

# VOLUNTEER MANUAL 2022



## BACK TO THE SEA

*The Back to the Sea Society is a non-profit dedicated to sparking curiosity of local marine life off the coast of Nova Scotia and to foster a desire to protect our ocean.*

## **Back to the Sea Society**

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## **Preface**

This Handbook clearly details the policies and procedures for The Back to the Sea Society volunteers. It is intended to be an informative guide that will acquaint you with the benefits and responsibilities of becoming a volunteer. It will also serve as an introduction to the exhibits, animals and conservation efforts of the Touch Tank Hut.

This Handbook is intended as the foundation of information and learning as you begin your volunteer experience here and a resource you can add and refer to over time. The Touch Tank Hut exhibits, programs, research and conservation efforts continue to evolve with our increasing knowledge of the animals and their environments. Therefore, this Handbook is a living document and may require updates.

Visit <http://www.backtothesea.org> for the most updated animal, facility and program information.

## **Welcome**

Dear Back to the Sea Society volunteers,

Welcome to the Back to the Sea Society family! I want to reiterate how much we appreciate your time and effort; you are truly valued. You are now part of an amazing team of staff, students, a Volunteer Board of Directors, and other volunteers all working together to make this the best Touch Tank Hut possible.

You will participate in all aspects of our work and public interpretation as we endeavour to provide guests and school groups with a more personal, interactive, and intimate learning experience. You will be critical to providing the best care for our animals by assisting the staff and executive director. As we get off the ground, we are always looking for individuals to assist with all aspects of the building, renovations, promotion, and events that will help us create a fantastic product and raving fans.

So, pat yourself on the back, or come see me and let me do it. We could NOT do this without you.

Best fishes,

**Shwayam Vinayak**

Volunteer Coordinator

Back to the Sea Society

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# **VOLUNTEER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

## **YOUR RIGHTS**

- Investigate the volunteer opportunities at the Touch Tank Hut by coming to Orientation or by contacting the Executive Director
- Be assigned to a meaningful task
- Receive training appropriate to the service
- Be involved in evaluating the program in which you work
- Be recognized for your good work
- Be treated with respect as a valuable member of the Touch Tank Hut team of educators and/or service specialists
- Participate in continuing education opportunities pertaining to Touch Tank Hut issues
- Be adequately insured against injury or liability while volunteering
- Receive a written job description
- Receive a letter of hours completion

## **YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES**

### Complete all forms

- Vulnerable sector check
  - We will require all volunteers to complete a volunteer vulnerable sector check
    - <http://www.backcheck.net/halifax/>
    - When completed send the receipt to the volunteer coordinator at [backtotheseavolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:backtotheseavolunteers@gmail.com)
    - You will be reimbursed when you reach your commitment requirement
  - Photo Release Form
  - Confidentiality Agreement
  - Personal Information Form

### Preparation:

- Attend the training and continuing education opportunities for your position ●
- Understand the time requirements and duties of an assignment before committing ●
- Be professional during your shift
- Arrive on time and leave at the end of your shift

### Notification:

- Inform the Volunteer Coordinator (in advance) if you cannot attend your shift
- Call us at (902) 817-2007 if you are going to be late for a shift
- Inform the Volunteer Coordinator if there is any change to your contact information or your volunteer commitment

### Professionalism:

- Show consideration and respect to other volunteers, staff and guests
- Perform your duties to the best of your abilities
- Always remain with your group and follow assigned duties
- Ask questions when you are not sure of anything
- Handle the Back to the Sea Society property with the utmost care (this includes: props, books, AV equipment, etc)
- Report any incidents, problems or confrontations involving the public to the Volunteer Coordinator so that an appropriate follow-up can be made
- Seek, accept, and act on performance feedback
- Serve as a goodwill ambassador of the Back to the Sea Society
- Keep track of your volunteer hours
- Smile and have fun!

## **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM POLICES & PROCEDURES**

### **COMMITMENT**

The Back to the Sea Society requires a minimum of 10 hours of work to qualify as a ‘Super Volunteer’! This makes you eligible to receive a letter or recommendation, gift store discount (10%), two adult season passes to the touch tank and reimbursement for the vulnerable sector check.

