

The Youth Opportunities Program



Thank you for your interest in the Appalachian Mountain Club's (AMC) Youth Opportunities Program (YOP). This packet provides specific information about YOP and our Outdoor Leadership Training (OLT). Please read this information carefully and give us a call with any questions; our contact information is listed at the end of this document.

YOP's Mission

The Youth Opportunities Program is an outdoor education, professional development, and social justice program of the Appalachian Mountain Club. Through Outdoor Leadership Training, trip planning support, and access to gear lending libraries, we collaborate with youth workers and teachers so they may foster impactful and relevant outdoor experiences for their youth.

YOP partners with organizations and schools in urban and under-resourced communities that historically have faced barriers to outdoor recreation. We envision a future where more youth enjoy the outdoors, and where outdoor participation is reflective of every community, with equitable access for all.

Our History

The Youth Opportunities Program began in Boston in 1968 during the civil rights movement, when much of the country was in turmoil over racial conflict and social injustices. The Appalachian Mountain Club became increasingly concerned about how these tensions were affecting Boston's young people. The AMC approached urban organizations to offer resources and training to get youth outdoors, and YOP's "train-the-trainer" model was born. By providing youth workers with training, equipment loans, and other resources, the AMC supported backpacking, camping, and hiking trips for youth, offering a unique opportunity for them to develop leadership skills and a connection to the outdoors.

The first outing consisted of a small group of youth from Roxbury, Massachusetts, who ventured to the White Mountains during the summer of 1968 and returned home with exciting stories and talk of going back. Two more Roxbury groups took to the mountains that summer, soon to be followed in summers to come by teens from Dorchester, Mattapan, downtown Boston, and Cambridge

Since its grassroots beginning in 1968, YOP has grown and evolved in an ongoing effort to provide youth and youth workers from northeastern cities with a successful education, leadership, and adventure program. Today there are YOP members throughout New England, New York, and New Jersey. We now offer more than 10 outdoor leadership trainings throughout the spring, summer and fall, as well as dozens of workshops to support our members' leadership development, including training in backpacking, camping, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, trip planning, map and compass, wilderness first aid, Leave No Trace, canoeing, and more. Our program has successfully trained more than 5,000 youth workers and teachers – professionals who have in turn brought the outdoors to more than 250,000 urban youth. And the numbers continue to grow!

About the AMC

Founded in 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club promotes the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the mountains, forest, waters, and trails of America's Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. We believe these resources have intrinsic worth and also provide recreational opportunities, spiritual renewal, and ecological and economic health for the region.

AMC's Commitment to Diversity

The AMC encourages the involvement of all people in its mission and activities, through its membership, programs, policies, and procedures. Our goal is to be a community that is comfortable, inviting, and accessible for people of any age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

YOP Member Benefits

Leaders who have successfully completed the OLT are eligible to receive many benefits from the Youth Opportunities Program. These resources make it possible for youth workers and teachers to lead their youth on outdoor adventures.

- **Equipment Loans:** YOP Members may borrow outdoor gear from YOP's eleven equipment rooms located throughout the region. This includes tents, sleeping bags, stoves, fuel bottles, backpacks, daypacks, hiking boots, warm clothing, rain gear, and water bottles.
- **Additional Training and Workshops:** Leaders who have successfully completed the OLT are encouraged to continue their outdoor education with YOP by taking workshops in snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, Wilderness First Aid, team building, canoeing, trip planning, and advanced backpacking. Those who have completed these workshops in addition to the OLT may then borrow applicable equipment such as canoes, paddles, lifejackets, cross-country skis, ski poles, winter boots, winter sleeping bags, and snowshoes.
- **Trip Planning:** YOP helps youth workers and teachers find the information they need to plan their trips. YOP staff are available to answer questions, address risk management concerns, and make equipment and AMC lodging reservations.
- **Reduced Lodging Rates:** YOP Members are eligible for reduced rates at AMC huts, camps, and lodges making it affordable to bring youth to visit stunning locations across Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and New Jersey.
- **Youth Adventures:** Throughout the year YOP offers a variety of Youth Adventures which typically include additional assistance such as food, transportation, lodging, and staffing support.
- **Other Amazing Benefits Include:** Free AMC membership for a year, opportunities to network with other youth workers and online membership resources through our YOP Member Hub.

YOP Membership Guidelines

We have developed the following guidelines for participation in the OLT and YOP.

