

HIKE LEADER GUIDELINES

Updated August 2022

The following guidelines for Indianapolis Hiking Club hike leaders are based on years of experience and are intended to insure that everyone's hiking experience will be safe and enjoyable. Leading a hike is a rewarding experience and all members are encouraged to do so. New hikes are always appreciated. In-town, moderate distance hikes are quite easy to plan and lead and that is where most new leaders start. Longer out-of-town woods hikes require more preparation, but can also be rewarding. To be a good leader all you really need is common sense, a spirit of adventure and sensitivity to the needs of others. Contact a Pathfinder or speak to someone who leads hikes regularly for some good ideas.

1. The leader is in charge of and responsible for the hike. However, each member and guest is responsible for his or her own behavior and safety. As leader, you may reroute, shorten or cancel a hike because of severe weather or any other circumstance you deem appropriate.
2. Contact the weekday or weekend Pathfinder to schedule your hike. About a month before the new bimonthly schedule is published, the Pathfinders will send an email request for hikes to all members who are enrolled in Google Groups for Broadcast emails. This email includes the date when all requests should be in. The Pathfinders will assist you with the hike description. Precise directions to the meeting location, hike start time and contact information will be required. Once all requests are in and a draft of the new schedule has been compiled, the Pathfinders will send a Broadcast email to all members listing all of the requested hikes for the new schedule. Any errors or changes need to be reported back to the Pathfinders before the schedule is finalized. The finalized schedule is then submitted to the Board for approval.

After the schedule has been finalized and the mailed schedule has been printed, it is still possible to add hikes to the current or the recently finalized schedule; however the pertinent information will only be included on the website. A good example would be adding a mall hike if the upcoming weather forecast is for hot/humid conditions. You can also change information for an already scheduled hike, like start time or meeting location. Send your request by email (preferred) to the Pathfinder. Only individual hikes may be added (i.e., no recurring hikes) and the request should be at least three days before the hike's effective date. Assuming the Pathfinder okay's the request, they will add the hike to the Club website calendar function, mileage update screen and PDF copy of the schedule on the website. The published schedule, which has already been mailed, will not include the new or revised hike. The Pathfinder or webmaster will also add a comment to the news on the website home page that a new hike has been added or there has been a change to a previously scheduled hike. A Broadcast Google Groups email should be sent by the requestor (i.e., hike leader) or Pathfinder alerting all members of the new or revised hike.

3. When developing the hike description (write-up) for the schedule, if your hike is going to be challenging, it should be described as such and not for beginners or ill prepared hikers and that an accurate trail description be used including length and terrain. It is okay to request an RSVP if you wish to have a dialogue with

hikers before the hike, in which case include your email address in the hike description.

4. You should scout the trail or drive the route before scheduling a hike. Check for parking and rest room facilities along the route and plan adequate breaks. Estimate the mileage for the hike description as accurately as possible; round up if .5 or greater. Don't overstate the mileage. If your hike involves a car shuttle, you will be responsible for coordinating it at the beginning and end of the hike and including that information in the description.
5. If you decide to cancel a hike, you should access your hike on the website using the "Update Mileage" link (on the Mileage page) and mark the hike as cancelled (option on the mileage update screen). You should also send a Broadcast Google Groups email to all members notifying them that your hike has been cancelled. If you are not enrolled Google Groups (all members with email capability should be) please contact the Pathfinder or webmaster to send the cancellation email for you and post the hike cancellation on the website Home Page News. For out of town hikes try and make cancellation decisions by 6 p.m. of the day prior to the hike (e.g., pending blizzard) and get the word out.
6. If you are scheduled to lead a hike, but for some unforeseen reason are unable to lead, it is your responsibility to find another member who will lead the hike on your behalf or cancel the hike as listed above.
7. Before the hike, the leader should print out and become familiar with the sign-up sheet, which is available on the Club website (see Forms).
8. If the hike you are leading requires an advance registration fee, such as the Mini Marathon or the Walk for the Cure, your hike description should say so and every participant should have registered and paid the appropriate fee and, if applicable, wear their registration tag. Confirm this before the hike starts. The Club does not condone "bandits," i.e., people walking without paying the registration fee.
9. Arrive at the hike venue at least **15 minutes early** in order to welcome guests and be available to answer questions.
10. Before starting the hike, the leader should:
 - a. Have all members, guests and children write their names on the sign-up sheet
 - b. Ensure that names are written legibly so mileage credit can be given
 - c. Briefly describe the hike, its difficulty, estimated time of completion, and the amount of water recommended, if the length or conditions warrant
 - d. If concerned that a hiker(s) may have difficulty, discuss options with the hiker(s)
 - e. If applicable, explain multiple distance options and be certain everyone indicates their desired mileage on the sign-up sheet
 - f. Introduce any guests
 - g. READ (aloud) the liability release printed on the sign-in sheet if guests are participating on the hike.
11. Hike leaders are not permitted to allow hikers to depart ahead of the start time listed in the schedule (i.e., everyone should start as a group). This applies to self-

