

WINTER TRAILS HANDBOOK

Planning and Promotion



Notes on use of the Winter Trails Handbook

- This handbook was created to assist event coordinators in producing Winter Trails® events. Feel free to use all or part of this handbook.
- The handbook is created as a reference source only.
- Questions should be directed to Reese Brown, SIA Nordic Director and Winter Trails Administrator (rbrown@snosports.org)

ORGANIZERS

SnowSports Industries America (SIA)
 Cross Country Ski Areas Association (CCSAA)
 American Hiking Society (AHS)

SUPPORTERS

National Snow Industry Association (NSIA)
 Canadian Ski Council

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MISSION

Engage children and adults in snowshoeing and/or cross country skiing and encourage lifetime involvement by focusing on the health, fitness and social benefits of these activities.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to one of the largest “introduction to snow sports” programs. The annual Winter Trails takes place the Saturday before Martin Luther King Weekend. More than 100 locations in 26 states and four Canadian provinces host a Winter Trails event to bring people outdoors for a snowshoeing and cross country skiing experience. This free event is for those NEW to snow sports and includes demos and clinics. Offerings vary among sites. **Most sites include BOTH snowshoeing and cross country skiing though a few are snowshoe-only or cross country ski only.**

During its 18-year history, Winter Trails has attracted nearly 150,000 participants, mostly new to snow sports, and millions of media impressions. **Hosting a Winter Trails event can generate new business for you.**

HOW the PROGRAM WORKS

Winter Trails is part of SIA’s Winter Feels Good (WFG) initiative to increase participation in snow sports and move product. WFG promotes the health, fitness and social benefits of snow sports and focuses its message on adult influencers of children.

Site hosts organize and promote their own programs including product and personnel on Winter Trails Day. Winter Trails brochures and flyers are produced by SIA for distribution via supplier sponsor reps forces, retail stores, site hosts, schools, community, recreation and health organizations and other means. Trade media sponsors advertise the program. An extensive non-endemic national, regional and local public relations campaign promotes Winter Trails. The Web site, www.wintertrails.org, allows consumers to locate Winter Trails events in their local communities.

Section I: EVENT OVERVIEW

National organizers and sponsors orchestrate an extensive public relations campaign reaching out to local, regional and national consumer media and Web sites, host and maintain the Winter Trails Web site and offer other resources for organizing and executing the program. Host sites make it happen. Winter Trails events are flexible and contingent on host venues needs and objectives.

There are five components:

1. **Agree to provide the necessary staff and/or volunteers to orchestrate a free learn to snowshoe/cross country ski day;**
2. **Plan the logistics and publicity utilizing existing resources;**
3. **Provide national program organizers information so the event can be used for national and regional as well as local PR efforts;**
4. **Execute to the best of your ability;**
5. **Provide national program organizers with follow up information including participant lists, waivers, photos and post-event survey feedback.**

Planning and Goal Setting

Your goal may be as straightforward as “introducing new people to snowshoeing and/or cross country skiing”. Be clear and explicit. Make sure that your staff and partners understand and agree.

Start planning early, designate a coordinator and/or organizing team, determine a time line, seek local partners, develop a public relations/marketing plan and **utilize the tools offered by WT organizers.**

Consider collaborating with a retailer if you don't have your own retail operation.

Consider partnering with a local scout troop/council or with organizations that promote activity such as a YM or YWCA, fitness clubs and recreation and parks groups. Cross country skiing and snowshoeing can offer a whole new winter experience for these groups.

Contact the local American Hiking Society (AHS) to work with you on your event; AHS originated Winter Trails. Invite local schools to organize a “field trip” to your Winter Trails event.

Create a tentative timeline and allocating adequate resources to keep you on schedule and help give you a clearer picture of when certain elements should be completed. You will be better able to identify specific goals and tasks for different workers and volunteers. Success directly corresponds to preparation.

