

TRISTATE RAMBLERS HIKE LEADER GUIDELINES

*Both experienced and new hike leaders are welcome and valued.
You are the core of our TSR mission, both in care and enjoyment.*

Summary

SAFETY SHOULD BE THE TOP PRIORITY

In Advance:

1. Learn the route for your trip.
2. Carefully write a description with distance and duration that welcomes hikers with similar abilities. Confirm/provide directions.
3. Post your hike.
4. Check that you have your gear and TSR Emergency Contact Card.
5. Communicate any trip changes.
6. Approve any guest requests.

Just Before:

1. Check your travel time; plan to arrive 30 minutes early.
2. Assess your group's preparedness and address any questions. Address any guests.
3. Appoint a sweep or co-leader, circle up for introductions, and check for emergency cards.
4. Start on time.

During:

1. Keep all hikers between you and the sweep and help hikers when needed.
2. Choose places for separations, clothing adjustments, rest, drink, and food.
3. Address injuries, if any.
4. Oversee decisions on unanticipated situations.

After:

1. Account for all hikers.
2. Remind members bringing guests to submit the signed waiver form.
3. Address any post-hike issues.

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Details

In Advance of the Hike

1. **Learn the route:** Scout the area by hiking your route before the trip date. Find possible stopping spots and points for early outs. Have a paper map or a downloaded digital version of the trails. Obtain contact information for the park office or staff in case of emergency.
2. **Account for the season/weather:** Some hikes are great in one season, not so much in another. Considerations include sun exposure (less desirable in the summer), rocky ridges and scrambles (extra challenging in wet or icy weather), buggy areas, water crossings, etc. Some views are blocked in the summer by dense foliage but open in the winter. Some parking areas/parks charge a fee in the summer. Take into consideration non-plowed or smaller parking lots in the winter.
3. **Write the trip description:** This is important to set expectations. Give distance, elevation, and duration so hikers can decide if the trip might be too strenuous or too easy. There are day-of-the-week standards of difficulty: Monday is relaxed, Thursday is vigorous, and alternate Thursdays and other days are somewhere in between. (For types of hike roughly by day of the week, see the [About Us/Our Activities page](#) of our website.) Make sure the meeting location is clear, especially if the location is not in the [TSR Directions document](#). The Outing Coordinator for the day of the week is a good resource if you need assistance. Refer to the [Guidelines for Add-on and Show and Go Events](#).
4. **Post your hike:** Learn how from the [TSR Leader FAQs](#).
5. **Check your equipment and be prepared for possible emergencies:** A TriState Ramblers Emergency Contact Card is required (available online at www.tristateramblers.org/forms). Bring a TSR Incident Report Form (available online at www.tristateramblers.org/for-leaders). Also bring a first aid kit, whistle, and extra water (for others).
6. **Consider other equipment:** Food, water, poles, proper footwear, cell phone. As temperatures and conditions dictate: layered clothing, sunscreen, insect repellent, hat, bug net, traction devices, snow shoes, extra water/electrolytes.
7. **Change of schedule:** If needed, communicate your new plan (such as on a different day or with a different leader) or cancellation. If weather or trail conditions may be a concern, communicate in advance about potential hazards to set expectations for participants. Learn how from the [TSR Leader FAQs](#).
8. **Approve any guest requests:** If there are no members on the waitlist and you are willing to allow a guest, approve any members who have requested to bring a guest. Approval is solely at the discretion of the leader.

Just Before the Hike:

1. **Leave early to arrive early:** Allow extra time for traffic delays. Build in time for things such as checking that your hikers have the required equipment.
2. **Take attendance:** Check attendees against the list of registrants in SignUpGenius; members not registered cannot participate in the event (unless a Show and Go). Confirm any guests have a signed waiver form complete with emergency contact information.
3. **Help the hikers assess their capability:** Organize hikers in a circle. Describe the day's activity, including its level of difficulty. Common problems are footing, elevation, and a fast

group pace. Listen to concerns and advise if the hike is not a fit and if there are better matched hikes. Ensure hikers are prepared (food and water) and have the appropriate gear for the conditions (e.g. bug spray, rain gear, traction devices). TSR wants trips to be safe and enjoyable for everyone. It is the leader's discretion to not allow a participant to join the group.

