

Youth Volunteer Program Guide

Cultivating a Community of Forest Stewards
through Invasive Plant Workdays



2022



Produced as a collaboration between
VT Dept. Forests, Parks & Recreation
and Winooski Valley Park District



Steps, From Start to Finish

When planning to hold a workday or volunteer program focused on invasive plant removal, there are many things to consider. Make sure you know **WHO** you are working with, **WHAT** they are going to do, **WHY** they are doing it, **WHERE** you'll be working, and **WHEN** it will happen. Here are detailed considerations to make, broken down by [3-6 months before](#) a program, [2-3 months before](#), [1-2 months before](#), [day of a program](#), and [follow up](#) to a program. These can serve almost as checklists, and the '[Guidance on Running a Program](#)' section offers general guidance.

PRIOR TO THE PROGRAM

3-6 months before

1. Consider your goal for running the program

- Is your goal to provide an educational experience, to provide an experience purely about invasive plant removal, or a combination of the two? Maybe your goal is just to get a group started on an ongoing service project.
- Outlining a concrete goal/motivation prior to planning a program will help to determine the rest of the program details such as what group(s) to reach out to, where to host the work, etc.

2. Consider available resources

- What **resources** do you have access to, either from within your organization or community or from other organizations/communities? Remember that “resources” can be defined broadly—including participants, tools, support people, and facilities.
 - What **participants** do you want to work with?
 - Is there a local school or group you have a connection with?
 - What **tools** are needed? Where can you find them?
 - Tools like weed wrenches, loppers, gloves, buckets and/or trash bags may be useful for invasive plant removal.

- Shovels break easily under leverage, so do not work well for removal; however they are useful for restoration plantings.
- **How many** of each tool do you have access to?
 - Your local Conservation Commission may have tools to loan out or may know where to find tools to borrow.
 - The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation's Invasive Plant Program has a tool loan library in Essex. Contact **anr.fprInvasivePlants@vermont.gov** for more information.
- If you will be running invasive plant removal programs frequently, consider checking the following websites to buy your own weed wrench-like tools:
 - www.theuprooter.com**
 - www.pullerbear.com/index.html**
 - www.extractigator.com**
- What **support people** will be available to help with the program?
 - How many young people will be there? If working with a larger group, subgroups of 10-12 young people work well.
 - How many adults will you need? **At least** two adults for every subgroup of young people is a good ratio.
 - If needed, who can you reach out to for extra help? Other organizations? Community members? Knowledgeable participant leaders who may not need an "expert" to lead a group?
- What **facilities** will be available for program participants to use?
 - Access to water, bathrooms, shade, and a gathering space are helpful, but not always necessary.
 - Which facilities are available will influence what kind of group you can work with. For example, 100 participants taking part in a full day program with no bathrooms would be a rough experience, but a smaller group of participants taking part in a half day program would probably be just fine at the same site.

Steps, cont.

3. Consider where you'll be working

- What kind of **worksite** and **invasive plant removal project** are available for the program?
 - Will you be working on land owned by your organization, or a school? Will you be on private land, or town land, or at a state park or state forest?
 - Keep in mind that there may be different [insurance/liability considerations](#) at each of these types of sites.
 - Are there enough invasive plants at your proposed worksite to keep a group busy? How big a group can be kept busy, and for how long? What age is the proposed work most appropriate for?
 - There are several considerations to make when [picking a good worksite for you group](#).
- Do you have somewhere to [dispose of the invasive plants](#)?
- Will you incorporate restoration planting or will the focus be solely on invasive plant removal?

2-3 months before

1. Contact potential groups

- Have a pitch to sell your program.
 - Consider mentioning that it is a service-learning and team building opportunity, a chance to learn while outdoors, etc.
 - Make sure your pitch is true to you!
- Be flexible.
 - Consider offering full or half day programs.
 - With invasive plant removal projects, two hours is really a minimum length of time needed to provide a rewarding experience.
 - Consider a few different worksite locations, and ways the program could take place.
 - Ex: an in-class talk followed by a field excursion, or a program hosted entirely at a local park, etc.
- It is helpful to have a single contact for the potential group you'll work with, who disseminates information (like schedules and waivers) to participants for you.