guided as well as led hikes. The hike leader may waive this rule if the situation does not lend itself to everyone starting together, such as the Mini-Marathon, a Volksmarch, mall hikes or a charity walk.

12. The hike leader or a designee should carry a cellular telephone and to know the local emergency numbers. If in the woods, know the local park ranger contact numbers.
13. It is a Club tradition to start the hike **on time**.
14. Stick to the listed hike speed. A common complaint is that hike leaders go faster than the speed listed in the schedule.
15. Count everyone at the beginning of the hike and again periodically to ensure everyone is still with the hike. Watch for hikers who are having difficulty and wait if hikers become too separated from the main body. If appropriate, because the hike is such that hikers might get left behind or lost, ask someone who you trust and knows the way to bring up the rear (sweep). The leader must maintain periodic contact with the "sweep." If it makes sense because one or more hikers are unable to keep pace with the main body, it is allowable to break the hike into two or more sections each with a designated leader.
16. Use common sense when hiking on a road. Request that everyone stay on the left facing traffic. Ask for single file if the road is heavily traveled and the shoulder narrow. Use sidewalks whenever possible and cross at marked crossings. Be alert for oncoming vehicles and warn those behind you of a "car up". Have someone at the rear watch for vehicles coming from behind and warn "car back".
17. On a trail be courteous to oncoming and overtaking hikers, runners and bikers and provide them room to pass. Warn the group via a "runner up" or "biker back." If you encounter horses, be sure everyone stands off the trail and gives them a wide berth.
18. If the hike has shorter mileage options, you must be familiar with each option and make everyone aware of each turnoff point. Unless directions are obvious, ensure that at least one person who knows the way and who will not leave people behind accompanies hikers choosing a shorter option.
19. Although it is usually appropriate for all hikers to stay behind the leader (except on self-guided hikes), the leader, at his or her discretion, may allow faster hikers to go ahead as long as there is a clear understanding between the leader and the faster hikers when and how they will link up.
20. Adjust your pace to give consideration to other hikers, particularly if obstacles, such as a stream or steep hill, slow the group.
21. After completion of the hike, the leader should record mileage earned on the Club website or arrange for mileage to be recorded. This is to be done in a timely manner. The leader should then retain the sign-up sheet for the next 12 months, in case it needs to be retrieved and reviewed following an incident.

22. Unless included in the hike description leaders may not award miles for distances hiked after the hike is completed. Some hikers may request the leader to give them extra mileage credit for miles they walked before the hike officially started or after the hike was completed (e.g. I'd like to walk a couple extra miles.); this is not permitted.
23. Remind everyone of the Club's intent to "Leave no Trace," especially if you see trash being left behind.
24. Hike leaders must contact a member of the Board of Directors as soon as practical following any incident that concerns the leader on a hike or other Club sponsored event. This may include, but not limited to, an accident, injury, possible crime or property damage. The Board member may ask the leader or anyone else involved in the incident to complete an Incident Report (available on website Forms) to capture relevant information while it is still fresh in their minds.