4. **Deliver key messages:** Remind hikers that they must have a TSR Emergency Contact Card. Assign a sweep and remind hikers they should stay between you and the sweep. Lead introductions. Get a head count and share it with the sweep. Invite attendees to join you at the front of the line for a real-time leader coaching session. Offer to speak with anyone at the end of the hike about becoming a TSR leader.
5. **Be ready to start on time:** You are encouraged to start at the time listed out of courtesy to hikers who are ready. Waiting for latecomers is not recommended because it may lead to a tradition of later arrivals and complicate preparations for the hike. You are responsible only for hikers with your group.

During the Hike:

1. **Enjoy the trip:** Remember that you are an ambassador of TriState Ramblers. If you are having a good time, others will, too! Going together has a substantial advantage in terms of safety and friendship.
2. **Communicate:** You and the sweep should stay in touch to keep your group together; hikers must remain between you and the sweep. Both of you should carry a whistle. Being in sight of each other will improve your response time to solve problems.
3. **Check hikers for their needs:** You can recommend when to stop for water, rest, separation, wardrobe changes, viewpoints, or other breaks. Attendees can also ask for breaks. Early in the trip (possibly in the first 10 minutes), watch for anyone who is having trouble keeping up and discuss a solution with them. If anyone needs to leave your group (drop out), let them know that you cannot take further responsibility for them since you must lead the main group. Someone in the group might help by accompanying the person taking an early out, but they are likewise no longer part of the leader's responsibility. Worst case: You may have to lead the whole group back to the starting point and abandon the hike.
4. **Other considerations:** Ensure sufficient time for everyone to hydrate, rest, change clothing, and return safely from a separation. Depending on conditions, stop in the shade or sun at a place where all hikers can rest comfortably. Always wait at trail junctions so the entire group follows the correct trail. If it is not clear where the trail continues, make sure all hikers are in sight so they know to follow the correct path. At difficult sections, assist hikers and make sure everyone has cleared the section before continuing. Make sure hikers follow instructions regarding safely navigating and crossing roads.
5. **Enjoy lunch breaks:** For breaks on the trail, clean up and check for items that might be left behind (trash, gloves, poles, etc.). Give a 5-minute warning and take a head count to ensure all hikers are present before departing. Occasionally, a group may plan to dine together after the trip.
6. **Explain options:** Inform the group where there are options to shorten the trip (early out). Communicate any unexpected change in route or need to modify the trip when necessary (for example, bad weather or lightning).
7. **Handle accidents:** *If an accident occurs:* The safety of the group is your primary responsibility. Do not immediately call park rangers or 911 for a minor problem that you and the group can handle on your own; an adhesive bandage and antiseptic cream are often

sufficient. If the injured person needs professional assistance, call if possible or designate a group to go for help (include someone who knows where the accident occurred and how to return); be sure to exchange cell numbers. Those best qualified to help should stay with the injured person. If the injury is less serious, assist the person in walking out. A paper map can be helpful to determine the shortest route to a road or other access point.

After the Hike:

1. If possible, remain long enough to make sure all participants get their cars started and leave the parking area. Help people with directions, if necessary.
2. Remind members bringing a guest that they must submit the signed waiver form after the hike; follow the instructions on the form.
3. If someone was injured during the hike and had, or is likely to require, treatment at a medical facility, complete the Incident Report form. Scan or take a photo of the report and send it via email or text attachment to the club treasurer.
4. In the event of a major accident involving rangers/police/EMS, notify the TSR president at your earliest opportunity and no later than the end of the day by providing a full written report, including whether medical attention was offered but refused.
5. Contact information for club officers is available on the [Officers](#) page of our website.
6. Keep copies of the document(s) for your own records.