



# UNIT III:

CHAPTER YOUTH PROGRAMS

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**SUMMARY** — Izaak Walton League chapters and members across the country have long been leaders in connecting young people with hunting, fishing, conservation, and the great outdoors. This unit offers ideas and guidance for running a chapter youth program designed to engage youth in the outdoors.

### Youth Programs

Hosting activities for “youth and the outdoors” has a positive ring to it. Any activity involving youth, whether you are teaching them to fish or to restore stream banks, is likely to generate member enthusiasm and community support.

Every League chapter can and should develop a formal youth program and offer a variety of activities that introduce young people to the outdoors. If a chapter owns property, that creates a natural focus for youth activities, but chapters that meet in public places also have attractive options for youth participation. Having a structured youth program as part of the chapter’s mission and activities will provide long-term benefits in membership growth and increased member support and contributions.

### A Focus on Activities

Many chapters approach youth programs from the angle of what they know best or what is readily available. Hosting a hunter education course or youth fishing derby comes to mind. Perhaps it’s sponsoring a Boy Scout troop or providing an archery day for local school children.

However, today’s youth really need to get back to basics. At school and at home, they do not have the opportunity for unstructured play and are spending less time outdoors than previous generations. People committed to conservation usually cite early childhood experiences with nature as critical to shaping their interests. That’s where the League can help today’s youth.

For example, your chapter can host regular meetings (weekly, monthly) or special events to introduce youth to nature and teach them the importance of natural resource conservation by first building an appreciation of those

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resources. You may also want to include parents in these activities so that the whole family can learn together. Focus on nature games and activities that will provide a positive, enjoyable, and educational experience for children.

## Young Ikes

Members of the Izaak Walton League have long been called “Ikes,” so the Young Ikes program name is a logical offshoot of that. The name should be readily identifiable within your chapter and, hopefully, in your local community. With little effort, the Young Ikes name could easily be used to help promote your chapter youth program.

In addition to this how-to manual, the League has produced a series of conservation-themed Young Ikes Worksheets and Young Ikes Activity Books (samples can be found in this manual’s Appendices) that chapters can use to engage youth and families at chapter and community events. The League’s Web site also includes a special emphasis on projects, activities, and resources to engage youth in the outdoors: [www.iwla.org/youngikes](http://www.iwla.org/youngikes).

## Chapter Program

Once your chapter has committed to reach out to young people, the real work starts in implementing a chapter youth program designed to engage youth in the outdoors.

## Objectives

Planning and organizing a chapter youth program — such as Young Ikes — can be done even by people with little or no experience working with established youth organizations, such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts or 4-H Clubs.

Most Izaak Walton League members have fond memories of outdoor experiences that perhaps continued into adulthood. It could have been as simple as a secret pond or favorite tree that provided hours of youthful enjoyment and wonder. Or it could have been a mentored experience such as a trail hike, camping trip, fishing derby, or hunting event.

You can set the objectives for your chapter youth program based on the interests of your members as well as the natural resources readily available in your area. Your first step should be to determine exactly what you want to and can reasonably accomplish given the available resources (including volunteers, money, and location).

Keep in mind that building children's early awareness of the natural world can help them develop a lifelong commitment to protecting our country's natural resources. Whatever objectives you set, your chapter's youth program should focus on hands-on involvement by the participating children. When working to meet these objectives, determine what types of events and projects your chapter can provide and the types of activities young participants would enjoy.

## Organization

After determining the objectives for your chapter's youth program, you need to decide who within the chapter can best lead your group to accomplish these objectives.

Identify a person who can serve as the chapter Youth Programs Coordinator (if your chapter does not already have one). Experience working with youth as a leader, teacher, or coach is helpful but not a requirement. Please notify the IWLA National Office when this new officer is selected and include him or her in your annual officer report form.

The Youth Programs Coordinator should work with chapter volunteers to form a Youth Programs Committee that will share responsibility for the program. The members of this committee should be enthusiastic and willing to volunteer their time and talent for the benefit of young people in the community. In addition to organizing youth-related activities, this group should be responsible for event safety, marketing, volunteer and participant recruitment, and the overall success of the chapter youth program.

**Note:** Unit I of the *IWLA Chapter Manual* — League Leadership, provides guidance on chapter leadership and committee structure applicable to a chapter youth program.

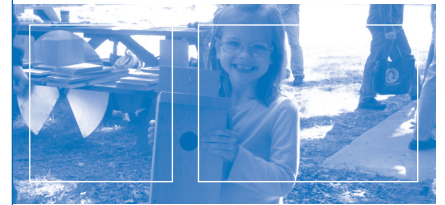
## Needs

During an early organizational planning meeting, determine how many participants your chapter can safely and effectively manage during any given youth activity. When first starting out, you may want to focus on the quality of the experience rather than simply recruiting a large group of youth participants. (You can always expand the program later.)

