

The Mountaineers Mountain Workshop Volunteer Manual 2015-2016



About Mountain Workshops

Our Mountain Workshops are programs we run with other youth serving agencies in Western Washington. It's important to create a strong lasting relationship with all of the groups that come to our programs. Here are some tips and tricks for a successful partnership

Working with our partner agencies

- Recognize many of these youth have never had the opportunity to climb, or have the transportation to leave city limit, have never been in snow before, so explain the basics: safety, snow conditions, wild life, etc.
- Explain what the noises they are hearing are, and why they aren't dangerous : i.e. the chains in the indoor climbing wall make a lot of noise and scare kids, ropes moving over holds and bolts do the same thing
- Language barriers—sometimes it takes longer to explain things to youth when English is not the first language — but it's important to treat youth with respect, not belittle them or talk down to them. Be patient, don't yell at them because you think they don't understand, ask questions, and be excited to build an awesome diverse community of people who are enjoying the outdoors!

Map Fund—Financial Assistance and Transportation Subsidy

Our goal with our Mountain Workshops is to provide access to the wilderness to as many youth as possible in Western Washington. We recognize that transportation and funding limits which groups are able to come to our programs, so we have a financial aid program for any group that needs it.

Ensuring success during a program for both participants and group leaders

Make the program fun (and safe!)

Explain technical systems to youth (climbing, chains, noise)

Empower youth to learn (tie knots, teach, belay)

Give leaders opportunities to participate (keep them engaged)

Check in with leaders (explain their role, and support)

Have group leaders split groups up beforehand

Roles and Responsibilities

Program Leader—The Program Leader may be Mountaineers Staff or a Branch Volunteer. This is the person who sets up the program with the partner agency, manages the agreement and develops the curriculum. The Program Leader is the “go-to” for the program.

Partner Agency Contact—The Partner Agency Contact is the person at the partner agency who sets up the program with The Mountaineers, manages the agreement and helps to develop the curriculum. This person communicates their program goals to the Program Leader so that we can create a program that best meets their needs.

Chaperones—In most cases partner agencies are required to provide 1 chaperone per 10 students. The chaperones are the primary supervisors of the youth participants—they are responsible for behavior management, helping youth with lunches, supervising bathroom runs, etc... In cases where youth in the program are highly traumatized or have developmental disabilities, partner agencies are expected to provide trained chaperones (social workers, therapists, paraprofessionals)

Instructors—Instructors are typically Mountaineers volunteers, occasionally with staff support. Mountaineers Instructors are responsible for teaching curriculum and maintaining a safe environment. They are responsible for ensuring youth participants and chaperones understand safety rules and precautions, and for teaching safe practices.

Policies

Electronics

Cell phones, music and video games are typically not a part of Mountain Workshops. They detract from the wilderness experience and from the community. Youth are encouraged to leave all electronics out of sight (or at home) during Mountaineers programs. Youth who choose to use cell phones for pictures may do so as long as it creates no disruption of the wilderness experience for others. The Mountaineers is not responsible for any lost, stolen or damaged electronics.

Weapons

Weapons, which include knives with blades longer than 3”, are never permitted on any Mountain Workshops activity. Youth who are found with weapons will have the weapon confiscated by Mountaineers Staff and will be dismissed from the program without refund.

Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco

Drugs (including marijuana), alcohol and tobacco are never permitted on any Mountain Workshops activity. Youth who have or are under the influence of these will be sent home immediately and dismissed from the program without refund.

Medication

Any medication administration for youth in Mountain Workshops will be handled by the chaperones in the partner agency.

Volunteers

Mountain Workshops rely on volunteers to provide our youth participants with the best possible mentorship to help them develop technical skills, leadership skills and competence in the outdoors. All volunteers play a vital role in the success of our program. THANK YOU for volunteering!

Food

Volunteers should plan to bring their own lunches and snacks.

Dogs

Dogs are not allowed at any Mountain Workshops activity.

Things to Know

We have a strict “no drugs, alcohol or tobacco” policy that we ask all volunteers to adhere to while you’re volunteering.

Please use appropriate language and keep comments and stories “PG”, even if you are only talking to other adult volunteers. We are committed to a diverse and inclusive program. This means that we welcome participants and volunteers of all backgrounds, religious beliefs, ethnicities, vocations, family models and lifestyles. We ask that volunteers and staff acknowledge this diversity and refrain from conversations that may be perceived as offensive to others.

Qualified Youth Leader

All Mountain Workshops volunteers must be Qualified Youth Leaders. To do this, visit www.mountaineers.org/QYLtraining.

