



Chapter 4- Commuter Crew: Site Visit

Chapter 4 details working with the Agency Coordinator and the tasks involved in organizing the project site prior to the arrival of students.

The planning for your program, including the myriad of small details, has been organized by the Regional Staff Coordinator. However it is useful for you as the Crew Leader to understand what needs to be done especially since as the program time draws near, some conditions may change. Use this chapter to orient yourself to what needs to be done and use the checklists to help keep yourself organized. The more planning and preparation you put into your program, the smoother and more enjoyable it will be both for you and the participants. The following list covers the primary tasks that should be accomplished:

1. Pick up your rental vehicle.
2. Meet with your agency or park coordinator.
3. Look at your work project.
4. Look over the venue options at the site for;
 - i. environmental education activities
 - ii. workforce readiness activities
 - iii. grass games, stretch circles, and team building activities
 - iv. eating lunch
 - v. rainy day respite
5. Gather all necessary tools.
6. Check out all your SCA equipment.
7. Review or write your Emergency Response Plan (ERP)
8. Meet other staff and set up opportunities/logistics.
9. Begin to plan recreation trip.

SCA has developed a handbook for agency personnel responsible for supporting all SCA Conservation Crews that has been sent to every Agency Coordinator. The *Agency Coordinator Handbook* should go a long way toward facilitating a successful relationship between you and the site coordinator, and is available on the Crew Leader website (<http://www.scacrewleaders.org/>) for your reference and use.

VEHICLE TRANSPORTATION

For all of our Commuter Crew Programs, SCA will rent a vehicle to use during the program or utilize existing public transportation.

Type of Vehicle

If your program requires a vehicle, SCA will rent mini vans. In some cases SCA works with the agency to secure vehicles. This will happen prior to your arrival at your program. Once the reservation has been made you will receive details to pick up your vehicle.

A few suggestions prior to signing out your vehicle:

1. Remember -- you need a seat belt for each occupant of the vehicle.
2. Make sure everything works, that there is spare tire and you know how to change it.

Note about Insurance:

Insurance coverage for SCA's drivers is trickier than most, given the average age of our drivers and the types of vehicles we most often rent. There are two types of insurance coverage: physical damage coverage and liability coverage. *Liability coverage* is provided by SCA's umbrella insurance policy. *Physical damage insurance coverage* is the piece that varies for each rental. This is the insurance coverage discussed herein.

Crew Leaders should refuse the over-the-counter insurance coverage options from Enterprise. Be certain that you list any additional drivers on the contract.

Vehicle Safety

It is your responsibility to make sure that any rig you drive is properly licensed and insured, and that it is in safe running order. Never use an SCA vehicle or government vehicle for personal business. See chapter I for a full listing of SCA Vehicle Policies.

CONTACT COORDINATOR AND ARRANGE VISIT (OPTIONAL)

Regional SCA staff maintains ongoing relationships with many of the agencies and partners where you will be assigned to do work. It is not customary for Crew Leaders make contact pre-program contact with your Agency Coordinator however there may be a case where you will be asked to communicate directly with them. Please introduce yourself and make a pre-program visit. They will have received a contact from SCA introducing you.

The timing of your visit will certainly depend on your schedule and the coordinator's schedule. Other factors such as the condition of the site, the distance to the site, and when the program begins will also affect the timing of your visit. Typically, Crew Leaders schedule a meeting with the coordinator in the days prior to the arrival of students.

As you arrange your visit, emphasize to the coordinator the importance of them visiting the work project with you. If they are too busy they may delegate the job to one of their staff. In either case, insist that someone from the agency accompany you. The success of the program and the quality of the work you complete depend on your fully understanding the agency's specifications and expectations for the work. Also, the better you know your coordinator the more willing and able they will be to help you.

NOTE: Agency Coordinators sometimes change between the time we receive the program request forms in the fall and the time of the programs actual start. If you find your coordinator is different from the name we have provided you, please notify your SCA Regional Coordinator immediately.

REVIEW WORK PROJECT

While the work projects have been coordinated by your Regional Coordinator it is encourage that you should understand the details of each project with which you will be responsible. It is encouraged that you review the work projects for your group. While SCA has made its best effort to negotiate reasonable and satisfying work, the project specifications may change as agency priorities or funding changes. Discuss all aspects of the project with your Agency and Regional Coordinator to make sure that you know both what is to be done and how. You also need to evaluate whether this project is suitable and safe for an SCA high school group and whether it can be completed in the time given.

