

BAYOU BEND DOCENT ORGANIZATION PROVISIONAL DOCENT INFORMATION AND APPLICATION



Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens is home to the early American decorative arts and paintings collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. More than 2,500 objects are on view in 28 room settings and galleries. The objects, made or used in America between 1620 and 1876, include furniture, paintings, prints, metals, ceramics, textiles, glass, and sculpture.

From the time Ima Hogg acquired her first piece of American furniture in 1920, she had what she later described as “an unaccountable compulsion to make an American collection for some Texas museum.” In 1957, Miss Hogg gave Bayou Bend and her collection to the Museum. She spent the following nine years transforming Bayou Bend from a private residence to a public museum, creating room settings that suggest early American interiors from particular periods.



In 1961, Ima Hogg personally invited the first group of docents to be trained as interpreters of the collection. That first provisional class was the beginning of what is now known as the Bayou Bend Docent Organization (BBDO), which today numbers about 200 active and 300 sustaining members. More than 1,000 women and men have served as docents at Bayou Bend, which has been open to the public for more than 60 years and is recognized locally and nationally as a cultural treasure.



BAYOU BEND DOCENT ORGANIZATION



What do Bayou Bend docents do?

Docents share the Bayou Bend historic house and collection with visitors. Docents make a commitment to give guided tours to the public on a weekly basis. In the provisional class they learn how to interpret Bayou Bend's collection of objects made or used in America between 1620 and 1876, and about the historic house and the history of the Hogg Family.

What are Bayou Bend docents like?

- **Bayou Bend docents are all kinds of people.** Docents range in age from their 20s to their 90s, speak many different languages, and come from diverse backgrounds.
- **Bayou Bend docents like to challenge themselves.** The provisional class is very comprehensive and offers a unique opportunity to learn object-based American art, history, and tour techniques. After graduating from the initial class, docents participate in continuing education organized by both Museum staff and fellow docents.

- **Bayou Bend docents enjoy interacting with all kinds of people.** Although guided tours for the general public are the heart of the docent program, docents also participate in school tours, tours for special groups, and major events like Azalea Trail and Fourth of July, which bring thousands of people to Bayou Bend. A Bayou Bend docent might share the collection with anyone from a museum curator to a family bringing their children for their very first museum experience!

- **Bayou Bend docents have a strong sense of responsibility.** Docents are entrusted with responsibility for:
 - the collection—to protect unique and delicate objects in an unusual setting.
 - Museum visitors—to provide a thoughtful, interactive, knowledgeable tour experience.
 - each other—whether as docent officers coordinating tour schedules, volunteers planning trips, members of a refreshment committee, or docents simply offering to trade tour times, docents support each other and the activities of the Bayou Bend Docent Organization.
 - themselves—for promptness, managing their own schedules and ongoing study, and adhering to the structures and policies governing the Museum and the docent organization.

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A Bayou Bend docent serves as:

- **an interpreter**, sharing information about the collection with guests, answering questions, and providing a personal, visitor-centered tour.
- **a host**, continuing Miss Hogg's legacy of hospitality at Bayou Bend.
- **an additional layer of security**, ensuring that the collection is safe during their tours.
- **a public representative**, serving as Bayou Bend's link to the public, knowing that the docent interaction will be the impression of Bayou Bend and the Museum that guests will remember after their visit.

Docents are expected to:

- be responsible for a weekly tour, on the same morning or afternoon. Specific responsibilities vary throughout the year, including school tours and varied tour formats. Four separate month-long breaks are built into each docent's schedule.
- attend monthly docent meetings from September through May.
- stay up-to-date on collection information, touring procedures, and interpretive techniques for Bayou Bend's unscripted tours.
- always arrive 15 minutes ahead of scheduled tour time.
- make a three-year commitment to the BBDO following course completion: April 2025–April 2028.



Docents have the opportunity to:

- serve in leadership roles with the Bayou Bend Docent Organization after the first "provisional" year of touring.
- do research on the Bayou Bend Collection or related topics.
- give presentations to the public as a member of the Bayou Bend Speakers Bureau.
- volunteer for special events, programs, and committees sharing Bayou Bend's collection in new ways.

The benefits of being a docent at Bayou Bend include:

- eligibility for biannual docent trips to museums, private collections, and historic sites across the United States.
- discounts in the Shop at Bayou Bend and the MFA Shop and on classes at the Glassell School of Art.
- opportunities to participate in exclusive Museum events and continuing education programs.

THE PROVISIONAL DOCENT COURSE

What will I learn in the Bayou Bend Provisional Docent Course?

Provisionals study history, material culture (the study of history through objects), art history, and interpretive skills.

How much do I need to know about history, antiques, or teaching before I start the class?

Nothing! The class covers all the essential knowledge and skills to become a Bayou Bend docent. Past provisionals have included nurses, teachers, lawyers, interior decorators, businesspeople, scientists, students, and community volunteers. Anyone who is interested in the subject material and willing to do the work associated with the class is welcome to apply for the Bayou Bend docent program. Reading materials and homework expectations are at the college level.

