

Hiking Activity Standards

This standard applies to Mountaineers sponsored hiking trips on established routes longer than 2 miles round trip. This standard applies to any committee sponsoring hikes or Youth & Family Hikes, whether as part of a course or not.¹

TRIPS

Hiking trips are restricted to maintained and unmaintained trails. The following exceptions apply to Hiking trips:

- Travel may proceed on snow-covered trails, unless the route exposes the party to terrain with avalanche hazards, where a slip is likely to result in an uncontrolled slide, or where snowshoes are required
- Parties may make off-trail excursions as long as Leaders follow Leave No Trace Principles and the route does not expose any party member to terrain that is unreasonably hazardous for them to cross given their skills and experience. Avalanche terrain should be avoided whenever possible.
- Travel in which participants run for any significant portion of the trip is considered a trail run, and must follow Activity Standards for Trail Running. These trips may not be posted solely as a hike or backpack.

DEFINITIONS

Hikes in The Mountaineers are front-country or back-country trips. When the hike is designed for youth clubs, outreach programs, or camps, it is a Youth Hike. When the hike is designed for families (children plus guardians), it is a Family Hike.

DIFFICULTY RATINGS

The difficulty of a hiking route will be rated using this scale as a general guide, and the rating must be entered on the activity listing with the specific distance and elevation gain communicated to participants in pre-trip communications.

- Casual Up to 4 miles and up to 600 feet of elevation gain round trip.
- Easy (E) Up to 8 miles and up to 1200 feet of elevation gain round trip.
- Moderate (M) Up to 12 miles and up to 2500 feet of elevation gain round trip.
- Strenuous (S) Up to 14 miles and up to 3500 feet of elevation gain round trip.
- Very Strenuous (VS) Over 14 miles or over 3500 feet of elevation gain round trip.

The overall Difficulty Rating for a trip or route shall be the lowest rating that satisfies both the distance and elevation gain criteria. For example: a trip with 11 miles of distance and 1000 ft of gain would be a Moderate trip.

¹Some committees sponsor hike-like activities that adhere to other relevant standards. For example, a component of an overnight Alpine Climb includes backpacking, but Climbing Committees adhere to the Clubwide Activity Standards for Climbing. Similarly, some Scramble Committees sponsor Scramble Conditioners, which meet the Clubwide Activity Standards for Scrambling (which include a Scramble Conditioner designation)

LEADER RATING

In addition to the route difficulty, a **Leader Rating** must be specified for each activity. This provides the leader with a way to modify the baseline route difficulty based on specifics of how they will lead the trip. The following are examples of criteria a leader may consider in setting the **Leader Rating**.

- Casual Average pace under 1 mph and no technical challenges or special skills needed.
- Easy Average pace 1-1.5 mph and no technical challenges or special skills needed.
- Moderate Average pace 1.5-2 mph OR some route challenges (e.g. rough trail, log crossings, steep terrain)
- Challenging Average pace >2 mph OR significant route challenges or skills requirements (e.g. fixed ropes, very rugged terrain, steep scree descents, snow or ice crossings)

It is recommended that the leader clearly specify the distance and elevation gain for the route as well as their planned pace, any special technical challenges and special gear, skills and conditioning requirements of the trip in the trip posting within the activity summary and/or the leaders' notes.

PARTY SIZE

The minimum party size for a hike is 3 and the maximum party size is 12 unless other party limits apply.

LEADER QUALIFICATIONS FOR HIKING TRIP LEADERS

There are two (2) Leader types in Hiking: 1) Hike Leader, 2) Youth & Family Hike Leader. All leaders must meet Key Elements 1-6 in order to qualify as a Leader. Youth and Family hike leaders have additional and/or different requirements as described below. Distinct badges are awarded for leader types and are not interchangeable.

All leaders must be Mountaineers members, at least 18 years old, with an up-to-date waiver on file. New hike leaders are strongly encouraged to go on a minimum of 3 relevant activities with The Mountaineers, preferably with different leaders, before becoming a hike leader themselves. Individual committees have the discretion to require more or fewer activities based on the applicant's experience and skills.

Leaders must be approved to lead hikes by a Mountaineers branch Hiking Committee, and entered on their committee's leader roster. Once approved by one branch, a leader may request to be added to another branch's hiking committee's leader roster. The committee chair of the requested branch has discretion whether to approve or deny leaders and/or to require that the leader complete any additional requirements before being added to the roster.

Leaders must demonstrate basic competency in each of the following key elements before being approved to lead a Mountaineers hike. Under each key element, bullets highlight examples of the skills, behaviors, or knowledge factors expected of a Mountaineers hike leader within that element.

