



Outing Leaders' Guidelines

Latest Update

July 2022

PLANNING AN OUTING

A. Gather the details required for posting on the TFN website.

These will be used to fill in the online [Walk/Outing Description Form](#).

- Select the park or area of the city you plan to explore.
- **Find a clear meeting point** that is easily found and seen by participants.
- **Outings should be TTC accessible**; please provide TTC route and stop information.
- For outings outside Toronto, provide travel information to reach the outing location.
- **Determine the main focus of your outing.** E.g., birds, flowers, trees, insects, geography, geology, built heritage.
- **How long is the outing you plan to lead, both in hours and kilometers?**
- **Consider accessibility** by individuals with mobility challenges, including people who use mobility devices such as motorized wheelchairs. Are there difficulties/impediments along the way (stairs, rough ground, steep slopes)? Are there alternative paths/routes which avoid those challenges?
- **Will your outing be a circular route or be linear**, with a different start and end point?
- Should participants bring anything special? E.g., lunch, binoculars
- **Are washrooms available?**
- Is there other information that would be helpful for participants? E.g., joint outing with another group, expected sights, end location, safe drop-out spots if people have to leave early, the option of an after-outing coffee shop meet-up.
- Since one or more outings per month are publicly advertised, would you be comfortable leading one of these? Is your outing location suitable for a potentially large group of participants? If chosen for a public outing you might be contacted to provide a photo or two for promotional purposes. This is not compulsory.

B. Plan your welcome.

- Print off the [Outing Leader Checklist](#) to help you remember what to say at the welcome.
- Rehearse your welcome before the outing.
- For public outings, bring TFN brochures/bookmarks to share for promotional purposes.
- Bring information handouts to share and/or field guides as resources if you wish.
- Bring an area map if it is suitable, for your own reference and/or to help participants unfamiliar with the area situate themselves.

C. Do a pre-outing walk or check.

- **1-2 days prior to your scheduled outing it is best to check the route or location.** You may find construction blocking the planned route or TTC access, flood conditions in spring, icy conditions in winter, or other issues.
- **Note safety hazards along the route and consider how to point them out or avoid them.**
- **Note sightings of birds, plants and other features of interest you are likely to see.**
- Select a lunch site, if planned, ideally with shelter nearby in the event of rain or snow.
- **Verify washroom availability.** This is an important consideration, as washrooms available in the summer may be closed in other seasons. If no washrooms are available on the outing route, seek out other options nearby (e.g., fast-food restaurants, public buildings such as community centres).

DURING THE OUTING

A. At the welcome:

- **Arrive early**, ideally at least 15 minutes before the outing start time.
- **If possible, greet everyone as they arrive.** Ask their name and whether they are a TFN member, if you don't yet know that.
- Greet newcomers, make them feel welcome and offer them a TFN brochure/bookmark to promote TFN membership.
- **Allow about 5 minutes grace time** after the planned start time for latecomers before leaving the meeting point. If it's possible, have the first speaking stop visible from the meeting point, so participants arriving quite late can still see and join the group
- **Introduce yourself; describe the route, length and purpose of the outing; mention washroom breaks, and forewarn people of any difficult terrain or icy conditions that will be encountered.**
- Encourage people to bring interesting sightings to the attention of the group.
- Encourage people to post their photos from the outing to social media using the hashtag #TFNWalk so that others can easily find them.
- **Point out other experts in the group** (ask their permission to do so beforehand).
- **Ask participants to adhere to the participant guidelines. Particularly: stay on the paths, do not pick or collect specimens, do not bring pets, thoroughly clean your footwear to avoid spreading invasive seeds.**
- **Count the participants at the time of departure, and count the numbers along the way to be sure to have the whole group.**
- Stress the importance of participants staying with the group behind the leader.
- **If the group is large (more than 10 or so), ask for a helper to shepherd any stragglers.** If possible, ask a TFN outing leader (if available) to take on that role.

B. On the trail:

- **Set an appropriate pace so that everyone can keep up, yet allow sufficient time to see and enjoy interesting things.** (A common complaint is going too fast.)
 - **Important: on all shared trails, paths or sidewalks, make clear to the entire group that they should keep to one side and avoid blocking the passage of pedestrians and cyclists**

also using that trail, path or sidewalk. This is a big challenge to manage, and is usually done by the shepherd if available. Reminders of this, and warnings of “bikes coming through” or “runners/walkers coming through” typically have to be repeated many times during an outing.