- **YOP Membership:** Upon successful completion of the Outdoor Leadership Training, youth workers become YOP Members for a period of two years and receive membership benefits according to their YOP Member Profile. YOP Members renew their membership by participating in a qualifying "refresher workshop" within 2 years in order to continue receiving YOP benefits.
- **YOP Member Profiles:** At the conclusion of the OLT, participants take part in an assessment process with their instructors to determine their YOP Member Profile. Possible Member Profiles depend on the type of OLT and the skills, experience, and comfort level of each participant. In turn, the Member Profile reflects the types of trips a member can lead with YOP's support. Participation in other YOP workshops and additional trip leading experience allow youth workers to grow and change their profile and lead more advanced trips. We encourage all YOP members to continue to build their skills by attending additional trainings and leading trips with YOP's support. See pages 7 – 9 for a comparison of OLT types and possible Member Profiles.
- **YOP Member Ratio of benefits:** In order to practice leave No Trace ethics, to think about best risk management practice and to equitably share the YOP resources, YOP members receive lodging benefits and

free gear loan benefits for themselves, another adult and 10 youth per trip. We will outfit you and 11 other individuals with all the gear you need (according to your profile, and assuming availability of inventory), and, if needed and available, we will subsidize the cost of staying at an AMC destination and/or other partner campsites for you and 11 other individuals. If your trip includes more than 10 youth, we recommend that you find a colleague or friend to take the YOP Outdoor Leadership Training, and this will allow for benefits to apply to the larger group.

- **Age:** Youth workers must be 21 years or older in order to participate in the OLT and become a YOP member.
- **Two Trip Minimum:** OLT participants are expected to lead a minimum of two trips within a year of taking the training, though many will go on to lead more. This can include day hikes, backpacking, camping, and other outdoor activities. These trips will naturally be based on the skills, interests, and schedules of each individual YOP Member and the youth they serve.
- **Trip Reports:** We ask that YOP Members report on the youth trips that they lead by completing a Trip Report through the online YOP Member Hub. Trip reports help us ensure ongoing funding and support for YOP.
- **Youth Agencies:** YOP is open to **all youth-serving groups and schools**; however we prioritize agencies and schools serving youth from urban and under-resourced communities. YOP's significantly subsidized lodging rates may be adjusted for some youth agencies and schools depending on the circumstances.
- **YOP's Role:** The OLT teaches a wide range of skills needed to lead youth on outdoor trips but is not a certification process. YOP provides support and resources needed to help make outdoor trips possible and can provide suggestions and ideas to members prior to any trip; however, YOP staff does not typically accompany members on trips. Agencies assume full responsibility and ownership for all their trips.
- **Lodging Discount:** AMC destinations across New England and the Mid-Atlantic region are available to YOP Members at greatly reduced rates. Destinations are extremely popular and often fill quickly. YOP Members are encouraged to plan their calendars at least 6 months in advance in order to have the best chance at getting preferred reservation dates. First priority for these subsidized rates will be given to agencies and schools that serve youth from urban, under-resourced communities.
- **Equipment Loans:** The type of equipment that YOP members may borrow is based on their individual Member Profile determined by YOP at the conclusion of the OLT.
- **Trip Seasons:** Successful completion of the OLT qualifies youth workers to lead "three season" trips – outings that take place in the spring, summer, or fall. This is typically mid-May to mid-October in New Hampshire and April to November in Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey. Ask for details on specific locations; trip seasons will vary based on weather and geography. YOP Members interested in leading winter trips must attend a winter skills workshop in order to borrow winter equipment or stay at an AMC destination during the winter.
- **Rates and Scholarships:** OLT and workshop fees are subsidized rates, for which most agencies and schools serving youth from urban and under-resourced communities will qualify. After reviewing your OLT application, YOP will contact you if the subsidized rate does not apply to your agency. We are also happy to consider providing additional financial assistance to those in need – you may request additional scholarship funds when completing the OLT application.
- **YOP Community:** YOP's greatest asset is our community of YOP Members and volunteers. All YOP Members are invited to participate in community gatherings, committee meetings, and social events hosted by YOP. YOP Members are also encouraged to participate in volunteer opportunities throughout the year.

The Outdoor Leadership Training

Overview

Many YOP members have told us that the Outdoor Leadership Training (OLT) has had a significant impact on their lives. Whether you overcome a fear, gain a new perspective, or just meet some great new people, the OLT will be like nothing you've ever experienced before.

The **purpose** of the OLT is to teach **basic outdoor and leadership skills**. These skills are all taught in the context of **taking youth outdoors**, a specialized type of trip leadership with unique challenges and rewards. The training is **experiential** which means that you will **learn by doing**; you will learn from your triumphs as well as from your challenges.