Planning and Arrival

Volunteers should register as an instructor on our website. You will receive an email from the activity leader in advance of the program, confirming your availability and providing any details about timing and what to bring. In general, volunteers arrive 30 minutes before the kids and receive an orientation from the activity leader. Because every group serves a unique population and comes with different goals and expectations, the activity leader will provide some background and help volunteers understand who the kids are and how best to support their learning.

A note about the use of photos

Because some families prefer not to have photos of their children publicly available, and because some of the youth in our programs come from unstable home situations, we need to be sensitive about not posting photos in public forums. It’s important that photos ONLY be shared with the group participants and Mountaineers Staff. Mountaineers Staff will only use photos of youth whose parents have granted permission to use their photos.

Outdoor Mountain Workshops Special Considerations

Many of our Mountain Workshops are run off site at local outdoor venues. These outings can include a trip to exit 38 to rock climb, a hike on the I-90 corridor and trips to parks in Seattle, or a snowshoe trip. These trips are an opportunity for groups to use the skills they learned with us at a program center in a wilderness setting.

Safety Hazards/Considerations

Group Management— Because participants are often unfamiliar with wilderness settings, it's important to be intentional about facilitating a safe environment, and helping kids feel comfortable. When you are on a hike, put someone at the front, middle and sweep. Create a common language, like “red light, yellow light, green light”, when you need the group to stop. At the climbing area, make sure the group and gear is off the main path, and we are sharing ropes and rock with other people in the area.

Climbing—set a mandatory helmet zone where everyone (including adults) has to wear a helmet. Usually this area includes the crag, and 30ft on either edge of the set climbing area. This helps protect participants from rock fall, or any head and neck hazards you could run into.

Often crags are not in an area that has good space to sit, or hang out. Point out potential cliffs or dangerous areas to walk. At exit 38, for example, there are many places a person could step off a cliff or ledge.

Hikes— Make sure folks are wearing appropriate shoes, have at least one *full* water bottle, and someone in the group has snacks/lunch. Appoint someone to be the Toast Master, who stops the group at various times during the hike to make sure people drink water. (They make a toast to something, and everyone takes a couple of sips of water).

The biggest injury on hikes are usually twisted ankles or scraped knees. Tell youth to watch where they are walking, avoid stepping on roots and loose rock, and be careful walking down hill.

Make sure the group is aware of how fast they are walking. You want to stick together as much as possible, which might be a challenge for people who walk at different speeds. A tip is to have the slowest person lead the group for a leg of the hike. You don't have to do this for the whole hike, but it gives everyone the opportunity to slow down. (People often forget that the hike down and take just as much energy as the hike up). Bring an arsenal of games, and stop to play a game when kids are getting tired (camouflage, Minute Mysteries, etc.)

Chaperones— Having an appropriate ratio of chaperones to students is especially important for these outings. Chaperones are really responsible for student behavior, and managing the group. As a facilitator/instructor you are responsible for managing the safety of the students in the activity they are doing. Chaperones should handle the bulk of any behavioral issue or group dynamic issue.

** It's also important to know that many of the chaperones do not have any more experience with the outdoors than their youth, so while they are responsible for managing the youth, they might not be able to manage themselves. Be aware that you will also be teaching them many of the skills such as going to the bathroom in the wilderness, animals, bugs, and all of the things experienced outdoors people know.

Edibles—our policy is that unless you (the staff or volunteer) absolutely know what the fruit or edible is, then do not eat it. We suggest that you avoid eating anything in the wild with groups, as we don't want to encourage them to test the limits of the wilderness. During huckleberry season, or if there are other exciting opportunities to explore edibles, it's imperative to stress that many wild fruits are poisonous, so kids should never eat anything unless an adult they trust knows it's safe.

Bathrooms— There often aren't bathrooms at most of the places we go. There might be a pit toilet at the trailhead. Make sure to communicate this with you group, as most often these groups have never had to use the bathroom in the wilderness.

*Tip—bring toilet paper and hand sanitizer—also bring plastic bags so they can pack out the toilet paper.

Emergencies & First Aid Whether at a Program Center or outdoors, accidents can happen. At the beginning of a program, the Mountaineers Program Leader should identify a Mountaineers Instructor as the First Aid Lead, and another Mountaineers Instructor as the Group Management Lead. The Program Leader should also ask the Partner Agency Lead to be the 2nd First Aid Lead.

In the event of an emergency or injury, the Partner Agency Lead should assist the designated Mountaineers First Aid Lead to work directly with the youth involved in the emergency/injury. The designated Mountaineers Group Management Lead is responsible for helping the rest of the group stay safe and not get in the way of the emergency. The Mountaineers Program Leader will then triage and assign responsibilities as needed to address the emergency.