Several questions this committee should ask include:

- What skills and experiences do chapter member have? Are there teachers, naturalists, or outdoorsmen or women who are willing to lead an activity or give a presentation?

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- Are there any known personnel from local or state government agencies who can bring environmental and conservation expertise to our youth program?
- What resources does the chapter have? What improvements need to be made to facilitate a successful chapter youth program?
- What are the equipment needs? Where could this equipment be obtained on loan or purchased? Do members have equipment that they would be willing to let children use?

The answers to many of these questions directly relate to your youth program's fundraising needs.

### **Budget and Funding**

After identifying the major components of your youth program, construct a budget for revenues and expenses. Do not underestimate expenses or be overly optimistic about how much revenue you can raise from donations, fees, and in-kind contributions to support the program.

How much the youth program will cost the chapter and where these funds will come from are important considerations. An allocated portion of the local chapter budget is a normal practice when adding a program at the chapter level. Dues increases are often not the preferred funding mechanism. Instead, you could consider raffles, contributions from local businesses, government and foundation grants, and even participant fees to fund a quality youth program.

**Note:** Unit II of the *IWLA Chapter Manual* — Finance, Legal and Fund Raising, provides more details, including proven tips on soliciting donations and fundraising options that can easily be applied to a chapter youth program.

### **Location and Dates**

Setting a predetermined location and day of the week will help volunteers, youth participants, and parents make time for youth events. For example, one chapter holds youth program meetings one Saturday per month at the chapter house from 10am until 12 noon.

Depending on the time of the year, you may be competing with other after-school activities, youth sport leagues, family vacations, holidays, and hunting and fishing seasons. So keep that in mind when planning your schedule.

Youth program field trips can be held on the chapter grounds or take you to a nearby park or private lands. Regardless of the site, it is important to take

the educational experiences outside — that’s where outdoor learning works best!

## Insurance, Liability, and Safety

As separate and independent entities, chapters are responsible for managing their own affairs and can be sued and held accountable for their actions. It is up to each chapter to decide what youth activities best meet its needs and to ensure that any such activity is carried out safely in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and permits. Each chapter should also seek the advice of a local attorney on steps it can and should take to help avoid future liability.

Examples of steps chapters can take to help ensure the safety of all participants and protect the chapter from future liability include providing appropriate equipment and training, monitoring the activity closely, following all safety precautions, carrying adequate liability insurance, and securing liability release forms from participants, regardless of age.

In addition to complying with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations and adhering to best practices in managing the chapter’s facilities and youth activities, all chapters should carry adequate insurance to cover any potential liabilities. The IWLA Bylaws require all chapters to carry public liability and property damage insurance covering property owned, leased, rented, or used by them for their meetings or other activities. It is always advisable for chapters to consult an attorney and a local insurance agent to seek independent advice on whether your insurance policy is adequate to meet your needs and circumstances as they relate to a youth program.

A liability disclaimer form or liability waiver (a sample is found in this manual’s Appendices) should be signed by each participant, regardless of age. Before they can participate, children under the age of 18 also should have their forms signed by a parent or legal guardian.

A photo release disclaimer can and should be included with the liability waiver. This will ensure that you can use photos and videos you take during youth events for chapter newsletters, Web site and social media postings, and news releases to the media.

As with any planned activity on chapter grounds, spend some time preparing for the unexpected. Youth leaders and guest instructors need to be briefed on the standard medical procedures and how to summon emergency medical responders. Ensure program leaders know the address to give first responders.



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When dealing with kids, you can almost count on the occasional falls, bumps, cuts, scrapes, and bruises. So when in the field or at an educational site or classroom setting, a first aid kit needs to be readily available.

Your program registration form should include a section on children's medical needs. Children with potentially life-threatening medical conditions — such as asthma, food allergies, allergy to insect stings, or juvenile diabetes — should be required to carry medication with them at all times while participating in your program. If the child is not old enough to administer his or her medication and a parent will not be present, volunteers should be trained by the parent and/or a medical professional on the proper use of medications such as inhalers and auto-injectable epinephrine (e.g., EpiPen). If there's the potential for medical emergencies such as seizures or diabetic reactions, parents should detail warning signs and how volunteers should respond. For more information about food allergies and anaphylaxis, visit the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network Web site at [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org).

Teaching in a hands-on atmosphere requires interaction between adults and youth. Some activities may require physical contact, so a formal procedure should be followed by all volunteer youth leaders. During the session, if physical contact is required, the adult should explain the need for the contact, ask permission, and monitor the young person's reactions. At least two adults should be with the youth group at all times, and no adult should be alone with a child at any time.