### **APPEARANCE**

Each volunteer acts as an ambassador for the Back to the Sea Society. Your appearance contributes to the overall impression our visitors receive.

All volunteers are required to wear a name tag, we will have some generic ones that say “volunteer” but if you wish to have a personalized one feel free to let us know.

You are also encouraged to purchase a Touch Tank Hut t-shirt to wear during shifts, but it is not required.

Please carefully review our guidelines for suitable attire. We request that you dress conservatively and practice good hygiene and personal grooming. If you have any questions about our policies or a piece of attire, please speak with the Volunteer Coordinator.

### Suitable attire:

- Clean clothing in good repair.
- Wear pants, jeans, capris, of appropriate length.
- Comfortable shoes with soles that grip.

### Unsuitable attire:

- Clothes that are dirty, smelly, or ripped
- Clothing with large logos or offensive words/ image
- Clothing which promotes other aquariums.
- Shorts/ skirts which are an inappropriate length.
- Please note that specific programs and volunteer roles may have additional uniform requirements – check with the Volunteer Coordinator.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Be present and punctual. This helps us provide the best possible service and high-quality experience. Please check your personal calendars before committing yourself to a program.

### Tardiness:

Being late is an inconvenience to the staff, other volunteers and program participants. You will be asked to discuss this with the Volunteer Coordinator or ED if you are late repeatedly.

### No-show:

No shows and excessive tardiness indicate you are not committed to this program. This may result in termination from a volunteer role and/ or the volunteer program.

### Leaving:

Please ensure that you leave your shift in a punctual manner, we want the volunteer following you feel included as well. You are free to hang around the hut but please give in our ID and come to the front of the tank.

## **BUILDING ACCESS**

The building is locked after business hours unless a special event is taking place. After-hours access must be arranged with the Volunteer Coordinator.

## **CHILDREN**

All volunteers must protect the children in their care from physical and/or sexual abuse or harm. If you become aware of questionable behaviour on the part of staff, volunteers or visitors, bring it to the attention of the Volunteer Coordinator or another staff person immediately.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Volunteers are expected to use discretion in discussing all matters, both professional and personal, related to the Touch Tank Hut. By signing your registration form you have agreed to

maintain and respect organizational confidentiality. If you are asked by a staff member to keep specific information confidential you are obliged to do so. These circumstances do not arise frequently but we need to ensure that volunteers maintain organization confidentiality when and if required.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Volunteers are not permitted to conduct independent business on Touch Tank Hut premises, including the solicitation of staff or volunteers, without the direct permission of the Executive Director. Any unethical or illegal conduct will be reported to management and the volunteer may be asked to step down.

## DATING

Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, make friends and, in some cases, meet someone you would like to become romantically involved with. Volunteers are permitted to date people that they meet during the course of their volunteer experience provided that person is not their direct supervisor (either a staff member or volunteer leader).

We follow the “ask once” approach to dating - if you ask someone out on a date once and they say ‘no’ then you must accept that and not ask again. Failure to adhere to this policy will be considered harassment and result in disciplinary action.

## GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

If you have concerns about procedures, proper protocol, your position as a volunteer or matters affecting your role at the Touch Tank Hut, please bring them to the attention of your immediate supervisor, usually the Volunteer Coordinator. If you are unable to resolve the problem together, then contact the Executive Director.

Every effort will be made at all levels to investigate your concerns and settle your problem on a fair and equitable basis. The Back to the Sea Society Executive Director is available to assist you if matters are not resolved to your satisfaction by the Volunteer Coordinator.

## HARASSMENT

Volunteers have the right to a working environment free of any conduct that is considered harassing, abusive, humiliating, disorderly or disruptive. If you are being harassed in any way, report the problem to the Volunteer Coordinator immediately.

The term “harassment” refers to any unwelcome conduct either explicit or implicit, from staff or non-staff that by its nature has the effect of interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

## **HOURS KEEPING**

Your volunteer hours are recorded for insurance coverage purposes, for our Annual Report statistics and so the Back to the Sea Society can acknowledge your contribution. The figures are also necessary when calculating donated equity and applying for grants.