- **Effective group management is important to ensure a good reputation for TFN outings and leaders.**
- **Be sure to be able to see the full group at all times.** This is especially important when walking a long distance between speaking stops; it’s important to turn around every so often to be sure the full group is moving forward. Many people walk quite slowly, requiring the group ahead to wait for a while for them to catch up. You can use that time to ask for questions, while waiting (if possible) for the full group to be together before sharing your key points about a location, so that everyone can learn.
- **At speaking stops, face participants and speak loudly.** If the stop location is noisy, move to a quieter area, or if you anticipate noisy locations, bring a loudspeaker system along for those spaces.
 - Although COVID masking is no longer required on TFN outings, leaders should make an effort to avoid requiring participants to have to congregate near the leader to hear what is being said, to minimize risk of COVID transmission (or encourage participants to wear a mask at those times). This involves attentive planning of the outing to monitor noise levels and identify quieter spaces where it is easier to speak and be heard without congregation.
- Point out plants/animals/natural/historical features in a loud voice, allowing an opportunity for all to see.
- Try to include interesting information about what is seen, not just identification, but don't make long speeches.
- Optional: Broaden the interest of the outing beyond its main focus by mentioning any environmental, historical or architectural aspects of the route.
- **Welcome questions and try to be accessible to all participants.** If someone asks an interesting question while walking, repeat the question and answer for the group at the next pause.
- Include beginners by taking time to help them understand how things are identified (in the case of plants, birds, mushrooms, etc). Encourage experts to share their knowledge.
- **Make sure everyone has an opportunity to see what is being described before moving the full group on,** and be specific in pointing out the location of a bird, plant or mushroom.
- Stop periodically and gather the group to point out items of interest. Pick quiet locations and be sure to speak audibly and clearly. In summer, look for a shady spot.
- **On long outings, pause by washrooms, when available.**
- **In the interests of safety, keep the group together when crossing roads and streets; be aware of hazards or obstacles; and help less agile walkers with barriers, slopes, uneven terrain or icy conditions.**
- Be flexible, adjusting to bad weather conditions.
- Enthusiasm, humour and interesting anecdotes add to the enjoyment of an outing.

C. At the end of the outing:

- **Provide a clear ending to the outing.**

- **Ask for feedback** - anything that would have improved the group's experience.
- **Provide travel instructions if they are not obvious.**
 - Be attentive to any participants expressing confusion about their route home, as they may be in an area with which they are unfamiliar. If necessary, accompany them to the correct transit stop or parking area to be sure they are clear about their route.
- Announce any after-outing social gatherings (e.g., coffee shop).
- **Within a week after the outing, please fill out the [Outing Leader's Report Form](#).**

CHALLENGING SITUATIONS AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

A. Keeping the group together

- **Make sure you have done a count at the start of the outing and confirm the count at stopping points. You can have a helper do this for you for large groups.**
- **Ask participants to report to you if they are leaving the outing.**
- **Participants move at different paces. Ask a back-up person to watch for stragglers so you know who has left and who may be lost. This may require slowing the pace of the full group, to keep it together.**
- Offshoot groups lagging at one spot may slow the pace. See if they have found something of interest before getting them to move on. Having a clear purpose for the outing will reduce this, as participants won't have conflicting goals; e.g., A vigorous hike vs. bird sightings.
 - If an offshoot group is consistently lagging at one stop, while the remainder of the group wants to move on (or if the offshoot group is significantly increasing the time of the outing), you may want to suggest that the offshoot group continue independently, while providing them with clear directions to the end of the outing route.
 - An option here, if there is an experienced shepherd in the group, this person could become the leader for the slower group.
- After lunch is an especially difficult time to keep track of a group. Announcing at the start of lunch how long the break is and when and where to meet back will help.

B. Dealing with rule breakers

- **If a participant arrives with a pet, gently inform them that pets are not allowed on TFN outings.**
- **If a participant ventures off the path, picks flowers, mushrooms, removes a nest, etc., remind them to respect nature, and to obey both Toronto park bylaws and Ontario laws.**

C. Physical challenges

- **The leader can cancel an outing at the meeting place due to inclement weather.**
- **Find a shady spot for information-sharing on a hot day.**
- **Make the group aware of poison ivy or other problematic plants in the areas you are passing.**
- **Point out icy spots during winter outings.**

D. Outing Safety

- **Discuss safety at the start of the outing**, identifying any special challenges or hazards along the route. This allows members to either opt-out or find help to overcome obstacles.
- Carry a cell phone or identify if someone in the group has one to be used in an emergency.
- **Carry a first aid kit.** At a minimum, have bandages and hand-wipes.
- **Keep a reasonable pace.**
- **In urban settings, be sure to cross streets at traffic lights or crosswalks, and wait for the full group to have crossed before moving on** (and let the group know beforehand you will do that).
- Given that some participants may walk slowly, it is important to avoid rushing across intersections, for safety.
- At the junction of a path, either wait for everyone or post someone to direct the followers.
- **Offer directions for safe early leaving along the route.**