

TOOLKITS

Energy: Public Lands Stewardship

TRAIL MAINTENANCE & INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL**THE FACTS**

Hiking trails across the nation are in constant need of attention from causes both natural and man-made. They are commonly damaged by erosion, foliage, litter and wildlife.

Water is a trail's worst enemy. Storms can wash out trails and sever tree limbs, blocking a trail or making it unsafe for hikers. Even normal levels of rainfall can cause erosion and have long term effects on a trail. Aside from erosion, wildlife is known to burrow into trails. Human traffic will litter and deteriorate trail boundaries, and the surrounding foliage will inevitably create obstacles.

With thousands of trails to maintain, volunteers are a necessary component of their creation and preservation. Volunteer groups around the country routinely repair damaged trails and create new ones for the nation to enjoy. It takes time and training to become an effective trail maintenance volunteer, but the payoff is worth the effort.

This summer, commit yourself and a team of your friends, family, and neighbors to help restore America's park trails and join United We Serve. This tool kit will give you the basics to recruit a team, organize your group, and make an impact this summer.

GETTING STARTED

While no two projects will be the same, successful projects will share a few common practices. We encourage you to incorporate the following elements into your service project:

- Create a team with your friends and neighbors to share the effort;
- Set outcome-based goals and track your progress to those goals;
- Celebrate your successes together.

The Challenge: Many community-based organizations do not have enough capacity to manage a large number of volunteers, so they need you to organize yourself in coordination with them. This tool kit is designed to either help you organize a group and be a positive addition to a community-based organization, or, if such an organization does not exist, to be a well-organized independently-run group that fills a needed gap in the community.

A step by step guide to getting started and executing service activities follows. Please let us know how your project goes and what you learn by telling your story at Serve.gov.

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Whether you wish to work on a specific trail or you simply want to volunteer in your community, check out the organizations already working in your area. There may already be an active volunteer group that you could join. Local organizations will have knowledge of the area trails and their maintenance needs. There are several ways to identify local groups and volunteer opportunities.

- Contact local [hiking groups](#), ask them how volunteers can contribute
- Check [Serve.gov](#) and search “Trail/Campground Maintenance”
- The [American Hiking Society](#) also maintains a database of trail maintenance programs
- Check [Refugeenet](#) for nearby projects fighting invasive species

STEP TWO: BUILD A TEAM

Teams can help share the work, motivate members, and hold each other accountable. Teams build community. Ask your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and faith group members to serve with you.

- Host a house meeting or pot luck to choose a project, set goals, recruit volunteers and plan next steps.
- [Get a guide for hosting a house meeting](#)
- Post your service activity on [Serve.gov](#) to recruit new volunteers.

STEP THREE: SET A GOAL

Set a service goal for June 22 – September 11 and hold yourself accountable. Find out what your partner organization needs and then work to fill that need. Commit as individuals and as a team to clearing a certain number of miles of trail. Set your goals high to stretch yourself. Then keep track of how you are doing and designate someone to be responsible for updating the group on how you are progressing toward your goals. You’ll be surprised at how much you can do when you commit, focus, and follow through.

- [Get a goal-setting guide](#)

STEP FOUR: SERVE YOUR COMMUNITY

The key to effective service is planning. Organize your materials, make confirmation calls and, if you have time, read supplemental materials before you volunteer.

- [Get a tip sheet for your service activity](#)
- Make sure that all volunteers participating have been properly trained to use any necessary tools and that they check with local authorities before making significant changes to the land.

STEP FIVE: REPORT AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES

Your team members, the community, and the President want to know about your successes and hear your stories. Share your accomplishments by reporting your results. We will highlight the best stories throughout the summer. Tell us about your successes and what you have learned, or just tell your story of service at [Serve.gov](#)

FOLLOW UP

SPREAD THE SERVICE

- After every event, thank other volunteers and sign them up for the next event.

FINDING LOCAL PARTNERS: PUBLIC LANDS STEWARDSHIP

Check out the organizations already doing good work in your community. Many existing service groups have identified community needs and built the expertise to provide solutions. Get plugged in with them!

It will be helpful to provide background on the local service landscape to the attendees of your house meeting. A few phone calls can produce all the information you need to know your options.

- Search national and local trails, [hiking](#) and [public lands](#) volunteer organizations
- Ask them how volunteers can bring value (use script below)
- If none of these organizations exist in your community, contact your local or state natural resources or parks department to begin your own volunteer group.

PHONE SCRIPT:

- Hi, my name is _____ and I’m interested in volunteering with your organization. May I speak with your volunteer coordinator?
- Do you need a volunteer to help coordinator other volunteers?
- What kind of volunteer opportunities do you have for local residents?
- If I organize a group of my friends to volunteer with me, how many volunteers can you take?
- How many days a week do you need volunteers?
- What kind of training/background check do you provide?
- Are you the best person for me to contact?

Group name	Contact name	Contact number	Days to volunteer	# of vols needed

House Meetings

Purpose:

House meetings are a valuable tactic for recruiting volunteers and building a team. House meetings allow community members to share their concerns and join together to work for progress. Within the room, you already have all the tools you need to enact change on a local level. Every attendee can contribute time or resources or leadership abilities.