It is the responsibility of each volunteer to log your hours. If you are at the Touch Tank Hut for personal or professional development purposes, please record these hours as well.

## **INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT**

Volunteers are committed to a high standard of excellence. Achieving this requires personal responsibility, a keen sense of professionalism, integrity, diplomacy and good judgment in working with staff and visitors.

In the event that a volunteer is no longer able to safely and accurately carry out their duties as required due to age, physical or mental issues or other factors, the Executive Director will become involved to determine best steps for the individual and the organization. Actions may include: re-supervising, reassignment of duties, re-training, retirement or other appropriate actions in discussion with the volunteer.

In the event that a volunteer breaches our policies and procedures, fails to meet the performance expectations for their role, or has not acted in the best interests of the Back to the Sea Society (and consequently jeopardized the reputation of the Back to the Sea Society and its Volunteer Program), the following progressive steps can be taken to ensure fair and accurate assessment and treatment of the problem:

1. Verbal discussion with the volunteer involved
2. Written report of the problem may be circulated to the volunteer, and the Volunteer Coordinator. Contracts of commitment may be created and signed.
3. Probation, suspension and termination are all possible consequences of inappropriate actions or conduct

## **LOST AND FOUND**

Report and turn in all lost and found objects to a staff member.



## **MEDIA**

You will be asked to fill out a media release form, please ensure this is submitted to the volunteer coordinator before your first shift.

Any activity involving the media should be referred to the Executive Director or Volunteer Coordinator. Volunteers should not engage in any media interviews without prior approval of the Executive Director.

If you are approached by media to answer a question or make a comment, please avoid saying “no comment”. Instead, say “I’d be happy to speak with you after you’ve spoken to someone from our communications team.”

If you are willing to speak with the media, we will find out the questions and help prepare you for your interview.

## **PETS**

To protect the health of the Touch Tank Hut’s live collection, no animals are permitted in the premises, except those brought to the Touch Tank Hut by the staff. This includes animals which visitors have collected and wish to add to our tanks. These animals cannot be brought in because we do not want to risk the health of our animals through disease or pollution and we do not have a permit to hold them.

An exception is made for assistance animals for people with disabilities. If you see an animal, and are in doubt whether it is a service animal, ask a staff member

## **SMOKING**

No smoking within 3-meters of the Hut and Alderney Landing.

## **THEFT, ROBBERY AND VANDALISM**

Please report any theft, robbery or vandalism to the Executive Director or Volunteer Coordinator. Also, call 911, if appropriate and inform a staff member of the incident as soon as possible.

# Emergency Procedures

## FIRE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

During an emergency such as a fire or other natural disaster employees and guests may have to evacuate the building. When you are required to evacuate, follow this procedure. To help ensure you are prepared, know your emergency exit and be aware of your surroundings.

### Evacuate yourself

- Watch for falling debris
- Assemble in the parking lot.
- Keep the road clear for emergency vehicles
- Check in with your supervisor, so they know that you are safe
- Do not return to the building and wait for the authorities to give instructions

### Evaluate others

- Assist with visitor evacuation if possible.
- Evacuate everyone via the exit.
- For group tours and programs:
  - Lead your group to the exit, counting heads as you go if possible. Each group leader should know how many people are in his/her group.
  - Use a calm voice to give instructions to the group.

### If you see a fire or smoke:

- Walk to the exit.
- Leave the building with your group (if you have one)
- Assemble in the parking lot and facilitate the head count

### If you are trapped

- Do not panic
- Call 911
- Stay low if there is a fire: close the door and seal off any cracks around it
- If your clothes catch fire – STOP, DROP and ROLL

### If anyone is missing from the headcount:

- DO NOT enter the building
- Inform a staff member or emergency personnel
- Only return to the building once the alarm has stopped and the authorities have given the all clear

## POWER OUTAGE

Follow the evacuation policy described above as well as implementing the power outage specific actions which can be found in the hut in our safety clip board by the window.