KEY ELEMENT 1: Group Leadership – examples of expected competencies

- Planning and organization
- Screening of participants (as appropriate)
- Communication (clear and effective)
- Ensures that all party members are accounted for periodically and at the trip conclusion
 - Respectful, caring, considerate
- Sound judgment and decision-making skills

- Establishes trust
- Focuses on group well-being and success as a whole
- Adapts as required / situational leadership
- Teaches / coaches and also learns from others

KEY ELEMENT 2: Technical Skill – examples of expected competencies

- Has experience and physical abilities commensurate with the trip being led
- Practices Minimum Impact Procedures / Leave No Trace 7 Principles
- Practices good Trail Etiquette
- Knowledge and use of 10 Essentials

KEY ELEMENT 3: Navigation– examples of expected competencies

- Effectively navigates trail routes with map and compass and any other appropriate tools to “stay found” (altimeter, watch, GPS)

KEY ELEMENT 4: Mountain Safety Skills– examples of expected competencies

- Shows good understanding of major seasonal backcountry hazards and how to assess the level of risk
- Shows good understanding of methods to prevent, mitigate or manage major risk factors

KEY ELEMENT 5: First Aid and Emergency Preparedness – examples of expected competencies

- Able to handle common first aid situations likely to be experienced on a hike
 - Know the “7 steps of Emergency Response” as described in Freedom of the Hills, and found on the website, or an equivalent emergency management process
- Exhibits a good understanding of how to handle emergency situations such as Late return/after dark/lost hiker/off route/lost
- Demonstrates problem solving and leadership skills relating to medical emergencies or unexpected weather and trail conditions
- Knows how to communicate /summon help

KEY ELEMENT 6: Knowledge of Standards and Policies– examples of expected competencies

- Familiar with applicable Mountaineers standards or procedures such as carpools; liability; waivers, postings and closings; ratings; equity and inclusion
- Knows Incident reporting expectations
- Familiar with maximum group size, permitting, and other applicable land management agency regulations

LEADER QUALIFICATIONS - YOUTH & FAMILY HIKE LEADER

- Key Elements 1-6
- Earn The Qualified Youth Leader Badge which includes the Qualified Youth Leader General Training and a Criminal Background Check administered through The Mountaineers. This is free of charge for the member.
- Once a Leader has earned the Qualified Youth Leader Badge they may complete the Qualified Youth Leader program specific skill badge training for the youth program they wish to lead for. Candidates can receive a badge corresponding with the training(s) they complete. Five options include:
 - Family Activities
 - Kids Clubs

- Teen Clubs
- Outreach
- Camps

PROCESS TO QUALIFY AS A MOUNTAINEERS HIKE OR YOUTH & FAMILY HIKE LEADER

Sponsoring committees must have a documented and transparent process, available to any interested member, by which a prospective leader can qualify as a Mountaineers Hike Leader, or Youth & Family Hike Leader, if the activity is in the scope of the committee (included in the committee's charter). Committees are responsible to verify that prospective leaders are competent in the key elements listed above using a structured, objective method. The following are examples of avenues that could be used:

- Data from application form and/or activity /course history
- Other leader badges (e.g. Climb or kayak leader or other)
- Documented completion of classes (Wilderness First Aid, On-Trail Navigation such as "Staying Found" or Wilderness Navigation or equivalent external class)
- Hike Leader or combined leader seminar or equivalent for example:
 - Take home test following leader seminar or as a "equivalency" in lieu of seminar
 - Structured interview with Committee Chair or designate to validate knowledge
- Mentored trip, in which the mentor evaluates the prospective leader on a relevant trip against the standards to the degree possible². A relevant trip includes a youth hike for the Youth Leader Badge, or an adult hike for the Hike Leader Badge.

Committees have flexibility to use different combinations of the above methods appropriate to individual leader candidates, maintaining flexibility to recognize experience and training from another activity or from outside the club where it directly applies to the key leader competency requirements.

However, the committee must maintain a mechanism to document their evaluation of a leader candidate against the key criteria so that any outside party can understand the objective method used to qualify the person.

It is strongly recommended that each hike leader attend a hike leader seminar or combined leader seminar or equivalent seminar including an overview of the standard and all the key leader criteria and expectations, even if they have led other activities for the Mountaineers. Because hikes have no prerequisites, hike leaders often have to face much greater challenges in screening participants, ensuring basic preparedness, providing first aid and navigation expertise for the group, and managing safety and

²In general, it is assumed that the holder of a Youth & Family Hike Leader Badge will not be granted reciprocity for a Hike Leader Badge. Because the different audiences require a substantially different skillset, committees are strongly encouraged to require a relevant mentored trip for a prospective leader seeking transition between Youth & Family and standard Hike Leadership.

pace during the activity than leaders of many other activities that have significant prerequisites for participation.

Upon review of the prospective leader's completion of the requirements, the sponsoring committee may grant the applicant a relevant Leader Badge and add them to their committee's leader roster, which authorizes them to post and lead Mountaineers Hikes and Mountaineers Youth & Family Hikes.

PARTICIPANT QUALIFICATIONS

Unless specified by the leader there is no prerequisite for signing up for a hike.

Participants are responsible for signing up only for trips that are within their capabilities, wearing suitable clothing / bringing suitable equipment as specified by the leader, and carrying the ten essentials.

RELATED CLUBWIDE STANDARDS

General Standards for All Club Activities

Comparable Standards

UIAA Standards for Voluntary Leaders and Instructors, October 2006

- Activity Standard 1: Mountain Walking and Trekking
- Leadership Requirements and Guidelines; Appalachian Mountain Club, March 15, 2015

Revision History

January 7, 2023

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