YOP offers a variety of Outdoor Leadership Trainings each year, ranging from three to five days and focused on camping, hiking, or backpacking skills. All trainings include a pre-trip meeting and several days of outdoor adventure in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, or New Jersey. Youth workers are encouraged to select the training that best meets their needs – see below for more specifics on each type of training.

Please note that in order to fully participate and engage in the OLT experience, all participants are asked to leave their cellphones and other electronics behind during the training. We understand that this may be a challenge, but we encourage you to embrace the opportunity to disconnect and be fully present in the moment. We also encourage you to have youth do the same on their outdoor adventures. We will provide a phone number should you need to be reached in case of emergency.

The OLT is one of the best and most helpful trainings I have ever been involved with.
– OLT Participant

What You Will Learn

The OLT covers four fundamental areas of outdoor leadership: technical skills, group dynamics, methods of leadership, and environmental awareness. Trip leaders with knowledge and skill in all four areas will be prepared to lead a variety of trips, from day hikes to camping to backpacking.

1. **Technical skills** training include lessons on navigation, equipment use, discussions about wilderness first aid, and risk management. These are the basic tools to lead an outdoor trip effectively and smoothly.
2. **Group dynamics** are explored through role-plays, games, and discussion. We teach strategies for creating a positive, inclusive group environment. Youth who are new to the outdoors will often behave differently in this new setting, so we try to prepare leaders for the potential challenges and opportunities their group may face.
3. **Leadership** is explored through an in-depth look at various methods and styles of leadership. Being a good leader means being an educator, an advisor, a motivator, a problem-solver and a decision-maker. Through role-playing, discussions, and the use of a Leader of the Day model, we help leaders balance these varying roles and find a style that works best for them.
4. **Environmental awareness** is emphasized in lessons on natural history and low-impact camping and hiking. We teach leaders to set a positive example for youth by being good stewards of the outdoors through practicing Leave No Trace principles.

Experiential Training and Leadership Model

YOP uses a Leader of the Day model. During the trip, each participant will be the co-leader of their group for a time. Except for the basic itinerary and in emergency situations, decisions will be made by the Leaders of the Day and the group. Leaders of the Day will be responsible for reviewing the route with the rest of the group, checking to make sure all needed equipment is included, coordinating group members, and dealing with issues that arise.

Along the way, the instructors may set up role-plays to illustrate scenarios that can (and probably will) happen when you take a group of youth into the woods. Confronting the role-play situations as real and dealing with them accordingly can be a great learning opportunity - both for you and the rest of the group. It is a safe time to make mistakes and learn new ways to handle challenges. At the end of each day, the group will spend time processing the activities and accomplishments of that day and reflecting on the decisions, leadership styles, and effectiveness of the group and the Leaders of the Day.

I was surprised at how extensive, well-organized, and well thought out every aspect of the training was and how incredibly generous YOP has been. – OLT Participant

Evaluation & feedback

At the end of the training you will be asked to evaluate yourself and the overall training experience through an individual assessment meeting with your Instructors. Together you will discuss the types of trips you feel comfortable leading and opportunities for further growth to determine your Member Profile. YOP uses these profiles to determine the types of trips that members can lead with YOP support and to offer support for future training and experience.

Our Instructors

Each OLT is co-led by 2-3 YOP instructors who have experience in outdoor leadership and youth development. Sometimes instructors are YOP staff, but often they are YOP volunteers who are so committed to sharing the outdoors with youth that they volunteer their personal time each year to help instruct the OLT. They bring their experiences and their success working with youth in the outdoors to the OLT to help you learn.

The instructors' role is to ensure the overall safety of the group, to facilitate the learning scenarios, to teach new skills, and to help process the day's activities. Your instructors are not there to provide all the answers or make decisions, but to help you and the group find the answers and make the decisions.

Equipment and Clothing

We will send you a clothing and equipment list for your specific Outdoor Leadership Training when we confirm your registration. You should not need to purchase any clothing or outdoor equipment for the OLT – you can borrow nearly everything you'll need from our equipment room. For each training, YOP provides: food, education materials, tents, sleeping bags, ground pads, backpacks, stoves, cooking equipment, compasses, first aid kits, maps and guidebooks, and more.