## FIRST AID OR SECURITY SITUATION

In any emergency first aid or security situation, go directly to a staff member. Broken bones or life threatening situations eg. poison, diving incident, unconscious etc., call 911 immediately. Please do not administer first aid if you are not trained, simply stay with the person and help keep them comfortable and calm.

## LOST CHILDREN

If you are approached by a child or parent or guardian who has lost a child or parent:

1. Have the parent/child stay by the front door. Stay with them.
2. Get a description of the parent/child while at the door.
3. Ask staff/volunteers to do a sweep both outside and inside.
4. If child is not found within 5 minutes, call 911.

## VOLUNTEER BENEFITS

### CONSERVATION

Be an active participant in conservation and participate in educational workshops on conservation efforts. Take the time to be proactive in acquiring information and knowledge on conservation actions and efforts. Participate in conservation programs and actions led by Touch Tank Hut staff and volunteers.

### CONTINUING EDUCATION

Throughout the year, events are planned to enhance the knowledge base of active volunteers, provide new skills and to offer personal enrichment. Opportunities are well advertised and volunteers are able to sign up for these events. Costs, if any, are kept to a minimum. Ideas for future continuing education opportunities are always welcome.

## RECOGNITION

Volunteers are recognized throughout the year informally in different ways! Formal recognition takes place at our annual volunteer recognition party at the end of the season.

## DISCOUNTS

10% discount on all gift shop items after minimum commitment hours have been completed (10 hours).

## REFERENCE LETTERS

To receive a letter of reference please give us at least seven days' notice. Additionally, if you would like to use a staff member as a reference, please ask their permission and willingness to do so before listing them as a reference.

## TRAINING

Volunteers receive training before beginning service. This provides you with background knowledge about aquatic biology, the Back to the Sea philosophy, structure, policy, staff, and our role as a world leader in environmental education and marine research. Training provides you with the information you need to be effective ambassadors in the building and in the community.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### INSURANCE

All active volunteers must carry their own personal medical insurance coverage, i.e. Medicare or appropriate medical insurance if you are not a Canadian citizen.

### STORAGE

Please bring just what you need to the Touch Tank Hut as storage is limited, so please be

considerate to all those working. There is space in the outside storage box as well as in the outside  
The Back to the Sea Society is not responsible for any articles lost or stolen from the property.

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## **PERSONAL PHONE CALLS**

Please take calls on your break and do not carry your cell phone on the floor. Please remember to turn ringers off when working in the Hut.

## **NEWSLETTER AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Sign up for our online newsletter, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter and Instagram (@Backtothesea\_ns). Stay informed, help us spread the word and help us think of more marine puns to use!

Special notices for volunteer will be sent to you directly by email. We will keep you informed of social events, policy reminders, key Touch Tank Hut info, animal and people updates, internal job postings, volunteer opportunities and other items considered of interest to our volunteers.

## **HOURS OF OPERATION**

The Back to the Sea Society Touch Tank hut is open seasonally from June - September. Dates will change annually.

The hours of the hut will be changed throughout the summer months so please reference the facebook page or the website for this information.

## **ANIMALS**

The Touch Tank Hut is a short term home for local specimens collected around the HRM. Collections sites will depend on specimen abundance, weather, and access. The most common dive site is in Eastern Passage, at Sandy Cove.

You will find everything that you need to know about our animals in our animals manual so please utilize it and feel free to use it in the Hut if you need to.

## **EXHIBITS**

### **TANKS**

The Back to the Sea Society Touch Tank Hut will have 2 8-foot tanks within the hut. All tanks are made of Acrylic which is best for cold water due to acrylic's good insulating

properties. Acrylic has virtually the same density as water so there is no magnification of the creatures in the habitat. Acrylic does scratch more easily than glass so please be careful when cleaning.

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## **WATER**

Seawater at the Mini Aquarium is from the bottom of the Bedford Basin which we then transport to our location in a large holding tank. We have a system in which the water is pumped in and drains out with both filtration or chilling. All fresh water comes from the City's water system which we collect from Alderney Landing.

