

Agency Leader Selection Guidelines

BCM has found that having an adult who knows the teens, has their respect, and can be looked to for guidance during all the programming, is one of the greatest contributors to the success in our partnership. Because of their specific knowledge of the teens and their organization, adult agency leaders play an essential role in helping to establish group norms and expectations. They also provide for continued teaching and reinforcement of the BCM curriculum highlighted during the programming once everyone returns to their communities.

Agency Leader Selection Criteria

- *They want to go:* It is vital that the agency leader **wants** to participate in the BCM programming. Agency leaders do not need to be outdoor enthusiasts or experts. However, the students will be cueing off how the agency leader reacts to the challenges faced in wilderness travel. A successful agency leader role models an eagerness to learn new skills and to step outside of their comfort zone.
- *They can lead:* The agency leader needs to have the authority to represent the best interest of the teens in cases of emergency. Additionally, this role requires bridging the gap between the adults and the youth; this requires direct honest communication with everyone.
- *They know the teens:* The agency leader has had a positive personal relationship with the teens prior to the BCM trip.
- *They are supported:* The agency leader should have the support of their organization. They should be given time to manage paperwork and communicate with teens and families and their responsibilities should be managed while they are out on a BCM program.
- *They are physically fit:* For backpacking expeditions, leaders will hike with backpacks weighing up to 50 pounds all day, for up to an hour without rest, and hike at elevations up to 12,000 ft. For canoe expeditions, leaders will carry a canoe weighing approximately 70 pounds over a distance of .5 mile or more, and paddle a canoe, alternating arms, for four or more hours a day.

Additionally, agency leaders must:

- Be 21 years of age or older
- Be the same gender as the youth (only necessary for the weeklong expedition)
- Pass a BCM Background check
- Be an agency staff person or professional youth worker

Exceptions: Other adults (such as consistent volunteers) will be considered under special circumstances by your regional BCM program staff.

***Additional Adults:** We encourage youth organizations interested in adding a second staff member or additional adults from the community to speak to a BCM about this option. The cost for each additional adult is \$125.



Youth Agency Staff Roles & Responsibilities

The Adult Leadership Team

A team of four to five adults with a diverse skill set leads each BCM expedition. One to two agency staff from the partner agency comes with the teens, while the other adults (one Instructor and two to three adult team members) are selected by BCM. Specific descriptions of these roles are as follows:

Instructor: The Instructor is the person in charge of the expedition. The Instructor is also typically the individual with the most medical training of all the team members, holding a Wilderness First Responder certification or higher. While leadership styles vary, Instructors have experience guiding groups of people in the backcountry and know that effective collaboration between all team members is essential. When you speak to your Instructor before the expedition, offer ideas of how you can be a productive member of the team. For instance, let him/her know if you are comfortable teaching any backcountry skills, leading any team building activities, or facilitating group discussions. While your Instructor is orchestrating the activities of the team, be sure to provide him/her support in any way possible.

Volunteer Mentors: Volunteer mentors are adults who contribute their time and knowledge and pay a fee to participate in our program. These volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds. Some team members live in the same communities as the youth and are experiencing the outdoors for the first time, while others are dedicated individuals who have vast wilderness backgrounds, but little experience with urban lifestyles or teens. Regardless of background however, all team members share a vested interest in helping young people gain a new perspective. BCM provides training to all adult participants to prepare them for the experience.

Agency staff: You as the agency staff are BCM's main contact at the youth organization. You are also an adult team member, and you act as the main liaison between the BCM adult team and the youth. Before the expedition, you are responsible for selecting the youth, conducting a pre-expedition orientation, getting youth paperwork signed and to BCM and other logistical aspects of ensuring the youth are prepared for their BCM experience. During the expedition, you share in the responsibilities of the leadership team and serve as the primary disciplinarian for the youth, if needed.

Expedition Guidelines

These are general rules for everyone (Agency staff, Teens, and other Adult Team Members) to abide by.