2. Communicate with property managers

- If you do not own the land you'll be working on, make sure you have permission to remove invasive plants from the site.
- Learn what facilities are available and reserve them as necessary. Request special accommodations your group might need.
- Make an invasive plant disposal plan with property managers -- where should the invasive plants be left? Who will dispose of them?

3. Pick a worksite

- Visit the site before the program to choose where each group will work.
- Each group of 10-12 young people should have their own work area.

Steps, cont.

- A good worksite often includes:
 - ***A concentrated invasive plant population.*** Working in an area with a dense invasive plant infestation makes it simpler to keep the group together, easier for participants to learn ID, and reduces the chances of participants pulling non-target species.
 - ***An array of different sized invasive plants.*** Invasive plants that are easy to pull by hand and ones that need the use of tools to remove.
 - ***Limited safety hazards.*** Pick sites that lack poison ivy, stinging plants such as nettles, prickles/brambles, steep banks, barbed wire, etc.
- Make sure the project is age appropriate.
 - Younger people, like middle schoolers, will typically only stay engaged pulling herbaceous species such as garlic mustard for a about 30 minutes at a time.
 - Using tools such as weed wrenches to pull up woody invasive plants, such as honeysuckle and buckthorn, tends to keep participants of all ages engaged.
 - Saws are not appropriate for middle schoolers.
 - Thorny invasive plants, such as barberry, and toxic invasive plants, such as wild parsnip, should not be the main focus of any volunteer program with young people.

4. Make a plan for how you'll dispose of invasive plants

- Check with land managers for any specific disposal instructions.
- General disposal options include: hanging uprooted invasive plants, piling uprooted invasive plants, moving uprooted invasive plants off site, and bagging herbaceous invasive plants.
- More [information on disposal can be found here](#), with VT Department of Environmental Conservation's Waste Management and Prevention Division.

1-2 months before

1. Continue communicating with your volunteer group

- Confirm/finalize program date, time, and location.
- Find out what program forms you'll need, and send them to the group one month to two weeks ahead of the program date.
 - Different organizations have different liability release requirements. Check with your insurance company, and the groups you're working with, to see what [release forms you might need](#). You may need to have participants or their legal guardians sign a liability release form. If the program is outdoors, consider adding a tick notice. If you want to document and promote your efforts with photographs, consider adding a media release.
 - Depending on your needs/preferences, request that the group contact/leader return the completed forms back to you by a specific deadline, or bring them to you on the day of the program.
- Request that group leaders split participants into subgroups before the program, and that they provide at least one adult/chaperone per subgroup.
 - Remember, subgroups of 10-12 young people with one invasive plant "expert" from your organization, and at least one other adult/chaperone from the volunteer group works best.
 - Having the group leaders choose subgroups helps with group dynamics.
 - If using media release forms, ask that participants who have not signed the forms be put in the same subgroup.
- Seek input from group leaders while creating the schedule.
 - Do they want any specific topics/themes covered?
 - What time do the participants normally have lunch and/or snack?
 - What time do they need to leave? Allow for commute and transition times as you determine the timing of your program.
 - Send your schedule to group leaders ahead of time for any feedback.

Steps, cont.

- Make sure group leaders know what facilities are (or are not) available, so participants can come prepared.
- About one week before the scheduled program, remind group leaders to remind participants to bring any necessary program forms (signed) and to come prepared.
- Send out a [list of gear participants should bring to the program](#).

2. Secure invasive plant “experts” to help out with the program

- Each group should have a representative from, or volunteering for, your organization. They will be the invasive plant “expert”.
- Invasive plant “experts” help identify the invasive plants, and teach about the invasive plants’ impacts on the ecosystem.
 - Remember, for each subgroup, having one invasive plant “expert” in addition to at least one adult/chaperone, per 10-12 young people, works well.
 - **chaperones** should be responsible for managing group dynamics.
 - **Invasive plant “experts”** should be prepared to teach about invasive plants, habitat restoration, and how to use tools, etc.
- Communicate the following details with invasive plant “experts” before the program.
 - Schedule for the day, including:
 - Tasks
 - Timeline
 - Activities
 - What tasks they will be doing and/or leading during the program.
 - What invasive plants and tools they will be working with.

3. Plan flow of the day

- Finalize the schedule for the day.
- Plan any activities.

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- For larger groups, organize materials for each group leader.
 - Order restoration plantings if incorporating a restoration component into the program.

