

Urban Walks Standards

This standard applies to Mountaineers sponsored walking on established urban and suburban routes. This standard applies to any committee sponsoring Urban Walks, or Youth & Family Walks, whether as part of a course or not.

TRIPS

Urban Walks are restricted to urban and suburban streets, parks, and greenbelts on maintained and unmaintained trails. The following exceptions apply:

- Parties may make off-trail excursions as long as the route does not expose any party member to terrain that is unreasonably hazardous for them to cross given their skills and experience.
- Travel in which participants run for any significant portion of the trip is considered a trail run^[1], and must follow Activity Standards for Trail Running. These routes may not be posted solely as a hike, urban walk or backpack.

DEFINITIONS

Urban Walks are outings two (2) miles or longer that take place on city or suburban streets, parks or greenbelts (on maintained or unmaintained trails), where there is consistent cell phone service, nearby emergency response access and egress (exit) points.

When the walk is designed for youth clubs, outreach programs, or camps, it is a Youth Walk. When the walk is designed for families (children plus guardians), it is a Family Walk.

Mountaineers Urban Adventures, generally less than two (2) miles when on foot, that do not meet these definitions are not covered by this standard.

¹DIFFICULTY RATINGS

The difficulty of an urban walk 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.

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|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ● 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. |

¹ The Trail Running standard can be found at https://www.mountaineers.org/about/vision-leadership/board-of-directors/clubwide-activity-standards/trail-running/at_download/file.

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.

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^[2]- Average pace under 1 mph and no technical challenges or special skills needed
- Easy - Average pace 1-2 mph and no technical challenges or special skills needed
- Moderate - Average pace 1.5-2.5 mph OR some route challenges (e.g. rough trailwater crossings, steep terrain, industrial landscape)
- Challenging - Average pace >2.5 mph OR significant route challenges or skills requirements (e.g. very rugged terrain, slippery 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. Leaders should specify if pace is average total trip speed or average moving speed.

PARTY SIZE

The minimum party size for an urban walk is three (3) with a recommended maximum party size of twelve (12) unless the land manager allows larger parties. Capacity decisions need to be in alignment with [The Mountaineers Outdoor Ethics Policy](#).

LEADER QUALIFICATIONS FOR URBAN WALK LEADERS

There are three (3) Leader types in Urban Walks: 1) Urban Walk Leader, 2) Urban Walk Leader with Specialty Certification or Training^[3] and 3) Youth & Family Walk Leader All leaders must be Mountaineers members, at least 18 years old, with an up-to-date waiver on file. New leaders are required to go on a minimum of 3 relevant activities with The Mountaineers, preferably with different leaders, before becoming a leader themselves. Individual committees have the discretion to require more or fewer activities based on the applicant's experience and skills. Branch committees have the authority to post additional branch-specific requirements for new leaders.

Leaders must be approved to lead Urban Walks by a Mountaineers branch committee that sponsors those activities and entered on their committee's roster. Once approved by one branch, a leader may

² Casual pace may be for beginners or may be oriented for participants who have experience.

³ Specialties include but are not limited to Night Urban Walks, Geocaching, Mindful Experience, Conditioning, Yoga, Nature, and Urban Nordic Walking

request to be added to another branch's hiking committee's 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.

Competent Urban Walk leaders are much like Hike Leaders. They lead activities that appeal to a wide variety of members and their best trips offer a highlight, memorable moment(s).

Urban Walk Leader Goals

- Plan and post Urban Walks that promise highlights, memorable moments in urban and suburban settings.
- Lead Urban Walks that anticipate and manage risks and opportunities unique to urban and suburban settings.

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

Urban Walk Competency Targets – Key Elements (KE).

Clubwide Standards are addressed with particular attention to Urban Walk considerations that may differ from backcountry hikes. Night Urban Walks special considerations (N).

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

Additional examples that address challenges unique to particular urban environments may be found in branch activity documents.

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

- First Aid – See KE #5
- Knowledge and use of 10 Essentials as pertinent to Urban Walks
- Additional examples that address challenges unique to particular urban environments may be found in branch activity documents.

KEY ELEMENT 3: Navigation– examples of expected competencies

- Requires basic map, altimeter (if appropriate), compass and GPS expertise and needs to reflect the complexity of city navigation but does not require backcountry and off-trail navigation skills.
- Plots routes and carries appropriate maps from mapping software or other sources
- In absence of recent (or any) trip reports, scouts route to discover highlights, hazards and alternative paths.
- Determines least risky street crossing locations.
- Manages terrain wisely to reduce risk of accidents, especially slips, trips and falls
- (N) Consider which daylight landmarks may lack utility in low light and which unique night landmarks could be used.
- Additional examples that address challenges unique to particular urban environments may be found in branch activity documents.