## **OUR STAFF**

Over the summer season, the Back to the Sea Society has three seasonal staff members. Summer staff positions include a Volunteer Coordinator, Animal Care Coordinator, and the communications coordinator. The Executive Director position is year round.

## **ALDERNEY LANDING**

The Touch Tank Hut is located right in the heart of Downtown Dartmouth at Alderney Landing. Alderney Landing is a not for profit organization that promotes community and cultural programming and is recognized as a unique destination and venue for business, arts and entertainment in Nova Scotia. Alderney Landing is a theatre, library, art gallery, farmers markets, restaurants both large and small as well as their newest addition, US!

Alderney Landing exists to enhance the cultural life of the region and we are very excited to be a part of it!

## **OUR APPROACH**

This section addresses how we serve guests of the Aquarium, how we deal with issues that arise in the course of our work, how we view animal collection and how we interact with each other. Defining our approach helps staff and volunteers to work as a cohesive team with consistent goals and understanding of the way we do things at the Aquarium.

## **OUR OPERATION PLAN**

In order to get to know our oceans and the life within it, we need to have the opportunity to see it at eye level, ask questions, get curious, be compelled to care and inspired to make sustainable choices. We do this at the Touch Tank Hut by:

1. Displaying only smaller, local, shallow-dwelling animals
2. Having a catch-and-release philosophy
3. Focusing Heavily on hands-on learning

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service is an important part of everyone's job at the Aquarium and making a good impression and providing excellent service to the visitors are the primary goals. Volunteers and staff are here to amaze, engage and inspire our guests and also to ensure that they feel welcome and enjoy themselves at all times. Visitors come here to have fun, to socialize with friends and family and to learn. It is up to everyone at the Aquarium to ensure that we do the best we can to meet our guests' needs.

By following the Ten Steps of Customer Service you will be making the most positive contribution that you can for the visitors and the Back to the Sea Society goals.

### THE TEN STEPS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

#### 1. **Be courteous.**

Smile, and be friendly and approachable. Always be positive.

Be polite with visitors, no matter what.

Listen to customer comments and let them know you understand their point of view.

Raise concerns and share items in a positive fashion. Focus on solutions and improvements.

#### 2. **Anticipate visitor needs.**

Ask the visitor before they ask you. Offer to help if you see someone in need of assistance.

#### 3. **Treat others as you would like to be treated.**

Support your co-workers both verbally (encourage) and practically (on-the-job support). Be helpful.

#### 4. **Be knowledgeable.**

Be able to answer the most frequently asked visitor questions and find out the answers you don't know; you may be asked again.

Use staff, hot sheets, email updates and other info sources to keep up to date on current happenings at the Aquarium

#### 5. **Be an effective communicator.**

Share information with staff and other volunteers.

Inform your supervisor of potential problems. Settle small problems with other volunteers and staff before they become larger ones.

#### 6. **Be responsible.**

Pick up litter and garbage on the premises. We all work together to make the Aquarium look its best.

Keep your work area neat and tidy for fellow staff and volunteers.

Take responsibility for yourself and your actions. Don't be afraid to own up to your mistakes and learn from them.

**7. Be proactive.**

Identify potential problems and see they are corrected as soon as possible. Can you initiate the solution? If not, promptly inform the correct staff member who can. If you are unsure, call the duty manager or your supervisor.

Don't wait to be asked to do something. Volunteer to do it.

**8. Be professional.**

Be on time for your shift, events, and meetings.

Maintain a professional and presentable appearance when working with the public.

Volunteers should fully abide by the uniform policy and dress code whenever on duty.

**9. Be adaptable.**

Be able to respond to changing situations.

Be willing to work within the regulations of the Aquarium

**10. Leave personal problems at home.**

You work in an amazing place; don't let home problems get in the way of your job. Enjoy your time with co-workers and the animals.

## TEAMWORK

The second essential component of Visitor Experience is teamwork. It is essential that we communicate, respect each other's space and work together positively, not only for the sake of each other, but also so that the VE department, in cooperation with all Aquarium staff and volunteers, can provide the best possible customer service to our guests.