In addition, you should consider screening potential youth program volunteers for criminal histories. Your local police department can walk you through the process for that. The U.S. Department of Justice, National Sex Offender Public Web site, is also a good resource for screening potential volunteers: [www.nsopw.gov/Core/Portal.aspx](http://www.nsopw.gov/Core/Portal.aspx).

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## **Volunteers**

Recruiting and engaging the right volunteers is critical to your program success. A chapter youth program not only provides opportunities to raise public awareness of your chapter, it can help you recruit new members and promote volunteer leadership from within your chapter. By vigorously promoting youth activities in your local community, you are educating others on the broader mission of the League and the benefits of membership. Planning and implementing these activities provides an excellent opportunity to develop future chapter leaders among your members.

You will need to identify the skills necessary to carry out the youth program (once the scope of the program has been determined), develop a volunteer recruitment plan, and establish the methods you'll use to keep those volunteers motivated and working.

## Recruiting Volunteers

Recruiting chapter members and developing them into volunteers should be a high priority for any chapter, regardless of their intended needs. Use the following tips to help recruit the youth program's required manpower:

- Know what skills, interests, and time commitment you need.
- Offer varying commitment levels.
- Recruit from partner groups.
- Invite friends and neighbors.
- Advertise events and requests for volunteers.
- Offer volunteer orientation and training.

## Motivating Volunteers

Motivating volunteers is one of the most important aspects of managing any chapter activity, project, or event. The chapter youth project leader must provide volunteers with opportunities to meet their expectations and use their skills effectively. Use the following suggestions to motivate project volunteers:

- Recognize their contributions.
- Make the task fun.
- Match the assignment to the right volunteer (based on his or her interests and abilities).
- Communicate regularly and ask for feedback.

Members will only volunteer their time and talent if they derive some satisfaction from the work they do.

**Note:** You can find more information on volunteer recruitment, motivation, and leadership development in Unit IV of the *IWLA Chapter Manual* — Conservation Programs and Projects (see “Chapter Conservation Projects” heading).

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## Marketing and Media

Part of a successful youth program is advertising. When marketing your chapter youth program, keep in mind that you are marketing it to parents — not directly to children. Knowing this, focus on writing promotional materials that will appeal to parents of young children and distributing these materials in places where parents are likely to be reached. You can place printed materials anywhere from coffee shops and gymnasiums to sporting goods stores and bait shops. Look for online community calendars and Web sites such as Patch.com that promote local events.

You can also reach out through other established youth organizations, such as Future Farmers of America school chapters, 4-H clubs, and Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. Within the chapter, make the announcement in newsletters, on the chapter Web site, and as a part of e-mail blasts to chapter members.

Reaching out to local media is another way to spread the word to parents. Community newspapers are often hungry for local news and photo opportunities. Local radio stations might announce events taking place in the community. Prepare and distribute a news release to media outlets in your area. Explain the League's mission and the importance of conservation education and engaging youth in the outdoors and provide event details and schedules.

**Note:** Unit VI of the *IWLA Chapter Manual* — Communications and Marketing, provides proven communication techniques to help your chapter improve its community outreach and inform its members.

The League's National Office also has a promotional poster template designed for youth-related activities that is available in limited quantities for free (sample found in this manual's Appendices). When using this template, be sure to include such information as:

- Name of the chapter youth program (such as Young Ikes)
- Chapter's name (spell out Izaak Walton League of America, if possible)
- Date(s) and time(s) for the event(s)
- Location with simple directions
- Target audience (ages)
- Special requirements (if any)
- Fees (if any)
- Provided meals or snacks (if applicable)
- Sponsors (if any other than the chapter)

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## Youth Activities

Chapter-sponsored youth events can attract children of all ages, requiring a range of educational approaches. Although there are a variety of environmental education activities available to engage children of all ages, this manual is focused on youth ages 5 to 11. The primary goal the activities found in this manual is to give youth a positive, enjoyable experience with nature.

### How to Use This Manual

This manual, *Engaging Youth In The Outdoors — A How-To Chapter Manual*, provides information on how to engage young people of varying ages with the environment and in the outdoors. We hope you can use these activities as the basis for a successful chapter youth program.

Refer to Unit II — Youth Activities for more details on “Suggested Youth Activity Lesson Plans” available for your chapter youth program. Under Unit II of this manual, there are five tabbed sections divided under the categories Soil, Air, Woods, Waters, and Wildlife (which correspond with the League’s mission). Within these tabbed sections are Suggested Youth Activity Lesson Plans. These field-tested activities were selected specifically for youth ages 5 to 11.

Core learning objectives are identified in each lesson plan. A list of “Additional Objectives” is provided at the end of each category section, which may be helpful to youth leaders who want to add lessons of their own. Also at the end of each tabbed section is a page of “Additional Projects and Activities” that may be helpful in developing additional youth projects and activities.

