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Document Purpose:

The following is a working checklist of “best practices” used by Genesee Valley Hiking Club (GVHC) hike leaders over the many years of the club. This checklist, although not mandatory, is suggested for use by GVHC hike leaders as it provides a degree of quality & consistency across GVHC-sponsored hikes.

The moments leading up to a hike can get very busy as hikers sign in and numerous conversations are triggered, introductions are made, friendships are re-ignited, etc. So this document is intended to help new and experienced hike leaders stay organized and not forget important steps that lead to a successful hike.

You might be asking ... What defines a “*successful hike*”? Great question! Some characteristics of a successful hike include but are not limited to:

1. GVHC members and guests had fun and got some exercise!
2. No hikers were left behind ... all who joined in the hike, completed the hike.
3. No hikers were injured during the hike.
4. Any medical issues that arose during the hike, were dealt with promptly and with compassion.

A typical GVHC-sponsored hike can be broken into 5 phases: Planning & Reconnaissance, Pre-Circle, Circle Time, Hiking, and Post Hike. Each phase has activities listed below that will help ensure you lead a *successful hike*.

Emergencies:

In the unlikely event of an emergency, the hike leader or any club member should call "911".

1. Planning & Recon Hike:

You should be familiar with your hiking trail / area and perform a reconnaissance hike which is typically done a few days or the week prior to the led hike. The purpose of the recon hike is to ensure your assumptions for vehicle parking and trail conditions are *current*.

1. Obtain the landowner's permission if needed for scouting the hike, the actual hike, and for using the parking area.
2. Take note of alternate extraction points which could be used in the unlikely event of a medical emergency during the hike. E.G. if someone were to twist their ankle, or have a heart condition, how would you get them to safety?
3. If the trail conditions have changed from what's normally expected, go to the Meetup web page for your hike and post a comment. E.g. If the trail is treacherous due to ice, post a recommendation that hikers bring crampons and hiking poles because the trail is iced over.
4. During the Fall Hunting Season, both the hike leader and trail sweep should wear orange safety vests and/or hats. Additionally, you should remind hikers to wear bright orange clothing using the Meetup Comments section of your hike.
5. Download and print the most current version of the [GVHC Hiker Sign-In Sheet](https://gvhchikes.org/Resources.html) Version X.Y from <https://gvhchikes.org/Resources.html>
6. To cancel a hike, please refer to the club policy titled: [Canceling a Hike](https://gvhchikes.org/Resources.html) which also can be found at <https://gvhchikes.org/Resources.html>

2. Pre-Circle:

1. Arrive at your hike venue at least 15 minutes before the planned start, whatever the weather conditions (unless the county orders all vehicles to stay off the roads).
2. As hikers begin to arrive, have them print & sign their name on the *Hiker Sign-In Sheet*.
3. Identify your Trail Sweep and provide them a whistle or exchange cell phone #s with them. (This is especially important with larger groups of 25 or more hikers.) Remind the Sweep that they have three jobs:
 - 1) You're always the last person.
 - 2) If you lose sight of the main group, blow your whistle. (If you don't have a whistle, agree ahead of time how the Sweep will contact the hike leader should you begin to separate.)
 - 3) If a hiker cannot keep up, designate an alternate trail sweep, and consider your options going forward such as: shortening the planned route or escorting the person who is having difficulty keeping up, back to the trailhead.

4. We want all participants in the hike to be capable of completing the hike. If a hiker does identify as being doubtful about their ability to complete the hike, then make clear the hike length, speed (e.g. a 20 min/mile pace), elevation gain (if relevant) and trail obstacles (if any) that they will encounter. Essentially, you need any “at risk hikers” to decide for themselves whether the hike might be too challenging.

3. Circle Time:

1. Ask your hikers to form up into a circle.
2. State Welcome / Introduction
3. Is there anyone here for whom this will be your first GVHC-led hike? If so, welcome!
4. Mention: Club Background – We are a 95+ year-old club. Encourage all attending to join the GVHC and that dues are only \$10 per year. Optionally mention up-coming hikes or other club activities e.g. Picnics, Exec Meetings, etc.
5. Verify that everyone signed in? (Pass the clipboard to any who haven't signed in.)
6. Accurately describe the hike, its length, speed (e.g. a 20 min/mile pace), elevation gain (if relevant) and trail obstacles (if any) that they will encounter. Essentially, you want all hikers to *decide for themselves* whether the hike might be too challenging. Point out that the hike leader will optionally change the hike duration, pace, or route taking, based upon conditions of the trail, weather, and feedback from fellow hikers.

If relevant, mention gear review: Bring hiking poles? Crampons? Insect Repellent? Water? Field Glasses? GPS? Gloves? Sun Block? Gators to protect shins from thorns, etc.
7. Point out that if anyone has to leave the hike, then someone will have to leave with them for safety reasons. We do not let hikers leave the group alone.
8. Only mention if someone appears to be breaking the rules. On the hike:
No pets,
No radios,
No smoking.
9. Identify your Trail Sweep to the group.
10. Remind hikers to stay behind the hike leader and ahead of the sweep.
11. Count off with our first names. Check this count against the sign in sheet. The number of hikers who signed in, should match the highest verbal count number.

4. Hiking:

1. Be sure to maintain a line of sight with your trail sweep.

2. Try to build in occasional pauses in the hike for water breaks, or chances to adjust clothing. Do a quick visual scan of your group, keeping an eye out for hikers who may be having trouble with the pace or experiencing other difficulties.

5. Post-Hike:

1. At the conclusion of the hike, remind folks to turn off GPS route tracking apps.
2. Optional: See if there's interest in building some club esprit de corps by meeting at a nearby coffee house, restaurant, or pub - - if you're available.
3. Tip: Don't leave the parking area until every hiker has started their car (especially in winter). You want to make sure there are no dead batteries or flat tires.
4. Follow the instructions on the bottom of the Lower Left Corner of Page 1 of the Hiker Sign-In Sheet. Using your cell phone camera, photograph each page of the Hiker Sign-In Sheet and send an email with the photo attachments to the Hiker Sign-In Sheet Archiving Service.

We (the GVHC) are always interested in improving this checklist, so if you have thoughts in that regard, please contact GVHC Club President, Larry O'Heron.

Document Change History:

Date	Description
5/1/2026 V7	Replaced verbiage on USPS mailing of Hiker Sign-In Sheet to Ex-President, with verbiage about emailing Hiker Sign-In Sheet to Archiving Service. Added references to club policy for Canceling a hike. [Tom K]
11/17/2024 V6	Added verbiage about: 1. Leader and Sweep exchanging cell phone #s, and, 2. Wearing bright orange clothing or hats in late Autumn during hunting season.
10/19/2022 V5	Added Patty Mangarelli's phone # for canceling hikes (in addition to Derek's), Table of Contents, and internal links for ease of doc navigation in PDF doc on a phone. [Tom K]
8/8/2022 V4	Added a few additional changes per 10/15/2022 email from Derek to Tom. [Tom K]
3/3/2022 V1-3	Incorporated changes proposed by Derek Price and Larry O'Heron using Microsoft Word <i>Track Changes</i> and <i>Comments</i> feature. This version needs final approval before posting it. Tom emailed Derek and Larry. Still need Larry's phone # if Hike needs to be canceled. Initial draft created by Tom Kolankiewicz by observing fellow hike leaders (Thank You: Ann, Anna, Larry, Michelle, Alicia, Paul, Chauncy and Derek) NOTE! The primary audience for this checklist is <u>new GVHC hike leaders</u> . It was written so that it can be referenced on a phone or paper copy before the start of your hikes.