Who will my instructors be?

The class is led by Bayou Bend's head of education and docent program manager. Many guest speakers, including museum curators, docent experts, and outside specialists, contribute to class instruction. Experienced docents participate in class as the provisional chair and mentors.

What will I do in and out of class?

During class, provisionals participate in lectures, interactive class discussions, garden and collection tours, special opportunities to study the collection with curators and experts, practice tours, and skill-building exercises. Provisionals also follow and participate in tours for the public, practice with mentor docents and peers, and complete reading assignments and written homework. Provisionals usually find that they need to allow for approximately 5–6 hours a week to complete work outside of class.

Important Dates

- An information session will be held on Tuesday, May 21, 2024, 1:30–2:30 p.m. in the Lora Jean Kilroy Visitor and Education Center at 6003 Memorial Drive. Attendance is strongly encouraged.
- Applications are due on Monday, June 10, 2024.
- Class meets from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Mondays, beginning in September. There will be 9 classes in the fall, a 6–7 week break for the holidays, and 11 classes ending in March.

Requirements for Class Completion

- Following the application process, all provisional class members must complete a criminal background check, per Museum policy. This will require release of some personal information, which will be kept confidential.
- Attendance at all class sessions is highly encouraged. Excluding illness or emergency, absences should be discussed with staff in advance. If a provisional misses more than two class sessions, it may be difficult to successfully complete the course.
- Provisional class members must satisfactorily conduct a test tour with the head of education in April 2025. At that time, interpretive skills and collection knowledge will be evaluated and discussed. The evaluation sheet for this tour will be shared with participants the first week of class.
- Provisionals complete a special project focusing on collection objects, artists, Hogg family history, etc. The Kitty King Powell Library and its staff offer an excellent source of reference material and support for these projects. Specifics will be shared during the early weeks of class. This project is due by September 2025.

BAYOU BEND PROSPECTIVE DOCENT INFORMATION SESSION



Tuesday, May 21, 1:30–2:30 p.m.

If you are interested in learning about the opportunities and responsibilities of the Bayou Bend Docent Organization, please join us! Our information session will give prospective applicants a chance to discover more about the Bayou Bend Docent Organization, the provisional docent course, and the commitments and benefits of this unique volunteer position. Join us for a brief program with docents and staff.

**R.S.V.P. (*acceptances only*)
by Monday, May 20, 2024, for the information session**

For reservations or for more information, please contact bbdocents@mfa.org.



BAYOU BEND DOCENT ORGANIZATION

PROVISIONAL DOCENT INFORMATION AND APPLICATION

Thank you for your interest in the Bayou Bend Docent Organization (BBDO). In order for your application to be considered for the 2025 provisional docent class, please return your completed application and three letters of recommendation by Monday, June 10, 2024. A PDF (digital file) of this application can be downloaded at mfah.org/bbdocents.

Applicant Information

Prefix	Name	Suffix
Address		
City	State	Zip
Home Phone	Cell Phone	Office Phone
Email		
Spouse's Prefix and Name (if applicable)		

References

Please request three references from employers, volunteer organization leaders, or close friends who can speak to your character, personality, and ability to successfully complete the provisional course and serve as a docent at Bayou Bend. Please do not submit reference letters from family members. These letters may be emailed to bbdocents@mfah.org.

Name	Email	Phone
Name	Email	Phone
Name	Email	Phone

Education

Name of School	Degree	Major	Year
Name of School	Degree	Major	Year
Name of School	Degree	Major	Year
Name of School	Degree	Major	Year

Volunteer Experience

Name of Organization	City/State	Position/Activities	Dates
Name of Organization	City/State	Position/Activities	Dates
Name of Organization	City/State	Position/Activities	Dates
Name of Organization	City/State	Position/Activities	Dates
Name of Organization	City/State	Position/Activities	Dates

Professional Experience

Employer	City/State	Position	Dates
Employer	City/State	Position	Dates
Employer	City/State	Position	Dates
Employer	City/State	Position	Dates

Do you speak any languages other than English fluently enough to give a tour?

Questionnaire

When did you most recently visit Bayou Bend? Applicants are required to have taken at least one docent-guided tour within the past year.

How did you learn about the Bayou Bend Docent Organization? What is the primary reason that you wish to apply to the training program?

Tell us about any experience you have with teaching or public speaking.

Describe a specific experience that you had in a museum that was particularly meaningful and memorable.

What are some of your hobbies or personal interests?

Tell us about a book you read recently that you couldn't put down.

Please return the completed application via email (preferred) or mail by Monday, June 10, 2024, to:

Docent Program Manager
Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens
P. O. Box 6826, Houston, TX 77265-6826
bbdocents@mfa.org

Please note: Letters of reference should be emailed or mailed directly to the above address.