Mountain Workshop Partners (Examples)

John Muir Elementary School:

Who: 5th grade classes from JMES - 3 classrooms generally 23-27 students in each class. Culturally diverse, for over 50%, English is their second language

What works: Program meets 3-4 times a year. Each trip they do something different. They love climbing, stewardship, and outdoor cooking. We always have teacher split the class into 2-3 groups, and this works really well.

What doesn't work: Trip to Camp Long - the waiver is too long for low ropes and they aren't able to get them done in time. Lack of communication/interest from teachers, and classroom visits are too short, and you have to stick with time schedule. Also the time frame we have been using

2013-2014 Schedule

October - Trip to Camp Long for climbing and low ropes

November - Trip to classroom to show climbing gear, and go over climbing commands

December - Trip to Mountaineers for climbing, first aid, and outdoor cooking

May - Seward Park trip for LNT/10 essentials, navigation, awareness trail and stewardship with Audubon

Potential 2014-2015 Schedule

October - Trip to Camp Long for climbing, and portable elements and games (no low ropes so you don't have to do the longer paperwork)

November - Trips to classroom (stay same)

December - Trip to Mountaineers (stay same)

March - Classroom visit - 40 minute presentation about native/invasives, Eco zones etc.

May - Seward Park trip

Teachers - Emily Freeman, Karen McHegg, Jackie Osbourne

Bailey Gatzert Elementary School :

Who: 3rd - 5th graders from BG come 4-5 Saturdays throughout the school year. This is a 3 way partnership with the Rotary Club of the International District. There will be at least one teacher who are the school liaisons.

What works: 3 way partnership makes it easy to get volunteers to staff the program. Having a teacher act as the sign in/sign out/bus contact makes covering liability easy. The program is relatively easy to run, just get the dates to the school ahead of time. We go into the classrooms two weeks before the program to get youth to sign up.

What doesn't work: The teachers who are the liaisons will not have decision making power.

2013-2014 Schedule

4 outings at The Mountaineers

1 outing : Hike/Snowshoe

Potential 2014-2015 Schedule

Trip to Camp Long

Working with the Rotary Club:

Though Rotary provides volunteers, they do not come with any liability - they become Mountaineers Volunteers for this program.

We've had someone every year as the main contact, who gets in touch with other Rotary volunteers. They also give us a grant for the program.

Hope Place Shelter:

Who: Housing for previously homeless mothers and their children and recovery facility as well. They come 3-5 times a year. Sometimes they come with both moms and kids. This year they will also do a one week summer camp as well.

What works: The program generally works really well. The program leads are really interested in what we do and are consistently easy to work with. They are flexible if we need to change dates. We contact at the beginning of the season to set up dates. They also have vans, so they can drive for everything except the snow trip. We order a bus a bus for the snowshoe program.

What needs more work: We need to gather clothes, boots, warm layers, etc. Youth don't have appropriate clothes. Make sure you provide plenty of belayers for the climbing sessions.

2013-2014 Schedule

5 outings - 4 rock climbing and 1 snowshoe/hike outing. Most of these youth have never snowshoed before so be aware of the area you go in. Make sure that it's super safe.

Seattle World School:

Who: Seattle World School is Seattle Public Schools' culturally and linguistically diverse school for newcomer secondary students. It is one of only a few schools in the country designed as a preliminary entry point for immigrant children in their quest for academic achievement and full participation in American society. We work with 30 of their 18-20 year olds. Much like the Interagency program, we partner with Camp Long to do a 5 month progression program. In 2014, at any given time we had 10-14 different languages spoken. This was an awesome challenge, and the youth were really great.

What works: The progression works really well! Getting them first comfortable with the idea of climbing and outdoor pursuits, and then going more into the facilitation side of outdoor ed worked well. Having translators there was definitely key.

What doesn't work: In general this program works really well. This was our first year running the program, so we are still in transition and working out the kinks. More communication with Camp Long is key, having clear roles and dates set in the contract, working with Ken so he understands roles is really important.

How to communicate:

Ryan, our school contact, was really on top of things. An email a couple of weeks ahead of time to check in works well, and he usually already has all of the details worked out. Communicate often with Ken and make sure you both have roles and responsibilities clearly worked out in your contract.

2013-2014 Schedule

February - Mountaineers climbing day

March - Mountaineers belay day

April - Low challenge at Camp Long

May- Advance lows and Mt. Challenger at Camp Long

June - climbing outside at Mountaineers