

Volunteer Handbook

Volunteer Units Working with Youth and Families



Short Synopsis: *Chapters are particularly well suited to create local opportunities for families to get outdoors together and build connections to AMC and one another. Chapters are not permitted to initiate or form relationships with youth organizations without supervision and engagement from staff.*

Introduction

For many years AMC has worked to reach and engage with the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts and conservation advocates. Chapters have a unique opportunity to reach people close to home. This document includes updated guidance and best practices to support chapter family engagement. If you have any questions, please reach out to Meighan Matthews, Volunteer Relations Manager.

Note that AMC has zero tolerance for child abuse of any kind. While at present, we are not conducting background checks on AMC volunteer Leaders, AMC is working towards implementation at the recommendation of both our Outdoor Leadership Development Committee (OLDC) and our insurance company. At some point in future, all volunteers will be required to undergo a background check as a condition of volunteering for AMC.

Providing Outdoor Experiences that are Designed for Families

This is the most important action chapters can take. At present, AMC is not known for its family friendly programs outside of our lodging experience. We do not have a deep bench of experienced family outings leaders. This limits our capacity to work with partners on youth focused events like Earth Day celebrations. When chapters focus on providing outdoor experiences for families within the AMC they:

- Build a reputation for being family friendly
- Create a cadre of volunteer Leaders with experience working with youth outdoors
- Foster community for children and their adults who enjoy time outdoors – help them make new friends in outdoor settings
- Strengthen their Leader pipeline by introducing adults to volunteer opportunities.

Actions:

1. Set a goal for offering X# of local, short duration (2 hours max) outdoor experiences. Ideas:
 - a. Offer a regular day of the month like First Sundays
 - b. Focus on a particular park with a lot of trails that has a play or picnic area or other attractive feature like a pond, stream, or big rocks.
 - c. Create a seasonal series that invites people to have repeat experiences with your chapter-led events.
 - d. Focus on school vacation weeks for a series of outdoor and learning experiences
2. Check in with your existing leaders to identify problems we can solve. Are they?
 - a. Leaders who are interested in leading events for families and have experience
 - b. Leaders who would lead events for families if someone went with them, or if they could have some additional training
 - c. Leaders who want to lead events for families, but are not sure how that works at AMC
3. Support posting of family friendly events
 - a. Provide AMC content like our *Outdoors with Kids* books, maps, or other resources for Leaders who need ideas for family friendly locations
 - b. Work with Meighan Matthews, Volunteer Relations Manager, to identify someone in your chapter to work with her and other chapters on cross-organizational activities and other ideas.

Partnering with Youth or Community Organizations

Several chapters inquired about outreach to local youth organizations. **AMC Chapters must have the support and oversight of AMC staff before reaching out to youth or community organizations.** Staff will usually be in the Educators Outdoors or Guided Outdoors Programs. This requirement reduces the confusion created when more than one part of AMC reaches out to the same group. It supports AMC's standards of engagement for working well with community groups so that we create mutually beneficial relationships that align the strengths of the AMC with the needs identified by the organization. Staff offer partners the breadth of AMC's resources devoted to supporting youth engagement outdoors including ongoing training for educators, curriculum resources, discounts at lodging, and access to gear. For more information, reach out to Meighan Matthews, Volunteer Relations Manager.

Here are some frequently asked questions from chapters about interacting with Youth Organizations.

1. **Can we simply donate funds?**

No. AMC is not a grant provider or a foundation and we cannot simply write a check to another organization where there is no deeper partnership.

2. **The Worcester Chapter has offered financial support to the benefit of Youth Organizations and schools in Worcester for many years. How can we do that?**

The Worcester Chapter, and the Connecticut Chapter have both contributed funds to support AMC's Educators Outdoors Program on those chapters so that staff can build relationships with local youth organizations and support their needs. Worcester has also contributed to support school attendance in A Mountain Classroom Program to support participation in experiential environmental learning at AMC locations. We also have outreach programs in place in Coos County in NH and Piscataquis County and Jackman, ME that need funding support. If you would like to learn more about financial support for AMC's youth programs, please contact Meighan.

3. **What if someone in my chapter has a connection to a Youth Organization they think would like to work with AMC?**

Reach out to your Volunteer Relations Manager so they can connect you with the right staff person who can learn more about how AMC can work best with that group.

4. **Why can't I just call up the Director of the local community organization and see if they are interested in working with AMC?**

It is not the role of volunteers to perform this outreach on behalf of the AMC. A cornerstone of AMC's outreach efforts with community groups is to respect their time and priorities. We are working to change historical patterns of outreach and engagement from 'let us tell you what you want and need' to 'let's talk about your organization's goals and whether or not AMC can meet those needs'. Our professional staff have training in this kind of outreach to build lasting relationships. In addition, as chapter volunteers are not background checked and do not take part in youth protection training, we are not well positioned to offer support.

If you have other questions, reach out. AMC does hope to grow its family outings offerings and its relationships with youth organizations. While we have lots of ideas, it's good to hear your thoughts too.