Guidelines for a Good Project

All successful SCA work projects share three characteristics: safety, suitability, and size.

1. Safety

We hope you are not asked to perform blatantly unsafe work. If you feel the work is not safe, raise this issue immediately with your Agency Coordinator. If you are unsatisfied with the response, contact SCA staffs in your region for help. One of the main purposes of the SCA administrative staff is to negotiate on your behalf; should discussions become heated, your congenial working relationship with the area will be protected. Keep in mind, however, that ALL work projects can contain potential dangers. During this visit you can assess the potential hazards and begin to formulate a strategy to foster safety conscious attitudes and work habits among your crew.

2. Suitability

Suitable projects are ones that help the agency accomplish its resource management goals and that can capture and maintain the crew's interest and motivation. It's fair to assume that if the agency asks you to do the work, it fulfills the first requirement. Your concern, then, will be to assess whether the work is appropriate for your crew (see project standards in chapter I). Ask yourself these questions:

- * Is the work clearly necessary? Does it accomplish meaningful conservation or resource management goals? Will I be able to explain the purpose and importance of this project convincingly to my crew? Is there a way to relate this project to the community in which these youth live?
- * Does the work require enough different manual skills that the crew will be challenged? Is there enough variety to keep participants from getting bored and careless?
- * Will our efforts have lasting results? If most of your project is "temporary," such as brushing, try to get at least a small "permanent" project to work on, too: stone steps, timber crib, bridge or boardwalk construction, etc.

3. Size

Your work project should be large enough to keep the Crew challenged, but small enough to complete well without rushing or working unsafely. It should have a clearly defined beginning and end, so that your crew can see the results of their work and feel proud. If it is open-ended (i.e., "replace as many waterbars along this 50-mile section of trail as you can..."), think about how you will set achievable goals to give the crew sense of accomplishment and completion. Most work can be made either interesting or boring. Imagine how you will motivate your crew to do the best job they can.

Understanding the Project Specifications and Work Expectations

Before you can direct your Crew to do a good job, you need to know what is expected, how you will do it, what tools it will take, how long it will take, and what hazards you might expect.

Get any written job specifications you can from your Agency Coordinator. Some coordinators will have a complete job description package made up, while others will simply walk the project with you and discuss it. If there are no written specs, get a copy

of the agency's general trail specifications. Then be persistent until you clearly understand what the agency wants.

You may end up with several smaller projects or one main one.

SCA groups often accomplish more work than the agencies estimate. Have some backup projects in case you complete the primary work project. Also, if conditions might affect the feasibility of your project (such as late snow-melt), arrange for alternative projects.

While you are surveying the work with your Agency or SCA Regional Coordinator, ask these questions:

- * What is the job?
- * Why is it being done?
- * Where is it to be done?
- * When is it to be completed?
- * How is it to be accomplished?
- * What are the required or specialized tools?
- * What are the major hazards?
- * Who else might be involved?
- * Are there additional projects our crew could perform while in the field? Remind your Agency Coordinator that while your focus will be assigned work projects, your location on trails provides an excellent opportunity for your crew to keep a log on public visitation to the area, wildlife, weather, and a host of other on-site surveys.

If for some reason, you object to your assigned work project or location, contact SCA. If you arrive in the field, however, and circumstances have changed so that you have grave concerns for the group's safety, contact SCA immediately.

Estimating How Much Work can be Accomplished

As you review the work proposed by the agency, estimate what reasonably can be accomplished. Let your coordinator know if you think the work cannot be completed in the time allotted, or if you will need additional meaningful projects.

Developing a sense of what a crew of 6 to 10 can accomplish in three or five weeks comes only with time and experience. If you are a new Crew Leader who has never directed a similar kind of project, you have very little to judge against. You can use your Agency Coordinator as a resource, or ask the opinion of a returning SCA Crew Leader or your supervisor. Make your best guess and learn from what actually happens. Some things to take into consideration:

- * How far from the pick up and drop off area is the work? How much of each day will be spent "commuting" on foot or in a vehicle?
- * Will all materials already be on-site or will it have to be transported? If so, how and by whom? How will this affect your Crew's ability to work steadily?
- * Is there only one project or several? If one, will there be times when there is not enough room for all 7 to 12 of you to work simultaneously?