Safety

As participant safety is a high priority for all AMC trainings, procedures and policies have been developed to manage and limit participant risk. Participants are expected to work with staff to reduce risks and make the experience successful for all involved. In case an emergency does occur, AMC instructors are trained in Wilderness First Aid, carry backcountry first aid kits, and follow a comprehensive Emergency Action Plan developed for each individual training group. Instructors carry cell phones and/or radios, although these are not reliable in all locations and conditions. Despite such steps, participants should be aware that there are risks associated with outdoor adventure activities, including but not limited to, cooking and camp chores, adverse weather and environmental conditions,

transportation in vehicles and on foot, and the remote locations of our trips. Please carefully read the Participant Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risks and the Release and Indemnity Agreement, and call if you have any questions. Your understanding of these risks and adherence to our policies and procedures contributes to making this experience successful.

AMC Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC)

In addition to the program-specific information provided in these materials, please note that the [AMC has Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#) that apply to all participants in AMC-sponsored activities. These criteria were created to help potential participants identify and understand the fundamental cognitive and physical requirements of participating in AMC activities. The EEC are a resource for anyone considering participating in an AMC-sponsored activity.

Choosing the training that's right for you

Backpacking, Hiking, Camping – which training should you take? Since 1968, YOP has been offering a **Backpacking Outdoor Leadership Training**. This classic wilderness training, which many participants have called life-changing, is appropriate for all youth workers who want to take their youth on outdoor adventures, regardless of experience level. If you are open to learning and new experiences, in relatively good shape, and enjoy challenging yourself, this is your training! Participants in the backpacking OLT often have a wide variety of backgrounds; many have no previous outdoor background while some bring several years of experience. The diversity of skills and experiences adds to the learning environment and prepares youth workers to more effectively lead their own trips. The Backpacking OLT offers participants an extended wilderness experience packed with new leadership and outdoor skills. This training can be physically and emotionally challenging, so a healthy sense of adventure and tolerance for challenge and adversity is helpful.

It's tough. It's frustrating. It's the best thing I ever did.
– OLT Participant

YOP also offers a **Camping and Day Hiking Outdoor Leadership Training**. While no experience is necessary for any of our trainings, we recognize that four or five days spent backpacking may feel overwhelming as a first-time experience. In contrast to the Backpacking OLT in which participants carry all of their equipment and spend each night at a different site along their hiking route, the Camping OLT uses a “base-camp” model, focusing on the skills necessary for leading day hikes and camping trips. The group will spend each night at the same campsite and go on hikes from that base. Participants will spend three or four nights camping in tents. No experience is required – just a willingness to learn and contribute.

YOP's three-day **Camping Outdoor Leadership Training** focuses on the basics of camping with youth. This is an excellent introduction for those new to outdoor adventure and interested in learning camping skills. Participants will spend two nights base camping, learning engaging outdoor activities and building skills in risk management, sensory awareness activities, games, campfire activities, Leave No Trace Principles and more. No experience is necessary.

YOP's three-day **Hiking Outdoor Leadership Training** focuses on the skills needed to get youth out on the trail for a hike. The group will stay indoors at AMC's Cardigan Lodge and venture out for several different hikes, ranging from 3 to 6 miles, with some steep and challenging terrain. We'll focus on planning and preparing for hikes, risk management, strategies to keep the group together, trail games and activities, Leave No Trace, and more. This OLT provides another great option for those new to the outdoors.