- Cell phones and MP3 players should not be on the expeditions
- No use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or non-prescribed medication
- Respect for all leaders and all teens, no vulgar or disrespectful language
- Valuables, including jewelry, should be left behind
- Everyone participates in team activities, discussions, and journaling
- Everyone contributes to chores and assignments
- All rules of the youth agency apply

How can you help?

Everybody has a unique set of experiences that have built personal skills and confidences. Because of this, each BCM team is unique. Some of our adults are experts in backcountry travel. This offers the teens an opportunity to learn and hone camping skills while in a wilderness setting. Some are excellent listeners who allow the teens to talk through ideas and problems. Some are excellent facilitators who create amazing team environments where everyone can excel. Regardless of your experiences, you have something unique to add to your BCM team – speak up and let your Instructor know what this is.

If you come to your expedition with an open mind you will be able to make a stronger impact on the teens and take more away for yourself. There will be problems. There will be difficult moments. You will have to learn to work with a group of adults that you do not know very well. You will laugh....a lot. There are very few right or wrong experiences on an expedition, but there are better and worse ways of dealing with situations.



710 10th St., Ste. 120
Golden, CO 80401
Phone: (303) 271-9200
Fax: (303) 531-6975

One very important point to consider is the cohesion of the team. If your adult team is unable to work together, the teens will mirror this behavior. Present a unified front whenever the team is making decisions or addressing problems so the teens feel confident under your leadership. Be strong in your decisions but do not be stubborn in your opinions. Treat every member of your team with respect regardless of how strong or knowledgeable they are and others will do the same. The leadership team drives the spirit of the expedition and it cannot be successful without unity and respect among the adults.

For a team to be successful they must have a common goal and be willing to work towards it using the individual talents within the group. The common goal is to offer five under-resourced urban teens the opportunity to see the wilderness in a setting that encourages their personal growth. After staying safe, the top priority is offering the teens a completely different perspective on the world by showing them not only a new landscape but also different faces and lives. This responsibility is big, but is also a lot of fun! Try not to feel so overburdened by the day's goals and tasks that you forget to enjoy the present moment. Enjoy the company of the other leaders and the teens by allowing them to get to know you. This will produce stronger results than driving the team to create personal growth through synthesized experiences.

Actions speak louder than words. In the backcountry, natural consequences provide the most effective lessons. As you practice Leave No Trace ethics, the teens will follow your lead. If you do not set up your tent properly and it rains, acknowledge your oversight. If you are open and forthcoming, there is a better chance that the teens will be. Be honest with your mistakes as you can always learn something from them. Strong yet humble leaders are the most effective in the backcountry.

An important part of being a team is helping each other in daily tasks. Leaders and teens should help each other with chores such as cooking, treating and hauling water, following Leave No Trace practices, setting up camp, etc. If there is a spare moment after you have accomplished all the necessary tasks, you may be able to sit down and take time for yourself. However, you be prepared for the days when helping your teammates and youth get chores accomplished will require all of your attention.

Be prepared to have to push the teens during tough points of the expedition. Be gentle but firm when they say they are tired. Let them know that you are also tired. An effective leader knows how hard to push and this comes from feeling out the level of maturity and fitness of the team. Offer to team up with someone so that they do not get discouraged. Talk about the beauty of the landscape, or use such opportunities to get to know one another. Recognize effort or improvement and work with teens that are having difficulty to identify when it is appropriate to be self-reliant and when to ask for help.



Teen Selection Guidelines

The purpose of BCM is to instill *critical life skills* through wilderness mentoring experiences. Teens who complete the BCM program display greater confidence, communicate more effectively, and show an appreciation for the natural world. In order to be successful on an expedition it is vital that the teens attend all the BCM programs and meetings prior to the expedition.