Take the time to thoroughly review and study the contents of Unit II for a better understanding of how these suggested activities were designed to engage, encourage, and educate youth in the outdoors.

### How to Use the *IWLA Chapter Manual*

Available to your chapter in print and electronic format, the *IWLA Chapter Manual* provides information on governance, financial management, legal issues, and fundraising strategies. It also includes ideas on membership recruitment, conservation projects and outdoor activities, and public relations strategies.

Many chapters have years of experience in planning and developing conservation projects and outdoor recreation activities. The *IWLA Chapter Manual* provides descriptions of a variety of projects and activities undertaken by League chapters nationwide and are based on information

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submitted by individual chapters. At the end of each activity, you'll find a list of multiple chapters that have conducted the activity, so you can contact them and exchange ideas or ask questions related to the activity — many of which can be modified for use in your chapter youth program.

**Note:** At the end of the *IWLA Chapter Manual* Unit IV — Conservation Programs and Projects, are detailed Sample Conservation Project sheets. Sample Outdoor Recreation and Activity sheets are found at the end of Unit V — Outdoor Recreation and Activities. The Appendices of the *IWLA Chapter Manual* provide additional examples of “Chapter Conservation Projects” and “Chapter Outdoor Recreation and Activities.”

We hope that your chapter members and the youth with whom you work continue to have a great time in the outdoors and that these activities and projects will help you do so.

## Youth and the League

### League Membership

Today's young people are tomorrow's conservationists. It is beneficial to have young people join the League at an early age and feel included at the chapter level.

The League asks that every chapter offer all four classes of membership to their new and renewing members, including these two for young Ikes:

**Youth Membership:** This membership class is for youth age 17 and younger. Youth members receive one membership card but are not entitled to vote, except at a chapter's recognized youth group meeting. Privileges are determined by the chapter and may be limited.

**Student Membership:** This membership class is for full-time students, ages 18 to 21. A full-time undergraduate student over the age of 21 may also be considered a student member. The student's full-time status can be determined by an official transcript from a trade school, college, or university. The member receives one membership card and is entitled to one vote. Chapter privileges are determined by the chapter.

**Note:** The other two membership classifications are Individual and Family Members.

## National Youth Convention

At each IWLA National Convention, held in July at different locations across the country, a Youth Convention is held in conjunction with the annual meeting. Open to children and grandchildren of League members attending the National Convention, the Youth Convention offers an array of outdoor and educational experiences designed to spark an interest in conservation and love of the outdoors. A nominal registration fee includes a one-year youth or student membership to the League. (Most of the Youth Convention program cost is covered by a grant from the IWLA Endowment and donations from League members across the country who support youth education.)

More information is made available each year in *Outdoor America* magazine and online at [www.iwla.org/convention](http://www.iwla.org/convention).

## National Recognition Awards

Each year, the League presents several awards at the National Convention that are related to youth programs at the chapter level.

The Robert C. O'Hair Award recognizes the chapter that has carried out the most outstanding youth program during the previous year. In some instances, award winners have hosted a regular youth program at the chapter. Other winners have held long-standing community youth events several times each year.

The Outdoor America's Future Award is presented to a youth or student member who has volunteered many hours at the local or state level in conservation projects and recognizes related efforts in school, community service, or chapter leadership development. By virtue of his or her grassroots efforts, this young member is considered an "up and coming" future leader of the League and is expected to mentor other youth members at the chapter.

The Defenders Chapter Achievement Award is named after the League's motto: "Defenders of Soil, Air, Woods, Waters, and Wildlife." Chapters receive this award based on activities and accomplishments over the course of one year. One of the six award criteria includes youth development, such as maintaining an established chapter youth program or providing financial and volunteer support for an outdoor or conservation education event for local youth.

Chapters are encouraged to submit nominations for these and other IWLA national awards. More information, including nomination and application forms and annual deadline dates, is available online at [www.iwla.org/chapters](http://www.iwla.org/chapters).

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## Scholarships

Many IWLA chapters and state divisions offer scholarships to eligible college-bound high school students who intend to study conservation or environmental majors at accredited universities. In recent years, the total amount of chapter- and division-sponsored annual scholarships has surpassed roughly \$125,000, with individual awards ranging from \$100 to \$2,000.

As a complement to these offerings, the League's National Office offers a National Conservation Scholarship to two qualifying college students with conservation or environmental majors. These scholarships are funded through a grant from the IWLA Endowment. More information about this scholarship program is available online at [www.iwla.org/scholarship](http://www.iwla.org/scholarship).

All of these scholarships provide students not only with financial support but also with moral support from like-minded conservationists. As these students pursue natural resources careers, they help to advance the League's conservation mission.

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