you agree with each statement by circling the number that best represents your response.

THE FIRST THREE QUESTIONS ARE FOR GUEST GUIDES ONLY.

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree
1. I really enjoy being stationed in the South Gazebo.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I really enjoy being stationed in the North Gazebo.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I really enjoy roaming through the zoo.	1	2	3	4	5

THE NEXT SIX QUESTIONS ARE FOR CHILDREN'S ZOO VOLUNTEERS ONLY.

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree
1. I really enjoy assisting in the Pet & Learn Circle.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I really enjoy handling animals for guest contact.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I really enjoy volunteering in the Walk-In Farmacyard.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I really enjoy presenting Animal Encounters talks.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I really enjoy narrating cow and goat-milking demonstrations.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I really enjoy volunteering during Animals in Actions shows.	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

THESE QUESTIONS ARE FOR ANYONE WHO VOLUNTEERS FOR SPECIAL EVENTS

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree
1. When I volunteer for a special event, I feel sufficiently oriented to my responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I really enjoy craft activities.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I really enjoy volunteering on National Pig Day.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I really enjoy volunteering for previews and events related to the opening of new exhibits.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I really enjoy volunteering for Breakfast with Bunny.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I really enjoy volunteering for Affie's Birthday.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I really enjoy volunteering for the Rhythm & Roots Festivals.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I really enjoy volunteering for Teddy Bear Picnic	1	2	3	4	5

9. I really enjoy volunteering for Fiesta Para Todos.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I really enjoy volunteering for Zoo Run Run.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I really enjoy volunteering for Boo! at the Zoo.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I really enjoy volunteering for Holiday Magic.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I really enjoy volunteering for Breakfast/Lunch with Santa during Holiday Magic.	1	2	3	4	5

THESE QUESTIONS ARE FOR ANYONE WHO VOLUNTEERS IN THE OFFICE

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree
1. I really enjoy volunteering in the offices.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I really enjoy affixing labels and stuffing envelopes.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I really enjoy doing data entry and computer work.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I really enjoy collating and putting materials together.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I really enjoy stuffing membership bags.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION VIII

Below are several statements related to administrative tasks we handle for you in the Volunteer Office. For each statement, please rate the extent to which you agree by circling the number that best represents your response. If a statement does not apply, leave it blank.

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree
1. My name and address changes are handled quickly.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My name and address changes are handled accurately.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My attendance/absence requests are handled accurately.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION IX

Below are a number of ways the zoo recognizes docents and volunteers, For each statement, please rate the extent to which you agree by circling the number that best represents your response.

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Strongly Disagree
1. The annual volunteer appreciation dinner is an excellent way to recognize us.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The annual volunteer picnic is an excellent way to recognize us.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The staff saying "thank you" is an excellent way to recognize us.	1	2	3	4	5
4. A thank-you note from staff is an excellent way to recognize us.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Gift shop discounts are an excellent way to recognize us.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Restaurant discounts are an excellent way to recognize us.	1	2	3	4	5
7. 10 cents refills on soft drinks/coffee are an excellent way to recognize us.		1	2	3	4 5
8. Receiving a T-shirt, water bottle, or other gift when we've worked a special event is an excellent way to recognize us.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The service award pins are an excellent way to recognize us.	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

SECTION XI

Below are several statements about your involvement in our Volunteer Program. For each statement, please rate the extent to which you agree with each belief by circling the number that best represents your response.

	Strongly Agree	2	Agree	4	Strongly Disagree
1. I am proud to say I volunteer at Brookfield Zoo.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I continue to have opportunities to grow personally and professionally.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I plan to remain in the Volunteer Program at least two more years.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I'm thinking about leaving the Volunteer Program within the next two years.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I'm definitely leaving the Volunteer Program within the next two years.	1	2	3	4	5

NOW, HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO LET US KNOW WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND. USE THIS PAGE FOR ANY OTHER THOUGHTS, COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, OR SUGGESTIONS.

Leave one full blank page here

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

For each question, please check the answer that best applies to you. Thanks!

1. Are you a weekday or weekend volunteer?

- weekend
- weekday
- both weekend and weekday

2. How long have you been a volunteer?

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 15-20 years
- 20+ years

3. What is your age bracket?

- 21-30 years old
- 31-40 years old
- 41-50 years old
- 51-60 years old
- 61-70 years old
- 71+ years old

4. I consider my racial group to be:

- African-American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Multi-racial
- Other

5. How do you usually get to the zoo?

- I drive alone
- I carpool with other volunteers/staff
- I walk
- I ride my bike
- I use public transportation

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY. PLEASE RETURN IT IN THE ENCLOSED SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE NO LATER THAN FEBRUARY 15, 2001.

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