



2020 Volunteer Vacations Host Guide

PRE-TRIP PROJECT PLANNING & DESIGN

Task Selection:

American Hiking is dedicated to protecting foot trails and the public lands that surround them. Therefore, the bulk of your volunteer projects should be focused on building or maintaining foot trails on public land. While you have already indicated a general project on your crew request, goals and specific tasks for the week, should be determined based on your volunteer crew. You will receive information about each crew member in advance of the project. Consider the crew, their trail experience, their fitness level, and their age in selecting the tasks to complete.

You should establish an itinerary for the week, secure necessary tools and materials, and confirm there is enough scheduled work prior to the crew's arrival. Your crew may be very experienced and complete the work in half the time estimated or weather could affect which projects can be accomplished. Always have a backup or additional projects planned and ready to implement.

Project Design:

Detailed planning and design of the project should occur at least a month prior to the scheduled arrival of the crew. As appropriate and needed, the site should be flagged and the design should be drawn. The project plan should include details such as the exact location and length of the trail to be worked; the estimated number of water bars and what kind to be cleaned, removed, added; the clearing width for vegetation; the installation, removal or repainting of signs involved; whether the project involves the construction of features such as puncheon, boardwalk or small bridges; and so forth.

Project Itinerary:

You should be prepared with a basic itinerary for the project based on the number of individuals in the crew, their experience level, and the tasks you aim to complete. Most trips will have volunteers arriving on Sunday evening. Sunday evening is generally used for setting up camp/settling into accommodations and group orientation and introductions. No trail work will be done on this meeting day. Generally, you should plan to have volunteers work Monday-Friday (with at least a half-day off), so 4 - 4.5 days of actual trail work. Saturday will generally be used for cleaning up/breaking down camp and travel. We advise volunteers to expect to work 6-8 hours on the work days. You will need to discuss the exact hours of work and start/end times with the crew leader and communicate that to the crew. Please also incorporate a couple of hours on Monday morning (or the first work day) to go over tool safety, trail work safety, and to discuss the project in general. Also factor in time to drive or hike to the project, breaks, and lunch (which will be eaten on the trail). This schedule may vary if the group is backpacking into basecamp.

Sustainability:

American Hiking is committed to building and maintaining sustainable trails. We urge you to abide by the Leave No Trace principles and to use the best techniques possible to make sure the work our volunteers accomplish lasts for years to come.

PRE-TRIP COMMUNICATIONS

Communication with American Hiking:

When the minimum # of volunteers you indicated on your crew request has been met, AHS will contact you to confirm final project details and provide you with the current volunteer roster. Once we confirm the trip details with you, the project confirmation will be emailed to those registered. AHS will update you of any changes or additional volunteers that register after the confirmation email has been sent and before the project starts.

Once the project confirmation is sent, volunteers have the green light to book their travel, so it is imperative that the details in the project confirmation are accurate. **Trips are generally confirmed 8 weeks in advance of their start.** If the trip has not met the minimum number of volunteers that you designated in that timeframe, we will contact you to determine if the project should proceed.

It is very important that the project confirmation goes out to volunteers in a timely manner. Please respond back to us as soon as possible when we contact you. If you are going to be out of the office for an extended period of time, please provide us with an alternate contact that can confirm project details.

Communication with AHS Volunteer Crew Leader:

You have requested an AHS crew leader for your project, and we will try to place an experienced volunteer in this role. The main responsibilities of an AHS Crew Leader are to act as liaison between the crew and you, menu preparation, grocery shopping, social leadership, and coordinating camp chores. Each crew leader goes through an orientation to learn program basics, but since every volunteer vacation is different, we ask that you discuss the specifics of the project, accommodations, week's itinerary, and specific gear needs with the Crew Leader.

The Crew Leader should contact you as soon as your project is confirmed by AHS. If the Crew Leader does not contact you shortly after we confirm the project, you should get in touch with him/her and go over details of the project. If you feel it is necessary for the Crew Leader to arrive prior to the rest of the crew please communicate this to him/her.

Although the Crew Leaders are usually veterans of the program, they are not expected to be experts in trail building and design and are not paid for their leadership role. The Crew Leader will look to you, the project host, for guidance regarding the project design and logistics.

Communication with the Crew:

Your contact information will be listed on the project confirmation, so when the confirmation is sent, you may start to receive inquiries from crew members. As mentioned, you will receive a detailed roster of volunteers when the trip is confirmed, so you can reference the names and backgrounds of those that might contact you.

