

ALTERNATIVE BREAK



Host Guide

Alternative Breaks are volunteer trail stewardship projects designed specifically for college student groups and young professionals. Most projects are one-week in length, consist of 8-15 crew members, and involve trail maintenance and building tasks on hiking trails on public lands. Alternative Break students travel to these projects at their own expense and provide their own meals, however the host is asked to provide housing, access to a kitchen or camping kitchen set-up, and full project supervision and oversight throughout the week. Most Alternative Break students have little to no trail-maintenance experience, but their service is meaningful, and they are enthusiastic about learning and taking part in conservation work on public lands.

American Hiking provides you the following project assistance:

- Communication and selection of a crew from a pool of interested colleges and universities
- Advertisement of your park and service project online and to our audience of universities, volunteers and supporters
- Logistical support and communication throughout the trip planning process with both the volunteers and park staff
- Direct communication with the school group to answer questions and prepare students for a week at your park

Volunteers provide:

- Volunteer labor and eager attitudes!
- Daypack and basic hiking gear / clothes based on climate
- Travel to the project location
- Meal planning and preparation coordination
- Limited hiking and camping gear if indoor accommodations are not provided

Hosts provide:

- Project plan for a week-long service project for new / inexperienced volunteers
- Technical expertise and supervision of the volunteers
- Lodging/Accommodations for volunteers (cabin, lodge, house, or campsite. Please note indoor accommodations are often preferred)
- Tools & safety equipment/first-aid supplies
- [Group cooking supplies](#) including stove, pots, pans, utensils, and fuel or access to a full kitchen

Timeline & Next Steps:

If you are interested in hosting an Alternative Break crew, please submit an online application. In your application, you will let us know your maximum group size, general availability to host, and accommodation details. Contact volunteer@americanhiking.org with any questions about the application process.

Once your application is reviewed and approved, we will advertise your project online, via social media and on our email list.

If a school group is interested in sending volunteers to your location, we will reach out to connect you with the group leader and confirm final details and availability.

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AHS staff will provide logistical support and communication throughout the entire pre-trip planning process, ensuring that both hosts and volunteers have a safe, fun and productive trip.

PLAN YOUR PROJECT:

Task Selection:

American Hiking is dedicated to protecting foot trails and the public lands that surround them. Therefore, the bulk of your Alternative Break volunteer project should be focused on building or maintaining foot trails on public land. Goals and specific tasks for the week should be determined based on the final size of your volunteer crew. When a project is confirmed, you will receive a roster with the volunteer's skills and experiences detailed for each participant. Consider the crew, their trail experience, their fitness level, and their age in selecting the tasks to complete. Most students are active and up for a challenge, but are not avid hikers and the majority have never done trail work before.

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. Weather could affect which projects can be accomplished- especially in March. Always have a backup or additional project 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 and the tasks you aim to complete. Most trips will have volunteers arriving on Sunday evening. Sunday evening is generally used for 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 a day off), so 4 days of actual trail work. Saturday will generally be used for cleaning up/breaking down camp and travel. We advise Alternative Break crews to expect to work 6-7 hours on the work days. You will need to discuss the exact hours of work and start/end times with the group's 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).

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. 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. Once a group is secured for a particular week at your location, lodging needs to be reserved and confirmed. Students ask many questions about lodging, so being as detailed as possible about amenities is really helpful. While every group varies in their preference, the majority of groups will prefer to stay in indoor accommodations that have access to an indoor kitchen/cooking facility and indoor bathrooms. We will still consider your request if it is camping in nature, but providing access to a kitchen and indoor bathrooms is helpful and increases the interest in your project.

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.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH AHS:

AHS staff will be in touch with you should a school express interest in your project to confirm if the dates and accommodations are available. Locations are confirmed year round, since we work with students who like to complete service projects during winter, spring, and summer breaks, however March Spring Breaks are the most popular time. To better ensure follow-through from the student groups, we require a deposit to officially reserve a week at any location. Once this deposit is received, we proceed with making final plans for the trip and collecting registration forms. The final roster and registration information is confirmed as early as possible, but usually 1 month prior to the trip start date.

