

Dear Guides and Docents,

It has been a year like no other. In the midst of a global pandemic, we made a successful transition to giving virtual tours, and many of you have joined us in that effort. We are grateful for your hard work in realizing this goal and also respect the decision others made in not facilitating virtual tours.

During the past 12 months, the Learning Innovation staff has spent time reflecting on Mia's mission and planning for the future. The museum field is changing, as our communities and country strive to achieve goals of diversity, equity, accessibility, inclusion, and belonging (DEAIB) in all our practices. In order to be relevant and vital to our diverse audiences now and in the years to come, we must foster an inclusive culture, promote equity, and recognize our surrounding communities' assets, needs, and interests. As museum educators, we are committed to helping our tour guides develop and build necessary touring skill sets that incorporate greater cultural fluency and responsiveness using an anti-racist lens. We acknowledge that we have done a lot of DEAIB work together, and we are continuing on that path.

As a result of these considerations, we are excited to announce program changes that we will begin to implement this summer and fall. These changes include combining the Art Adventure, Collection in Focus, and Docent programs into one program, giving the group the name Mia Guides.

The Mia Guides program is designed to engage our audiences in the most impactful ways through two areas of focus: 1) Pre-K-12 School and 2) Adult/University/Multigenerational. These categories address our greatest volunteer need for school tour guides while also acknowledging the importance of serving our adult audiences. We know that your passions and interests drive your tours. We want you to tour with the group you prefer and will ask you to select your primary audience as students or adults. On Monday, May 24, you'll be sent a Google Form survey via email to make that choice. We will begin a training program for working with these audiences in new ways this fall.

We see many opportunities for this merged group to meet the needs we have identified as essential to the success of Mia and to our programs. This memo and attached FAQs mark the beginning of a process that will continue to develop and grow over the next several months and years with your support and participation.

We met today with our three program councils (Docents, Art Adventure Guides, and Collection-in Focus Guides) and are now sending this communication to all docents and guides

in order to answer questions that we anticipate. We have scheduled information sessions for each program to further address questions that are not covered here.

Why we are changing our program and what we hope to accomplish

Mia's strategic plan identifies us as an audience-aligned institution whose mission is to enrich the community and make our institution and collections accessible to all. (See [Mia's DEAIB policy](#).)

We are committed to creating a learner-centered program that reflects our priorities for school and adult tour audiences in the following ways:

- Adult visitors and school children “see themselves” at the museum in both the works viewed and guides presenting them.
- Topics for school tours are age-appropriate, relevant and meaningful to students to foster 21st century learning skills and student agency. To that end, we are working with teachers to develop new tour topics that meet the needs of their students.
- Tours and gallery experiences for adult visitors are topical, relevant, and meaningful, and tie works of art to current conversations of importance and interest.
- Guides follow best practices for facilitating tours and gallery experiences.
- Meaningful activities are incorporated into tours.

How we will implement program changes

Our training program will focus on best practices according to age groups, incorporating Mia's DEAIB values. One of our major goals is to dismantle the hierarchy within our programs and make volunteer opportunities more equitable and accessible to more people. We will develop shorter, sequential training modules that will open up our program to a more diverse range of potential volunteer guides.

We acknowledge this change may result in volunteers feeling a loss of identity with regard to their respective programs. And, we see the potential for the many gains and positives this new structure offers, such as:

- growth in touring skill sets, where facilitation skills are key.
- participation in a collaborative process: we will build our new program together.
- creation of a volunteer group that values all experiences equally, built on respect and understanding of our different lived experiences.
- learning and answering the needs of Mia's surrounding community and our diverse school audiences.

This change is part of a long-term vision. We are developing a sustainable tour program for the future. Our training will undergo structural changes that we will outline more fully in the coming months. We know you'll have further questions. We invite you to sign up to attend one of the following open house conversations. Please click on the link to register and receive the Zoom link for the session of your choice.

Art Adventure

- AAG Session 1: [Monday, May 17, 3 to 4 PM](#)
- AAG Session 2: [Thursday, May 20, 11 AM to 12 PM](#)

Collection in Focus

- CIF Session 1: [Tuesday, May 18, 12 to 1 PM](#)
- CIF Session 2: [Wednesday, May 19, 5 to 6 PM](#)

Docent

- Docent Session 1: [Wednesday, May 19, 11 AM to 12 PM](#)
- Docent Session 2: [Thursday, May 20, 1:30 to 2:30 PM](#)

If you are unable to attend an open house session, here is [a link to a google form](#) where you may ask any questions not covered in the attached FAQ document. Please use the form; do not respond to this email. We will also record all the sessions and make them available.

We appreciate all the years of service you have given to the museum and look forward to a new chapter working together to create the best tour experiences possible for our visitors. We ask you to join us in this journey toward a more diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive museum.

Sincerely,

Your IPE and STL staff