

# Facilitator Guide

*A facilitator's overview of the Trails Training website at Volunteers for Outdoor Arizona*

The trail work videos and documents available at [www.VOAz.org](http://www.VOAz.org) cover a wide range of topics related to natural surface multi-use trails — those for use by equestrians, hikers, and mountain bikers. The topics include:

- Basic techniques for building, rehabilitating, and maintaining trails
- Safe personal practices for those engaged in trail work
- Safe and effective use of hand tools
- Crew Leadership for managing trail crews
- Planning and management of trail work events
- Trail work design

While the most common trail work tasks are covered, this list is not all-inclusive. One criteria for topic selection was the extent to which the special requirements of trails in arid landscapes have been addressed in existing publications.

This training program is intended to address the interests of a wide audience, that include:

- Volunteers, including those who have little familiarity with trail work
- Experienced volunteers wanting to refresh or enhance their grasp of trail work techniques
- Organizations that want to train prospective volunteers and crew leaders
- Trainers working for organizations who improve and expand sanctioned, non-motorized recreational trails.



While the preparation of these materials has been influenced by the perspective of a private non-profit engaged in trail work and training for trail work since 1999 (VOAz), it is

hoped that public and non-profit land managers with interest in these topics will also find the materials useful.

One goal of Arizona State Parks in funding this work is to increase the **number** of people involved as volunteers in trail work. Another goal is to increase the **quality** of work by volunteers who work directly with land managers or through voluntary associations.

## Creation of a Training Program

The training resources at the [www.VOAz.org](http://www.VOAz.org) are best used as resources for a well-designed training *program*. These materials may make it possible to reduce the classroom time. Viewing and reading these materials can be assigned in advance, so that trainees arrive at a live training program with some preparation. The videos have an inherent liveliness that makes them a good vehicle for discussion when viewed by small groups of trainees.

Suggestions on training strategies included below cover the roles of:

- Trail Worker
- Crew Leader
- Event Manager
- Trail Designer

## Trail Worker Training

Some trail users believe that trail work involves little more than the application of common sense. To many, trails are simply paths opened up that are easier to hike or ride on than

going cross country. Many official trails are legacy routes that have been incorporated into a trail system — they were never designed, much less built, as recreational trails.

One way to overcome these misconceptions is to get trail users involved in regular organized trail work events. Small crews working at an event with trained Crew Leaders can be very effective for several reasons:

- Because the number of volunteers is small, it is easier to hold trainee attention and there are opportunities for one-on-one instruction.
- They are hands-on experiences rather than just listening to someone talk about trail construction.
- They capture variations encountered in the natural environment, which often do not match the idealized configurations found in print publications and diagrams used to illustrate trail work technique and structures.
- If some of the crew are experienced volunteers, they can help with the training experience and provide social support and further motivation.



Disadvantages to using events for training new trail workers include:

- Crew Leaders are not always great trainers.
- Some events offer a vary narrow range of learning opportunities.
- Some events are in highly atypical environments limiting the transferability of the lessons learned.

The first disadvantage can be overcome if trainees are only assigned to Crew Leaders with a talent for teaching. The latter two disadvantages can be noted and their implications discussed.

## Basic Trail Work Training Events

Events are sometimes used to both mobilize and train new volunteers. Such events may do a better job mobilizing than building solid skills when they involve groups larger than one crew. Testing is a very important part of learning. With small training crews the test can be "show me you can do this" or better "teach me how to do this." That becomes impossible with a large group. Keep in mind that classroom sessions by themselves may be of limited value because they don't lend themselves to meaningful testing in our context. Classroom presentations need to be followed with small group field exercises.

The VOAz training web site can be used to support an effective training program for new trail workers by following three activities in sequence:

1. Individually, read a book, such as *The Joy of Trail Work*, and view the videos at [www.VOAz.org](http://www.VOAz.org)
2. View and discuss the videos in a group session, taking advantage of the pause and rewind features of the videos.
3. Participate in field work sessions with demonstrations and closely-supervised work training

The field work session or sessions should be scripted in advance based on the content materials at the web site and the assets and limitations of the training site.

## Crew Leader Training

Crew Leader competence is the key determinant of the strength of a trail work program of any organization. The PDF publication at the VOAz website *Leadership Training - Crew Leader Guide* identifies four priorities with respect to the volunteer experience for every trail work event:

1. Safety
2. Enjoyment
3. Quality Product
4. Productivity or Output



Additional documents available under "Training" at the VOAz website may be incorporated into any Crew Leader training program:

*Crew Leader Tool & Safety Check List.* This is available as a PDF document or you may purchase a spiral pocket-sized booklet suitable for use in the field

*Safety Planning for Volunteer Work*

Crew Leaders should also use a trail work technical reference handbook. *The Joy of Trail Work* is available for purchase through VOAz. It specifically addresses the special requirements of trail work in arid landscapes. The U.S. Forest Service, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Student Conservations Association, IMBA and others have good trail work publications as well.

The aforementioned *Crew Leader Guide* identifies the three primary skill areas of a Crew Leader:

- **Technical Skills** Crew Leaders must command of a core set of technical skills and safe work practices. The *Joy of Trail Work* covers basic trail construction and maintenance tasks that Crew Leaders should master.
- **Leadership Skills** Crew Leaders must be able to motivate other volunteers to engage in the shared goal of building sustainable trail. This section describes skills critical to successful crew leading — from communications to handling serious rule violations.
- **Management Skills** Crew Leaders must integrate a series of activities to create a successful work event. There are management tasks related to the work of a crew and then there are additional tasks related to the work event (i.e., recruitment, registration, food services) that a crew leader may be required to fulfill as well. Some of the latter relate to liability and administrative requirements of the Crew Leader's organization. Others are associated with the host land management agency requirements.



Beyond a sound proficiency in trail work technique, the most challenging task for Crew Leaders can be working effectively with volunteers — what we refer to as “leadership skills”. Many Crew Leaders are drawn to trail work because they love to build trails, but will likely need instruction in effectively leading volunteers.

## Trail Design Training

There are two resources pertaining the trail design available at [www.VOAz.org](http://www.VOAz.org). One is a PowerPoint presentation entitled *Trail Design Principles*, the other is a PDF file containing the Facilitator Notes for that video. The presentation covers widely accepted principles of sustainable trail design.

The primary audience for these are trail designers and trainers. Additional prospective users may include:

- Anyone interested in the topic
- Individuals or groups interested in building a new trail.
- Crew Leaders. The information included can help Crew Leaders judge if they are being asked to build or maintain an unsustainable trail and to devise effective repairs to damaged trail.

*Please note:* Even though it is a mandatory pre-condition to building or moving a trail, the topic of Trail Planning and securing authorization to build a new trail or a major realignment is separate from Trail Design, and is not covered at VOAz.org. Always work through the relevant land manager.



*Volunteers for Outdoor Arizona can design and conduct training programs to fit your agency requirements. Please contact us for additional details.*