The Aquarium functions through the efforts of a wide diversity of individuals completing a huge range of different tasks. Sometimes it can be difficult to conceive of and appreciate the importance of all of the jobs that take place here.

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT GUESTS OR CUSTOMER SERVICE SITUATIONS

The majority of problems that arise for our visitors are something you can easily assist with on the spot. However, if you ever find yourself in a difficult situation with an upset guest, please find a staff member. We do not expect you to handle complex or difficult customer service situations alone.

Staff are onsite to handle the complaints or concerns of our visitors. They are trained to handle a wide range of challenging situations and are your support and backup in a difficult situation.



## **OUR CONSERVATION IN ACTION**

### **APPROACH**

Conservation can be affected in a number of ways; direct actions, behavioural change, change in policy or law. Although education and awareness are necessary precursors, they are not sufficient alone to effect measurable physical change on the environment. The Conservation Group seeks to link people with direct action including behavioural changes. Advocacy work is conducted throughout the organization through educational materials and activities like providing scientific advice on key issues.

Our target audience is the general public across Canada (either as individuals or through community or corporate groups). Unique to the Conservation Group in the Touch Tank Hut setting is that many of those we engage will never actually visit the facility. Therefore, we rely heavily on a sophisticated, well managed digital presence.

## **OCEAN INVERTEBRATE CONSERVATION ISSUES**

This information is just for your own knowledge and is something you can share with our visitors in a positive way if you wish! It is important to have this information because we are working against these issues through education, but in no way should this discourage you!

### **PHYSICAL DISTURBANCE**

The ocean shoreline is one of the most popular locations for residential living, tourism, and industrial development, and therefore the human impact on the shoreline ecosystem is increasing. One source of harm to invertebrates is the physical disturbance of the rocks on which they reside. Here are some ways this can be destructive:

- Rocks are turned over and not placed back into their original position. Certain invertebrates have adapted to live on the underside of the rock, and some on the top. If this is reversed, neither will be able to survive.
- Walking on the rocks, and therefore trampling invertebrates during low tide. The increasing amount of foot traffic on the coastline has a profound effect on invertebrate populations.

### **POLLUTION**

The increase in coastal development has also resulted in an increase in wastes being thrown into the ocean. The shoreline environment is one of the most affected ecosystems because of its close proximity to human development. Invertebrates are an extremely good indicator of the overall health of the shoreline. If there is a large, diverse community of invertebrates, the water quality is probably pretty good, and there is most likely a low amount of overall pollution. The

opposite is also true if there is a lack of diversity of invertebrates; water quality is likely to be poor, and overall pollution is likely high.

#### Over-exploitation

When discussing overfishing, marine invertebrates are often overlooked, but many species are in need of serious conservation measures to ensure their continued survival.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP ANIMALS AND THEIR ECOSYSTEMS?

Throughout this section, you can find plenty of boxes with helpful tips on how to help the issues we have discussed.

- Leave the environment as you found it to reduce disturbance
- Make more Sustainable Consumer Choices
  - Buy more environmentally friendly, organic, and non-toxic products then suppliers will begin to make them more available.
  - Buy items in bulk, or those that have less packaging
  - When buying household cleaners, look for vegetable-based soaps and cleaners with natural ingredients, which are less damaging to the environment and to your family than petroleum based ones.
- Make small lifestyle changes
  - Use refillable containers – for instance, in the case of dish soap, use a small container for convenience, then refill with large economy size.
  - Reduce the amount of meat in your diet
  - Use organic lawn care (chemical free garden)
  - Compost! It saves space in landfills, and can be used as a natural, inexpensive fertilizer

### FINAL NOTE

Small changes make a big difference. As a final note, the purpose of challenging yourself to be more conservation minded is not aimed to make you feel guilty, pressured, or uncomfortable. The point is to find a balance where you feel comfortable making environmentally friendly choices and incorporating these into your lifestyle. For instance, if you feel that taking used bath water to water your plants is a bit excessive, then don't do it. Maybe just try to minimize the water in your baths, plant native species of plants that don't need excessive watering can be your contribution.

Thank you for helping support the Back to the Sea Society!