Your house meeting will help you identify your leadership team. The people that are committed enough to come to your house meeting should be considered potential leaders of the initiatives being implemented in their communities.

As a house meeting host, invite people from your social network to participate in a discussion about your community, pressing needs, and potential solutions. House meetings often engage people new to service and unclear about next steps. Serving with the support of a team will increase the ease and comfort of many new volunteers.

Building community through house meetings is a critical step toward the President's ultimate goal, which is to support everyday Americans in a grassroots effort to improve lives and strengthen communities.

A House Meeting

Goals

- Choose and plan a service project for the summer.
- Set measurable group and personal goals for your United We Serve project.
- Identify 5 attendees to be team leaders.
- Plan the next meeting of the leadership team and identify next steps for each leader.
- Obtain commitments from all attendees to volunteer on a regular basis from June 22 – September 11.

Host Duties

- Before
 - To have **20** people attend, you will need to invite **50**. Brainstorm a list of **50** people to invite. Include your friends, family, members of your faith group, colleagues, book club attendees, etc.
 - Make calls to the **50** people on your list to invite them to your house meeting. Remember that phone calls are much more effective than a mass email.
 - Post your house meeting on Serve.gov and invite local residents interested in volunteering to attend.
 - Browse Serve.gov to see what needs in your community aren't being met and which organizations you might be able to partner with. Take some preliminary steps to identify local partners already working in the community.
 - Prepare necessary materials.

- During
 - Be prepared to give a short explanation of why you became involved/what inspired you to serve.
 - Consider how you most want to serve your community. President Obama has identified four target areas for summer service: health, education, community renewal, and energy and environment. What does your community most need?

- After
 - Thank attendees and get their pledge to serve this summer.
 - Organize a follow-up volunteer leadership meeting with your new team to take next steps.

House Meeting Planner

Use this brainstorm sheet to think of those you want to invite, including those who have never volunteered before or may be new to Untied We Serve.

Name	Phone #	Invited (Y/N)	Committed (Y/N)	Confirmed (Y/N)	Notes
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Name: Please print the invitee’s full name.

Invite: Please mark **yes, no, maybe** or **left message (LM)**. This will help you track who you need to contact and who you should be calling for confirmation. The only real invitations are when you speak with someone directly.

Commit: Please mark **yes, no** or **maybe**.

Confirm: Please mark **yes, no** or **left message (LM)**. You’ll need to call every invitee who said yes or maybe, and every invitee who only got a left message. Please do not assume that **anybody** will come without a confirmation the day before your meeting. It can’t hurt to give people a quick reminder, and you need to know how many people will be at your meeting to make that meeting as effective and enjoyable as possible.

House Meeting Agenda

*****Before starting the meeting, have everyone sign in and appoint a timekeeper who will keep each section running on time.*****

- 0:00-0:10 **Host welcome and introduction**
- Host of the meeting introduces themselves and welcomes attendees.
 - Host shares why (s)he was inspired to organize the house meeting and the purpose of the meeting.
- 0:10-0:25 **Attendee introductions**
- Go around the room and ask each person to introduce themselves and share their reason for wanting to serve this summer.
- 0:25-0:45 **Choose a project**
- Host introduces three or four project ideas and opens up the room for discussion.
 - Discuss what projects will work best in your community.
 - Group votes on project choice.
- 0:45-0:55 **Set goals and identify leadership**
- Ask which attendees are interested in being volunteer leaders – they should stay after the meeting for 15 minutes and commit to a weekly planning meeting from June 22 - September 11.
 - Ask each attendee to consider personal summer goals and make a realistic but ambitious summer commitment.
- 0:55-1:00 **Conclusion**
- At the end of the meeting, the group should have:
 - At least one project to commit to for the summer.
 - A leadership team.
 - Pledges from each attendee to participate.
- 1:00-1:15 **Leadership team meeting**
- Meet with volunteer leaders to set weekly meeting and divide responsibilities.
 - Fill out attached worksheets.

Leadership Team Worksheet

The members of my team include:

Name	Phone Number	Email

Our weekly leadership meetings occur every _____ at _____.

Who are 5 other friends and family members who you will call to enlist in your group’s project? Make these calls during the leadership team meeting, if possible:

Name	Phone Number	Email

Setting Goals and Tracking Progress

Breaking Down Your Goal

What is your group's project?

Who are your local partners?

What is your group's goal? (ie, how many lbs of donated food will you secure, how many hours will you spend reading to kids, how many homes will you audit?)

How many weeks do you have until the National Day of Service and Remembrance on September 11th?

What will you have to average per week between now and September 11th to reach your goal?

How many volunteers will you have to recruit on average per week to reach that goal? How many hours would you guess they have to work? If it's not clear at first, you should be ambitious and then adjust your recruitment goal as you go.

Tracking Progress to Goals

Our team will report progress to goals every _____ to _____.

_____ will share our progress to goals with all team members by email/phone calls every _____.

We will also share our story and accomplishments at serve.gov.