- * Will you need to spend a significant amount of time training the participants in special skills?
- * Will agency personnel be necessary at any stage? If so, what will you work on if these folks are not available as planned?
- * Will you have to contend with weather extremes such as heat, heavy rain, high wind? What is the altitude of the work site?
- * What is the terrain like? New construction on rugged, stony, steep slopes is much slower than across flat grassy meadows.
- * Does the work require continuous hands-on involvement of the Crew Leaders? Will you have time to "supervise" the project?

Things to be Aware Of

Agency folks who have never worked with SCA Crews often underestimate the amount and quality of the work that can be accomplished. Make sure you have back-up projects lined out, even if your coordinator is certain you will never finish the first one. On the other extreme, your coordinator may overestimate your technical skills. If you feel uncomfortable with any part of the project let her know up front. Perhaps she can arrange to have an agency "technician" work with you for part of the project, or perhaps you will simply leave some portion of the project untouched.

PLAN YOUR TOOL CACHE

Review the Tools Necessary to Do the Work

After you have visited the work site and have a sense of the tasks involved, sit down with your coordinator to review the complete tool list. Also list any materials you may need such as nails, bolts, or milled lumber. Your list should specify the number of each tool you will need. If your project is 90% grubbing new tread, you will need enough trail grubbing tools (Pulaskis, pick mattocks, and McLeods) for each Crew Member to have one. Find out where the shortfalls are, and figure out how to improvise and or request from your Regional Coordinator. As a last resort you may need to modify the project.

Set Actual Tools Aside

During your pre-program visit, try to select your tools and store them in a separate area. You'll probably need to meet the local maintenance foreman to do this. Examine each tool you choose to ensure it is in safe working order and good condition. Tools should be sharp and have tool covers. If you are not familiar with a tool, ask how to use it correctly and learn what safety precautions it requires.

If you are a new Crew Leader making your pre-program visit BEFORE you have attended SCA Work Skills training, you may feel at a loss. Ask for your Regional Coordinator's advice to make up a preliminary list. You may need to revise the list once you have attended the Work Skills training session.

Inventory Tools

Some tools may need to be borrowed from your partner agency, but generally, your tools will be coming from SCA's master gear cache. You will make an appointment with

SCA staff to bring your list of required tools to the cache and pick up what you need. You will be provided with a checklist to record your inventory.

REVIEW YOUR EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN (ERP)

Review safety procedures and complete a detailed Emergency Response Plan (ERP) with your coordinator. An unfortunate tendency among many crew leaders is to gloss over these details, assuming either that nothing serious will happen or that things can be ironed out when something happens. **Do not fall into this trap!**

Be totally over-prepared in this arena; the groundwork you lay during your pre-program visit will be well worth it when you are preoccupied later with managing an evacuation. For a complete list of information to be gathered along with a sample, completed Emergency Response Plan, refer to the Risk Assessment chapter. **Your completed Emergency Response Plan must be received by your regional office before your program starts** (they will be scanned so that all offices have them proper emergency response). Your crew cannot go into the field unless SCA and your coordinator have a completed emergency response plan.

PURCHASE FOOD

The Crew Members are required to bring their own lunch and water bottle, if they do not have a water bottle we can provide you one for them from the office cache. It is almost a given that some Crew Members will not show up with a lunch on any given day. You should plan on having backup sandwich supplies readily available in the form of peanut butter, jelly and bread. Keep it real simple and plain or else they will all start forgetting their lunch every day. In addition, there will be occasions where you will provide snacks for the crew. We encourage the selection of healthy snacks to model healthy choices in nutrition for Crew Members and Leaders. This will be addressed further in subsequent chapters.

MEET AREA PERSONNEL (if applicable)

As well as getting to know your Agency Coordinator, ask to be introduced to other people at the agency office who may take an interest in your program. Agency staff who you might work with in some capacity could include the front office receptionist, the maintenance foreman, the wildlife biologists, the trails foreman and so forth.

Coordinator's Schedule

Your Agency Coordinator will have other things going on while your program is in the field and you should determine what those other responsibilities are. This will help you anticipate how much support you can expect should there be a problem or emergency during the program. Ask whom else you can call on if you need extra supplies or extra direction for your work projects and your coordinator is unavailable.