4. Gather Supplies

- Here are examples of supplies that might be useful to have for a program that has an educational component.
 - Teaching & activity materials
 - [Prepare packets* \(if using\) for invasive plant “experts”.](#)
 - Info sheet: emergency procedures (including location to share with 911), leader’s cell phone #s, list of participants in group
 - Tool inventory
 - Map of site
 - Schedule
 - Description of roles to assign participants
 - Score card
 - Instructions for afternoon activity
 - Prizes and certificates (if using)
 - Tools
 - If borrowing tools, arrange pick up/drop off times

**these can be reused*

Steps, cont.

DAY OF THE PROGRAM

1. If necessary, check in with property manager

- Say hello and let them know you've arrived.
- Confirm how many people and vehicles are coming.
- Double check your removal plan with them.

2. Use flagging to mark various sites, including:

- Boundaries for each subgroup's work area.
- Any specific disposal site.
- Any areas which participants should avoid.
 - Mark any hazards such as poison ivy, brambles, stinging plants, barbed wire, etc. that are present but can be worked around.
 - If those hazards are present but cannot be worked around, choose a different worksite.
- This can **also** be done the day before the program.

3. Create a central meeting area where participants will receive instructions,

OR

Where participants can focus and learn (If adding an educational component)

- Find a spot that is out of the rain or hot sun, with minimal distractions.
- Display the schedule for the day so participants know what to expect.
- Set out name tags and markers on picnic tables for participants to fill out.
- Set up a teaching area with your supplies, an easel and/or white board, and anything else you might need.
- Arrange picnic tables in a semi-circle facing the teaching area.

4. Unload tools

- Organize tools, including bug spray, by subgroup.
 - Have a tool inventory sheet for each subgroup as well as a master tool inventory to help keep track of everything that's getting lent out.
- Provide each subgroup with a bag or crate to hold gloves, bug spray, and any other small tools.
 - For younger people and/or bigger groups, bring tools to worksites before the participants arrive.

5. If bathrooms and trash cans/recycling are available, determine their locations

6. Check in with invasive plant "experts"

- This is especially important for larger groups, or if your "experts" don't normally help with educational programs.
- Make sure they:
 - Know where their worksite is.
 - Bring their subgroup's tools to their worksite.
 - Are comfortable with the schedule for the day and any activities they will be leading.
 - Are comfortable with ID and tool use.
 - Are ready to teach their subgroup invasive plant ID.
 - Know what to do with the invasive plants they've pulled.

7. Greet participants as they arrive

- Direct everyone to their tables or meet-up spots.
- Collect forms (make sure the adults filled them out too!).
- Point out the bathrooms and trash cans/recycling.

Steps, cont.

- Check in with group leaders who are in charge of youth volunteers.
 - Provide them with copies of the schedule, making sure they know when snack, lunch, and departure times are expected to occur.

8. Run program!

- See "[Guidance on Running a Program](#)" section.

9. Clean up

- Before the participants leave, make sure subgroups properly dispose of their invasive plants.
- Account for and pack up all tools -- the invasive plant "experts" can help you carry them to your vehicle(s) or storage area.
- Collect and deposit any remaining trash in the correct place.

10. Debrief with invasive plant "experts"

- What went well? What could be improved?
- Did they run into any issues?
- Any other thoughts, ideas, suggestions, or comments they'd like to share?
- Follow up with anyone who has to leave before the debrief so you can get their insights too.

FOLLOW UP

1. Send thank you e-mails or notes

- Send thank you notes to participating organizations, and any staff or volunteers you brought in to help.

2. Ask the participating organization to complete a program evaluation

- Remind them that feedback is important for improving your program.
- Survey Monkey or other free online survey resources are an easy way to get feedback.
- A survey request or link can be included in the thank you email.

3. If working with an educational organization, send “back in the classroom” activities

- [Youth Volunteer Program Guide](#)
Companion website for this guide, has linkable subsections for sharing.
- [Invasive Plant Lesson Plans and Activities](#)
Companion lesson plans and activities for this guide.
- These can even be included in the thank you email.

4. Write yourself a program reflection

- What went well? What could have been better? Are there any improvements you can think of or things you'd try differently next time? Any circumstances specific to this group to remember for a future program?
- Program reflections are very helpful to plan future programs with a group, and can also be very useful for grant writing and reporting.

You Can Make A Difference!

VTinvasives.org



For questions about this guide
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or

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