The Crew Leader is required to make contact with the crew to introduce themselves and provide general trip information. In your initial conversation with the Crew Leader, please let them know of any specific travel or project details that they need to pass along to the crew (i.e. specific clothing they should bring, meeting location, weather update). You are also welcome to contact crew members to welcome the group and provide further details on arrival, the project, etc.

ACCOMMODATIONS & TRANSPORTATION

Accommodations:

Hosts are asked to provide lodging for volunteers (campsite, cabins, dormitory, etc.). You should secure lodging or campsites and determine what the sleeping accommodations and provisions are well in advance of the project start. If you are hosting a backpacking trip, also determine where the crew will stay or camp on the day of their arrival and the night before their departure (often at the trailhead or ranger station). This will be communicated to the crew in the project confirmation.

For camping trips, volunteers are required to provide their own tent, sleeping bag, pad, and all personal gear if necessary. If you are providing indoor accommodations, please determine the number of available beds/cots, how they are situated, and if volunteers need to provide their own linens.

Permits/Entrance Fees:

Any permits required for volunteer service need to be secured well in advance of the volunteers' arrival. Any visitor entrance fees should be waived for the volunteer crew and communicated to the entry gate attendee in advance of the volunteers' arrival.

Transportation:

If you indicated that you could provide an airport pick-up on your crew request, we will confirm this pick-up time and drop-off time with you and include that in the project confirmation. These details are very important for volunteers as they schedule their flights in accordance with the details you list.

If it is not possible to provide an airport pickup, please provide volunteers information about other transportation options (i.e. preferred shuttle, bus schedule, ferry schedule). If transportation between lodging and project site is needed, please arrange that in advance. We prefer if volunteers do not need to drive their personal vehicles to and from the work site. A government vehicle or vehicle owned by the host is encouraged.

ON-SITE

Orientation:

You should be available at the first meeting or group orientation to welcome the group and introduce yourself and staff if possible. This is especially important since it makes the volunteers feel welcome and that their service is appreciated.

Safety Orientation:

Prior to the project starting, we require you to thoroughly discuss safety issues, emergency plans, and proper tool use with the volunteers. Discuss any safety concerns of the project or region (altitude sickness, poison oak, bears, etc.). Discuss what steps should be taken in case of emergency, especially if you are not present. Please demonstrate proper and safe use of each of the tools the crew will be using and any precautions they should take on the trail.

Supervision and Training:

Full supervision of the crew while on the project site is strongly recommended. If you need to be away from the crew for part of the project, indicate the scope of work to be done and any technical methods specific to the terrain or region. Some crew members are usually experienced, but often there are participants who have never done trail work before and will need to be trained.

Tools/Safety Equipment:

We ask that you provide any necessary tools and safety equipment required for project completion. Volunteers are asked to provide their own work gloves. Please demonstrate proper and safe use of each of the tools the crew will be using and any precautions they should take on the trail.

Group Cooking Gear:

We ask that you provide group cooking gear including stove and fuel, pots, pans, utensils as necessary, etc. **A full listing of supplies we ask you to provide is included.** Volunteers are asked to provide their own personal eating utensils including plate/cup/knife/fork (for camping trips).

DAY-OFF/EVENING ACTIVITIES**Local Activities:**

We strive to provide both satisfying work and play on our volunteer trips. To ensure that the crew has a chance to relax and explore the area on the trip, we ask you to give the crew at least a half-day off of trail work for free-activity. This can mean scheduled time off the work project for the crew to do their own exploring, hike on their own, or relax in camp. If you would like to be involved in the free-day activity a guided hike, tour of the area, ranger talk, boat/canoe trip or other excursion are all suggested activities.

Special Event:

It is not required, but a final dinner/celebration with the crew is always appreciated at the end of a working vacation. This can be discussed with the crew leader and announced to the crew during orientation. Sometimes the volunteers want to get on the road on Friday evening if they have completed the weeks' work so you might want to schedule the celebration on Thursday evening.

MEAL PLANNING/FOOD**Food Purchasing:**

For most volunteer vacations, the menu planning and food purchasing is arranged by the Crew Leader. However, if the Crew Leader is flying to the project location, they might need transportation and assistance with shopping on their arrival day. If the Crew Leader is driving to the project site and does not need transportation, please be prepared to provide information regarding local grocery stores.

If you are purchasing the food for the volunteer crew (instead of the crew leader), we can handle the food purchase in a couple of ways. If your organization does not have a stipend allocated for volunteer food, American Hiking Society will provide the food stipend for the crew at \$11/person/day. If you pay for the food upfront, AHS can reimburse you at the completion of the trip using a food reimbursement form to be supplied prior to the trip.