SETTING GOALS: PUBLIC LANDS STEWARDSHIP

Did you know that one in every three acres in the United States is public land? Public lands surround us – the sidewalk outside your home, neighborhood parks, school playgrounds, to state parks and national parks. These public lands are ours, and it is our responsibility to care for and protect these lands.

What will you do to help care for and protect our nation's public lands?

SET CONCRETE GOALS

Setting goals helps you be accountable to yourself and also increases accountability within a group. Clear goals at the beginning of a project will also help you determine how your project will work and what role group members can play. Once goals are set, you can track your progress, compare your results with other group members, and figure out what works best so everyone can meet (or exceed) their goals.

Set a service goal for June 22 – September 11 and hold yourself accountable. Commit as an individual and as a team to volunteer a certain number of hours on public lands this summer. Then keep your commitment. Let's see what we can do together!

- As an individual, I will commit to ___ number of hours volunteering on public lands over the summer.
- As a team, we will commit to ___ number of hours volunteering on public lands over the summer.
- As an individual, I will commit to improving ___ miles of public lands by removing invasive species and repairing trails.
- As a team, we will commit to improving ___ miles of public lands by removing invasive species and repairing trails.
- I will recruit ___ volunteers to join me in volunteering on public lands over the summer.

TRACK PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS

- Set a weekly or biweekly deadline to report progress. For example, "Our team will report progress every Friday. The person responsible for reporting results for your team is _____."
- Make sure every group member is in the loop. Designate a group member to track and share the results. For example, "Our team will share our progress with all members by email/phone calls every week. The person responsible for sharing progress is _____."
- Keep track of your progress. Score sheets like the one below can be helpful.

Week	# hours volunteered as individual	# hours volunteered as team	# miles improved as individual	# miles improved as team	# volunteers active
June 22					
June 29					
July 6					
July 13					
July 20					
July 27					
August 3					
August 10					
August 17					
August 24					
August 31					
September 7					
Total					

Share your volunteer experience here:

TIPS: PUBLIC LANDS STEWARDSHIP

Each trail clearing experience is going to be different. Finding a meaningful and rewarding experience will depend on your own interests and goals. Your first step toward volunteering should be to check with local trail groups. They may already have projects to join or experts properly trained in trail building.

A good trail building team:

- Takes all necessary training and safety precautions;
- Has an expert on the ground to form a construction/maintenance plan, taking trail sustainability and the health of the natural ecosystem into account;
- Possesses and employs the necessary tools for the terrain, allowing only qualified individuals to operate them; and
- Carries a first aid kit and has someone certified in First Aid present for every shift.

TRAINING

National parks rely on volunteers to maintain trails, but if trails are maintained improperly it could prove detrimental to the natural habitat. Before you begin clearing a trail or park land, connect with a local agency or use some online training tools.

- Adopt a trail
 - Committing to clearing human litter, sticks and other large impediments to hiking is the easiest way to help keep our nation's trails usable. Your team can work with the agency responsible for the park and "adopt-a-trail" to clear for the summer.
 - If your town doesn't have an adopt-a-trail program, create one modeled after successful examples in [Arizona](#), [Massachusetts](#), or [Wisconsin](#).
- Clearing invasive species
 - Invasive species damage natural habitats by crowding out native wildlife and disrupting the ecosystem. Many invasive species spread rapidly and are costly to combat, making effective volunteer projects particularly important. Once a habitat is overtaken by an invasive species, there is often little that can be done to reestablish the natural ecosystem.
 - In 2005, the Federal government spent \$8.1 million to clear invasive species. The total amount of invasive species clearance needed nationwide would cost \$107 million.
 - Help us remove invasive species. Before removing invasive species, take the [US Fish and Wildlife Service's Invasive Species Training Module](#).
- Prevent water erosion and other natural damage
 - Water is a trail's worst enemy. Storms can wash out trails and sever tree limbs, blocking a trail or making it unsafe for hikers. Even normal levels of rainfall can cause erosion and have long term effects on a trail.

- In 2007, The United States Forest Service published the [Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook](#). It is a beginner's manual for building or maintaining a sustainable trail. At a minimum, all trail construction or maintenance volunteers should review the Forest Service Notebook before participating in a trail project.
- Get local guidance
 - Some local trail groups may provide volunteers additional training tailored for their geography or climate conditions. If there are no groups in your area, more in-depth training is available through non-governmental organizations. The [Professional Trail Builders Association](#) has a comprehensive list of publications regarding trail planning, design, construction and maintenance.
 - For a more hands-on experience, the [International Mountain Bicycling Association](#) travels the country conducting Trail-building Schools.

SAFETY

- Trail maintenance volunteering can be physically strenuous. Without the proper training and safety precautions it could be dangerous. It is crucial that before performing any trail work, all volunteers have been trained in the proper use of tools and safety equipment.

CELEBRATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Your work this summer matters and should be celebrated. Remember to go to [Serve.gov](https://www.Serve.gov) and tell us your summer story of service.

Also, be sure to keep track of what worked for you this summer and what could be improved. You can learn from this service project when you organize your next service project!