OLT Comparison

	BACKPACKING	CAMPING & DAY HIKING	CAMPING	HIKING
WHO SHOULD ATTEND	Suggested for youth workers and teachers who enjoy a challenge, are in good physical condition, and are interested in leading a variety of outdoor trips.	Recommended for youth workers who plan to lead day trips, day hikes, or camping overnights. Suggested for those who may not want to backpack for 5 days.	An excellent introduction for those new to outdoor adventure. Suggested for those who are interested in more “close to home” camping opportunities.	An excellent introduction for those new to outdoor adventure. Suggested for those who are interested in day trips or overnights at roadside lodges.
SUMMARY	Each night is spent at a different campsite along the hiking route. All gear for the duration of the trip is carried on each participant’s back. Backpacking is a challenging experience full of fun, learning, and adventure.	Focus is on day hiking and “base-camping” skill development. Each night is spent at the same location. Day hikes range from 3 to 6 miles, covering some challenging terrain.	Focus is on “base camping” skill development. Each night is spent at the same location. Activities will focus on camping with youth exploring new surroundings. Hiking will not be a part of this training.	Focus is on day hiking. Day hikes range from 3 to 6 miles each day, covering some challenging terrain.
LOCATIONS	White Mountains, NH; Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, NJ	Cardigan Mountain, NH; White Mountains, NH; Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, NJ; Harriman State Park, NY	Blue Hills, MA; Ecology Village, NY	Cardigan Mountain, NH
DURATION	4 or 5 days	4 or 5 days	3 days	3 days
PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE	No experience required, but participants should be in good physical condition and enjoy a physical and mental challenge.	No experience required	No experience required	No experience required
ACCOMMODATIONS	Tents shared with 1-3 people Composting toilets or backcountry bathrooms. Meals cooked by the group on backpacking stoves.	Tents shared with 1-3 people. Composting and/or portable bathroom facilities. Meals cooked by the group on camping stoves.	Tents shared with 1-3 people. Composting and/or portable bathroom facilities. Meals cooked by the group on camping stoves.	Bunk room in lodge shared with 1-3 people. Running water and flush toilets in lodge. Meals prepared by the group in a fully-equipped kitchen.
PHYSICAL EXPECTATION	Able to carry up to 40 lbs. for up to 7 miles over challenging terrain, for more than 8 hours per day.	Able to carry up to 15 lbs. for up to 6 miles for more than 8 hours per day	Able to carry up to 10 lbs. for up to 1 mile.	Able to carry up to 15 lbs. for up to 6 miles for more than 8 hours per day
TRIP TYPES, LODGING AND EQUIPMENT BENEFITS	Based on YOP Member Profile. Possible Member Profiles include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backpacker • Hiker and Camper • Hiker • Camper 	Based on YOP Member Profile. Possible Member Profiles include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiker and Camper • Hiker • Camper 	Based on YOP Member Profile. Possible Member Profiles include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camper 	Based on YOP Member Profile. Possible Member Profiles include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiker

YOP Member Profiles

OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING TYPE	Backpacking			
	Camping and Hiking			Backpacker
	Camping	Hiking	Camper + Hiker	
Possible YOP Member Profile Types	Camper	Hiker	Camper + Hiker	Backpacker
Equipment Privileges				
Hiking equipment		•	•	•
Camping equipment	•		•	•
Backpacking equipment				•
Trip Types and Season				
Day hikes with indoor overnight(s)		•	•	•
Day hike, no overnight		•	•	•
Camping up to 3 nights	•		•	•
Spring, summer, fall	•	•	•	•
Multi-day backpacking				•
AMC destinations	AMC Campsites	AMC Lodges and Cabins	AMC Campsites, Lodges & Cabins; some AMC huts and Cardigan High Cabin*	AMC Campsites, Lodges, and Cabins, AMC Huts, AMC Backcountry Campsites

AMC Campsites: Ponkapoag Camp, Harold Parker State Forest, Noble View Outdoor Center, Mohican Outdoor Center, Corman Harriman Outdoor Center, Ecology Village

AMC Lodges & Cabins: Joe Dodge Lodge, Highland Center, Cardigan Lodge, Mohican Outdoor Center, Harriman Outdoor Center

AMC Huts and Cardigan High Cabin: “Low Huts” (below treeline) include Lonesome Lake Hut, Zealand Falls Hut, Carter Notch Hut, and Mizpah Spring Hut. “High Huts” (above/near treeline) include Lakes of the Clouds Hut, Madison Spring Hut, Greenleaf Hut, and Galehead Hut. Cardigan High Cabin is located on the side of Mt. Cardigan.

AMC Backcountry Campsites: Located throughout the White Mountains and include backcountry lean-to shelters and tent platforms.

How to apply

The OLT application is available online at www.outdoors.org/yop/apply. We recommend that you review the application before completing it online and consider downloading a copy for reference. You will likely need some information from your supervisor/agency director to complete the application.

Please note that OLTs fill very quickly and we recommend applying as soon as possible. Our application reviewers expect that all submitted applications are complete and closely reflect your work with youth and your readiness for the training. Once we have reviewed your application we will contact you to confirm your registration or ask any follow-up questions. Shortly before the start of the training we will be in touch with a final information packet as well as directions and a few reminders.

Please submit your application and payment as soon as possible if you intend to participate in the training. Please contact us with any questions you might have: We hope you'll join us!

YOP New England (Massachusetts and New Hampshire OLTs)
Megan Luce, New England Program Coordinator
617-391-6567, mluce@outdoors.org

YOP New York/New Jersey (New York and New Jersey OLTs)
Sebastien Venuat, NY/NJ Manager
646-292-5253, svenuat@outdoors.org

General information: amcyop@outdoors.org
www.outdoors.org/yop

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– OLT Participant*