Remember that you are potentially working with a large agency whose staff has many other priorities. You may have to adapt your schedule to theirs; arrangements agreed upon earlier may fall through because of circumstances beyond your Coordinator's control.

Arrange First Day Welcome and Other Guest Speakers

Arrange for someone from the agency to welcome your group on the day they arrive. A warm welcome can emphasize to the Crew Members that their efforts are an integral part of helping the area meet its resource management goals.

Begin arranging for guest speakers to visit your group. These can be agency personnel, people from other federal, state or local agencies, representatives of conservation groups, individuals from resource-related industries, people from nearby colleges, local community leaders or SCA Resource Assistants in your area. Plan the dates they will visit now while their schedules are relatively open. See a thorough discussion of guest speakers in the environmental education chapter in this book.

In addition, SCA's Advancement Department will be visiting crews in order to introduce foundations and other supporters of the program to the youth who are participant in this experience. In some regions, large service events will take place to satisfy this objective.

PLAN or OREINT YOURSELF TO PLANNED ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION/RECREATION TRIPS

Environmental Education is an interregnal part of every crew experience. Commuter crews try to schedule one day a week devoted to and environmental education trip, topic or experience. Typically, SCA regional coordinators have predetermined these Environmental Education days. Make an effort to review what days and what types of experiences have been planned for your Commuter Crew. There maybe opportunities to suggest alternatives based on your expertise and contacts in the community. Don't hesitate to communicate these options to your SCA coordinator. Environmental Education will be explained further in Chapter 6 of this Handbook.

Recreational Trips are an end of the crew option for some regional programs. Check with your SCA coordinator to see if this is part of your Commuter Crew schedule. Recreational trips for Commuter Crews can either be planned in advance by the SCA staff (sometimes necessary due to reservations during the high summer season) or can be planned by the Crew Leader. Communicate with your SCA coordinator about what arrangements need to be made. For most programs, your recreational trip should be two to three days long and may involve several hours by van to reach your destination. Recreational Trips will be explained further in Chapter 9 of this Handbook.

FINAL DETAILS

Buy Local Field Guides and Literature

Your students will want to know as much about the local area's natural history as you can tell them. Begin prepping to answer their questions by getting any local field guides or literature about the area. Check at the visitor center or the area's Natural Historical Association to find out what literature is available.

While working on a Commuter Crew it is valuable to also learn more about the community or neighborhood surrounding the park you will be working in. SCA suggest that if you are not familiar with the community to research the cultural and social history of this area.

Additional Items That Are Helpful

You may want to include some other information in your packet. Crew Leaders have had good success sending:

- Inspirational quotes or natural history facts

- History that might pertain to the community or park you will be in
- A topographic map of the area with explanation of where you will work, and or recreate, etc.
- Ask about nicknames that the youth may prefer to be called during the Crew and/or interests or hobbies they may have

Arrange to Store Valuables During Program

Your participants will need a safe place to store their personal items like cell phones, extra cash and wallet during each work day. Identify the need to have a locked box purchased for your Crew and have Crew Members store their personal non-essential items in this box at the beginning of each work day. Store this locking box in the van in a secure and out of the way location (i.e. under the seat).



SITE VISIT CHECKLIST

	COMPLETE	DATE
• Meet your Agency Coordinator and other area personnel	_____	_____
• Review the work project and arrange for alternate/extra work	_____	_____
• Inspect site of base camp and learn pertinent area regulations	_____	_____
• Check all your tools for quality and quantity	_____	_____
• Check stored equipment	_____	_____
• Research emergency response plan (ERP)	_____	_____
• Send ERP to SCA Regional Coordinator appropriate agency personnel	_____	_____
• Receive and test your radio or cell phone	_____	_____
• Arrange for transportation of supplies; Arrange for gear storage	_____	_____
• Follow necessary procedures to drive vehicle	_____	_____
• Arrange for guest speakers and official agency welcome to the Crew on the first day	_____	_____
• Arrange last week's recreation trip and make necessary campsite reservations if not already completed.	_____	_____
• Get local field guides / information	_____	_____
• Arrange place to store valuables and extra personal gear	_____	_____