A BCM expedition is not right for every teen. On the expedition participants will encounter varied environmental conditions, be without aspects of 'home life'- i.e. no showers or cell phones, and will need to work together. Teens struggling with issues of control and authority to the degree that they are unwilling to cooperate and/or actively demonstrate disrespect, verbally or physically, especially when under stress, are typically unsuccessful on BCM expeditions and can have a detrimental effect on themselves and other teens while in the backcountry. Selecting youth who understand the demands of BCM is critical for our partnership and requires careful and clear communication by the Youth Agency staff to screen, prepare, and excite teens for this experience.

The Youth Agency should identify eight to ten teens that are a right fit for the BCM program

-The eight to ten participants are expected to attend all the pre- and post-expedition experiences

-The agency will then select **five** from those eight to ten teens to participate in the weeklong expedition*

*We have found that some students are unable to participate in the weeklong expedition due to summer school, family emergencies, or other issues that arise. Therefore, it is vital to start our programming with up to ten teens

Teens Selection Criteria:

- **They want to go:** Teens are more likely to be successful on a BCM expedition when they are excited about hiking, spending time in nature, and can handle the challenges of being away from home.
- **They deserve to go:** These teens have consistently demonstrated behaviors that have led to positive outcomes at the Youth Agency. BCM programs should not be used as corrective or punitive measures.
- **They can listen:** A teen's ability and willingness to listen and follow instructions is essential to the success of this program.
- **They are physically fit:** For backpacking expeditions, teens will hike with backpacks weighing up to 50 pounds all day, for up to an hour without rest, and hike at elevations up to 12,000 ft. For canoe expeditions teens will carry a canoe weighing approximately 65-75 pounds over a distance of .5 mile or more, and paddle a canoe, alternating arms, for four or more hours a day.

Additionally teens must:

- Pass BCM's medical and psychological assessment
- Not be currently or recently involved with the criminal justice system for violent crime or sexual abuse
- Not have the financial resources to participate in similar activities with their families or on their own

Age requirements:

BCM trips are best suited for teens 13-18 years old. As teens vary widely in their physical, emotional and mental abilities between these ages, we ask that your teens not span more than a 2 year age difference (i.e. 13-15 or 16-18). Following these guidelines will help ensure the best group dynamics and most growth opportunities for the teens. **Exceptions:** your Regional Program Staff will consider anyone outside of the age range on a case-by-case basis. Maturity levels will be considered.



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Golden, CO 80401
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Youth Application and Parent Information

You will receive a Youth Application Packet in a printable format. Please print and distribute one packet to each of your teens.

This packet includes the following:

1. Welcome Letter and Expedition Overview for Parents/Guardians – English and Spanish (for parents)
2. Gear Checklist – English and Spanish (for youth and parents)
3. Youth Application – English and Spanish (for youth and parents)

You will be responsible for distributing and collecting youth applications. Please be sure to submit all youth applications by the deadline indicated in your Youth Agency Agreement.

Please help us expedite the screening process by carefully reviewing each application. Specific things to look for are:

1. All names, addresses, and phone numbers are clearly legible.
2. Each application includes two emergency contacts. The first contact (if the student is under 18) must be a parent or guardian. The second contact should be a reliable adult who can help us locate the youth's primary emergency contact in the event that we cannot reach them. (This contact can be agency staff who is not in the field with the student, a second parent, family member, or close family friend.)
3. Students and their families are not required to carry health insurance to participate.
4. Please review the medical screening portion of each application, making sure every box is filled in. If the student checks "yes" please be sure there is a written description/explanation in the space provided and include additional clarifying notes if necessary. (For example, a student may check yes to having ankle problems and write "my ankles hurt when I run." In some cases this student may just use ankle soreness as an excuse to get out of sports, in others they may have a recent, real, ankle injury that we need to be aware of.)
5. **BE SURE ALL PARENT SIGNATURES ARE PRESENT.** There are four required signatures, as well as one optional signature. Students will not be allowed to participate in any BCM programming without all required parental signatures.

Big City Mountaineers staff will thoroughly screen each application. Your detailed review of each application will save BCM and your agency staff a significant amount of time. Every missing piece of information requires our follow up with you and your follow up with the student or the student's family.