**Becoming a Hike or Backpack Leader for the Foothills Branch**

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***Foothills branch strives to be a welcoming gateway for outdoor enthusiasts from all backgrounds, experience and fitness levels.*** Hikers and backpackers in the Mountaineers face no course pre-requisites to participate, so hike and backpack leaders need the mindset, inter-personal and leadership skills to respond to the challenges related to highly varied applicants for their trips, including some people who are just starting out, who may have limited physical capability, or who prefer a slower more social experience – as well as very fit and intense outdoors people who want to go far and fast.

So, the Mountaineers have a well-developed process to train and certify new hike and backpack leaders so that they are capable and ready to handle the challenges of the role!

Pre-requisites for Hike or Backpack Leader Candidates

* Mountaineers member, at least 18 years of age
* Have participated in at least 3 Mountaineers hikes or backpacks, preferably with different leaders[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Must demonstrate a basic competency in:
* Group leadership
* Technical skill in the activity
* On-trail navigation including use of map and compass to “stay found”
* Mountain hazard recognition and safety
* First Aid and emergency preparedness
* Standards and Policies of the Mountaineers and land management agencies

Process to Become a Hike or Backpack Leader

1. Complete the New Hike-Backpack Leader Seminar[[2]](#footnote-2). This seminar meets the seminar requirement for any Mountaineers branch, regardless of where you take it.
2. Submit the online leader application from the Mountaineers website[[3]](#footnote-3): [*https://www.mountaineers.org/volunteers/volunteer-with-us/leader-applications-folder/hike-or-backpack-leader-application*](https://www.mountaineers.org/volunteers/volunteer-with-us/leader-applications-folder/hike-or-backpack-leader-application).
3. Plan, post and run a hike or backpack trip with an experienced leader as your mentor[[4]](#footnote-4).
   * Refer to the excellent tutorial on the Mountaineers website on ‘Scheduling and Managing an Activity’ – see [*https://www.mountaineers.org/volunteers/schedule-manage/schedule-manage#activities-trips*](https://www.mountaineers.org/volunteers/schedule-manage/schedule-manage#activities-trips)
   * To be qualified as a backpacking leader you are required to lead a mentored backpack trip.
   * Your mentor will be your coach and co-leader on your trip, and after the trip they will advise the appropriate branch committee chair how you did and what, if any, concerns or gaps they see before you should be certified as a leader in full standing.
   * If all went well, the committee chair will note you on their leader roster as a leader in full standing.
4. You may continue to lead trips after that with a co-leader as long as you like.
5. We suggest that new leaders qualify as a hike leader and lead a couple of hikes before adding the logistical complexity of backpacks.
6. ***Most of all - HAVE FUN!!***

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For more information, or to volunteer as a mentor or to help instruct in the New Hike-Backpack Leader course, contact the Foothills Hike-Backpack Committee chair Cheryl Talbert, *cascadehiker@earthlink.net*

1. Candidates with considerable group leadership experience outside the Mountaineers may be able to move forward with less Mountaineers trip experience – up to the discretion of the Hike/Backpack Committee chair. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A 2.5-hour evening seminar held in alternating months in Seattle and the east side. Seattle’s seminar is just called the New Hike Leader Seminar; Foothills’ covers new hike or backpack leaders. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Indicate on the application which branch that you would like to lead for (you may lead for more than one branch but the branch on your application will get your request and will be responsible for the subsequent steps). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Work with your local Branch’s hiking or backpacking committee chair to find an experienced leader to mentor you, or you can ask a leader that you know and are comfortable with. That branch also needs to list you as a leader on “probationary status’ on their committee roster for you to be authorized to post your mentored trip. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)