KEY ELEMENT 4: Safety Skills– examples of expected competencies

- Employs pedestrian safety practices on sidewalks, shoulders and street crossings.
- Clearly explains the roles of leader and sweep during walk.
- Alerts walkers to all modes of traffic hazards and areas of increased crime risk.
- Interacts sensitively and safely with impaired or upset citizens.
- Alerts walkers about footwear choices when wet, steep, rough conditions may call for water proofing or aggressive tread.
- (N) Requires headlamps or handheld lights and backup batteries, and models reflective clothing and gear.
- (N) Leader(s) carries, employs additional traffic light wand similar to law enforcement gear.
- Identifies toileting options to provide in Trip Postings and Hello Urban Walker brief.
- Consults sources including local news and law enforcement to address hazards/risks in route selection with anticipated alternatives.
- Additional examples that address challenges unique to particular urban environments may be found in branch activity documents.

KEY ELEMENT 5: First Aid and Emergency Preparedness – examples of expected competencies (Footnote for Clubwide activity standards at the bottom).

- Able to handle common first aid situations likely to be experienced on an urban walk
- Know the “7 steps of Emergency Response” as described in [Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills](#), or an equivalent emergency management process
- Exhibits a good understanding of how to handle emergency situations such as late return, after dark, lost walker, or off route
- Demonstrates problem solving and leadership skills relating to medical emergencies or unexpected weather and trail conditions
- Knows how to communicate or summon help
- Additional examples that address challenges unique to particular urban environments may be found in branch activity documents.

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; stewardship
- Knows Incident reporting expectations
- Familiar with maximum group size, and other applicable land management agency regulations

KEY ELEMENT 7: Conservation. We work to protect our public lands and the outdoor experiences they provide. Examples of expected competencies.

- Acknowledges and honors the lands and lifeways of native people
- Reduces carbon footprint with transportation choices
- Practices low impact urban recreation
- Advocates for urban parks, gardens, greenways and waterways
- Stewards urban green spaces, parks, trails and recreation areas

Additional examples that address challenges unique to particular urban environments may be found in branch activity documents.

LEADER QUALIFICATIONS - YOUTH & FAMILY URBAN WALK LEADER

- Key Elements 1-7
- Earn The Qualified Youth Leader Badge (which includes the Qualified Youth Leader General Training and a Criminal Background Check administered through The Mountaineers).
- 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 URBAN WALK LEADER OR YOUTH & FAMILY WALK 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 Urban Walks 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:

- Application with subsequent confirmation of intent to lead Urban Walks
- New Urban Leader seminar
- Pedestrian Safety Skills seminar
- A mentored Urban Walk with an experienced Urban Walk leader
- First Aid skills relevant to the urban environment where emergency access and response is readily available (Examples include AHR/CPR, Red Cross First Aid/CPR, Medic 1 First Aid/CPR, Trail Emergency Preparedness + CPR, First Aid for Hike-Backpack Leaders + CPR)
- On-Trail Navigation competencies (Examples include On-Trail Navigation Badge including GPS as satisfied by Staying Found, On Trail Navigation or equivalent, in lieu of Wilderness Navigation)

Upon review of the prospective leader's completion of the requirements, the sponsoring committee may grant the applicant an Urban Walk Leader Badge and add them to their Urban Walk leader roster, which authorizes them to post and lead Urban Walks. ^[4]

Urban Walk Leader Equivalency

Urban Walk Equivalency is an opportunity for Mountaineers club members who are experienced in leading Urban Walks using the modern navigation tools (map, altimeter, compass, gps and emergency communication devices), popular with Mountaineers walkers, hikers and backpackers, to gain the Urban Walk Leader badge. This badge is obtained by meeting Urban Walk Leader standards.

If you already hold a Hike Leader or Backpack Leader badge and have led at least 3 Mountaineers Urban Adventures, Hikes or Backpacks within the past 12 months, you need to complete the Urban Walk Pedestrian Safety Seminar.

Hold current First Aid and CPR certification.

⁴In general, it is assumed that the holder of an Urban Walk Leader Badge will not be granted reciprocity for a Hike Leader Badge. Similarly, the holder of a Hike or Backpack Leader Badge will not be granted reciprocity for an Urban Walk Leader Badge. Due to the different destination types requiring a substantially different skillset, committees are strongly encouraged to require a relevant mentored trip for a prospective leader seeking transition between Urban Walk and standard Hike or Backpack Leadership.

Meet any additional sponsoring committee requirements.

If you need to renew your previously earned Urban Walk Leader badge, you can renew it by being current with first aid and navigation requirements, assisting in the instruction of the Urban Walk Leader Seminar and co-leading an Urban Walk with a current leader.

Equivalency candidates must be a current, paid member of The Mountaineers in good standing, at least 18 years old, with an up-to-date waiver on file.

PARTICIPANT QUALIFICATIONS

Unless specified by the leader there is no prerequisite for signing up for an urban walk.

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

Participants on Urban Walks may be asked by their leader to bring a different set of essential gear suited to the particular hazards of the trip to be led (such as reflective clothing and a whistle).

Review and Amendment History

- **Approved by the Branch Leadership Committee (BLC) on March 25, 2026**
- **Approved draft by Urban Walk Council on January 26, 2026**
- **Approved January 25, 2025 by vote of the Urban Walk Council.**