

Field Trip Organization 101

Chicago River Fieldtrip

A field trip to the Chicago River can be a wonderful experience for teachers and students, providing a memorable learning experience. If you are new to outdoor field trips it can seem daunting. Here are some suggested steps to help make the process go smoothly.

Decide when you want to go

Fall and spring are the most popular times for a field trip to the Chicago River (though there are lots of great winter activities if you don't mind the cold). If you are thinking of the spring, we recommend calling in March as we book up fast. Fall is usually less busy.

Decide where you want to go

There are a variety of locations along the river from urban to natural. The most natural settings are in the Forest Preserves. Northern forest preserves stretch from Foster Avenue in Chicago all the way to the beginnings of the Chicago River in Lake County. Southern forest preserves stretch from Crestwood to Palos Hills. Other less natural settings include city parks and golf courses. Urban settings, such as along city bridges, are also possible sites.

Refer to the field trip site location sheets (www.chicagoriver.org/education) for more information on all recommended field trip sites. If you have a site you would like to visit, which is not on our list, we would be happy to check it out. Feel free to contact Friends of the Chicago River, Chicago River Schools Network staff for assistance.

Schedule with Friends of the Chicago River

If you would like a staff person to help the day of or if you would like to borrow any equipment please contact Friends at least two weeks in advance. The earlier you contact us the more likely we (or our equipment) will be available on your preferred dates.

Apply for permit, permission and busses

If you choose a Cook County Forest Preserve site you **must** fill out and turn in a permit application to the Cook County Forest Preserve District at least two weeks before your field trip. You should also call (708) 771-1088 to make sure bathrooms are unlocked the day of your field trip. In addition, you will need to get permission from your school district and hire your own bus. The permit can be obtained from Friends' website at www.chicagoriver.org/education.

Decide what you want your students to do

There are a wide range of activities students can do at the river. We suggest picking a three to six activities and choosing a variety of different types of activities. For write-ups of all the activities listed below, check out www.chicagoriver.org/education. Below are brief descriptions of possibilities, but of course feel free to create your own.

Water quality testing: 5th-12th Using test kits we have for loan, students can test the waters for pH, turbidity, nitrates, phosphates, dissolved oxygen, biological oxygen demand, total solids and fecal coli form.

Macroinvertebrate collection: K-12th Students can collect and identify macroinvertebrates (small, backboneless organisms living in the water) to determine the quality of the river. Younger students can simply observe and characterize the animals they find. If you don't have your own equipment, you can borrow all the equipment you will need from us.

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Ecology Studies: K-12th Students can investigate the ecology of the riverbanks and land surrounding the river through transects, nature walks and observation activities.

Mapping and Orienteering: 3rd-12th Students can practice drawing site maps and gain skill in navigating using compass directions.

Active Games: K-12th Students often get very excited on field trips; an educational active game can provide them with a constructive outlet for their extra energy.

Observation: K-12th Students can hone their observation skills as they take guided nature walks, scavenger hunts and make detailed drawings.

Reflection: K-12th Take time to let students soak it all in and understand what this visit to nature means to them.

Stewardship Activities and Restoration: K-12th Students can help with physically restoring natural areas to health. Some activities can include trash pick up, invasive species removal, native plantings and native seed collection.

Decide on field trip organization

We suggest you bring no more than 60 students to the river at once, and divide students into groups no larger than 15, each group having its own adult leader (a parent, teacher or teacher's aide). There are two main ways to organize students on a field trip:

1. Students rotate through a series of activities, each student having the opportunity to try everything.
2. Students are divided into expert groups. Each group delves deeply into one or two activities. Groups then report back to the entire group.

Due to bus schedules, field trips usually last two to three hours, including time for lunch.

Send in your "Field Trip Needs Form"

After you have designed your trip, please fill out the "Field Trip Needs Form" and fax it back to us at (312) 939-0931. **THE DATABASE CANNOT FORMALLY BOOK YOUR TRIP UNTIL WE HAVE THE INFORMATION ON YOUR "NEEDS" FORM.** The form can be found at www.chicagoriver.org/education.

Recruit and train chaperones

Most school districts require a chaperone for each ten students. This kind of coverage is a necessity at the river. Each student group should have an adult chaperone. In addition, you may need activity leaders to lead the different stations at the river.

In class before field trip

We have found it very helpful if before the day of the field trip students are: familiar and comfortable with the content behind the activities they will be doing are already divided into their working groups and have reviewed in their groups what their tasks are. We also recommend reviewing the safety procedures (available at www.chicagoriver.org/education).

It is very important that students do some work in the classroom before the field trip. To obtain some of our lessons go to www.chicagoriver.org/education.

At the Chicago River

If Friends of the Chicago River is assisting you, we will provide an introduction to the Chicago River and to the site as well as review safety procedures. Teachers can remind students and chaperones of the instructions and timetable for the day.

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