Once a group is secured for a particular week at your location, and the group leader is determined, I will put you in contact with the designated group leader. This person will contact you regarding logistics and project details on behalf of the crew. The students will often request to set up a meeting with AHS & the host so that they can ask questions and meet the host staff in advance of the trip. AHS will coordinate the meeting logistics.

ONSITE

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:

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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. Discuss what steps should be taken in case of emergency.

Supervision and Training:

Given the inexperience of the Alternative Break crews, full supervision of the crew while on the project site is required. 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.

Tools/Safety Equipment:

We ask that you provide any necessary tools and safety equipment required for project completion. 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:

Hosts are required to 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 [linked here](#). Volunteers are asked to provide their own personal eating utensils including plate/cup/knife/fork (for camping trips).

SAFETY & ILLNESS PROTOCOL

Emergency Response:

The safety of our volunteers, hosts, and partners is our highest concern. Hosts must take every precaution to avoid injury or illness during the scope of the project work, which includes providing a full briefing of potential risks that volunteers might encounter, and how to mitigate those risks while on the trail. Each individual host is responsible for following their own safety protocol in the event of illness or injury during the trip, and responding immediately to all injuries and illnesses.

If a volunteer needs emergency medical assistance, refer to the person in the group with the highest medical training (usually the host staff) to provide immediate care while en route to definitive care such as a hospital, emergency room, or urgent care clinic. Do not hesitate to call 9-1-1 and seek additional emergency medical care should the situation call for it. Once the patient is receiving medical care, contact AHS staff and the volunteer's emergency contact if additional follow up is needed. AHS will provide an incident form to complete after the conclusion of the trip. AHS will not cover the cost of any medical or evacuation services.

COVID-19 and other illnesses:

The most up-to-date version of our COVID-19 protocol can be found [online here](#). At this time, American Hiking does not check or collect vaccination status for any staff, volunteers, or host partners. Volunteers are required to abide by all local, state and federal COVID-19 travel and group regulations and any additional safety requirements as required by individual hosts. This may include requiring a negative COVID test, quarantine before and after arrival, wearing masks indoors when not eating, or other requirements upon entering that state.

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AHS recommends that all volunteers stay up to date and follow the Center for Disease Control's Domestic Travel Guidelines before, during and after their Volunteer Vacation, which may include wearing a mask when traveling, remaining socially distant from those outside your household, self-isolating and testing prior to and upon return of your trip, and continually monitoring yourself for COVID-19 symptoms.

All trip participants must provide their own health and accident insurance in case of injury or illness while on their trip. AHS or any of its partners can neither be held responsible for potential transmission of nor exposure to COVID-19 on the trip and during travel to and from the trip.

MANAGING ILLNESS ON A TRIP:

- Those exhibiting symptoms of illness need to self-isolate from others and consider leaving the trip depending on severity of symptoms. AHS strongly urges that the individual seek medical attention at the nearest facility for moderate to severe illness. AHS will not cover the cost of any medical or evacuation services.
- Anyone with a fever or exhibiting symptoms of suspected COVID-19 must quarantine themselves (stay completely away from anyone who is not a member of their household and stay away from any surface touched by others) while they are preparing to leave.

DAY OFF & EVENING ACTIVITIES

Local Activities:

We strive to provide both satisfying work and play on our Alternative Break 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 a full-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 group leader and announced to the crew during orientation.

MEAL PLANNING & FOOD

Food Purchasing:

For most Alternative Breaks, the menu planning and food purchasing is arranged by the student or staff group leader. However, if they are flying to the project location, they might need transportation and assistance with shopping on their arrival day. If they are driving to the project site and do not need transportation, please be prepared to provide information regarding local grocery stores.

If the host is providing food, please refer to the **Menu & Meal Planning Guide** (request from AHS staff) for detailed instructions on providing meals for your volunteer crew. You will receive dietary restrictions, allergy information & any special requests for each crew member upon confirmation of the trip.