Sample Timeline

A timeline establishes internal and external deadlines and helps you:

1. Anticipate all possible disruptions and add contingencies;
2. Consider your audience – those new to snow sports. What will they need that seasoned skiers and snowshoers don't need? Also, the types of promotion and media outlets you use will influence the amount of participants.

This timeline is an example and can be condensed.

Sample Timeline

MONTH	ACTIVITY	WHO	COMPLETED
Pre-event	Hold initial organizing meeting		

	Secure commitments from participating organizations		
	Appoint event coordinator		
	Select time and secure a site		
	Design overall event plan and budget		
	Begin fundraising for event		
	Begin scheduling and entertainment		
	Acquire necessary permits and insurance		
	Establish media plan and press list		
	Involve local radio station as sponsor		
	Write first press release announcing event		
	Invite VIP's		
	Confirm all exhibitors and equipment allocation		
	Send out promotional mailing to potential participants		
	Contact press for interviews and feature stories		
	Prepare logistics instructions for all exhibitors		
	Distribute posters and flyers		
	Follow-up with press efforts		
	Follow-up with all invitations		
	Send out PSA announcements		
	Send out announcements to community leaders		
3 Weeks Out	Schedule volunteer crews (security, clean up, etc.)		
	Confirm all exhibitors and equipment allocation again		
	Arrange for banners and other attractions at site		
2 Weeks Out	Continue press efforts		
1 Week Out	Confirm volunteers, committees, vendors and exhibitors		
	Re-poster local area		
Day Before	Set-up Venue		

(two sample event day time lines are at the end of this document)

Personnel

Jobs need to be defined and assigned. If your staff is small, **a retail partner or affiliation with a community group can offer a valuable resource.** Ideally, an overall coordinator should oversee staff even if the staff plays multiple roles. Volunteers can support the event in the areas of publicity, logistics, registration and post event follow up.

Determine the number needed to effectively run the event. Several different jobs need coverage such as registration, parking, organizing hikes and demos.

NOTE: Setting up for Winter Trails is like setting up for most special events. Winter Trails can include a President's Challenge element (President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports) to encourage regular physical activity. To organize a President's Challenge Clinic at your event, please see the separate Clinic Guidelines included with this handbook.

Section II: PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

Effective promotion is important. **These suggestions are things you already do, or should do.**

Work with your local media and other communications channels in your market to publicize your event because you ARE the local connection. The national and regional efforts will enhance your own. RDB Events and Marketing can work with you on local media. Suggested steps include:

1. Designate a Media contact and make a plan
2. Develop your message
3. Create your press materials and distribute

Someone with media or PR experiences should be the continual designated contact to send out information, interface with reporters, answer questions, schedule interviews and keep track of publicity. If a media or PR person does not exist, a well spoken member of your staff will work fine.

Publicity strategy starts by identifying your target audience – those new to snow sports or at least snowshoeing and cross country skiing. That identification determines what types of media to contact, and how much and what type of publicity you will want to incorporate.

Be conscious of your target audience's 'language' and knowledge about snow sports to better determine what media sources would best reach those persons.

Helpful Tools: Templates, logos, generic press releases and additional guidelines about publicity for your event can be found on the www.wintertrails.org Web site.

SIA, the Cross Country Ski Areas Association (CCSAA) the American Hiking Society (AHS) and the Canadian Ski Council promote Winter Trails among national, regional and local media through distribution of press releases, brochures, flyers, Web sites and word of mouth that begin in the summer. Knowing YOUR plans early makes it easier for us to get interested public/reporters to you. Keep us in the loop.

Media Outreach

Press List

If you don't have a list of local media contact RDB Marketing for help in developing one.

Consider reporters, columnists and editors at local papers, magazines, and radio or television stations who cover environment, science, health, or lifestyle/adventure topics. Smaller outlets may not have a reporter specifically assigned to any of these topics so ask for a 'general assignment' reporter or talk to the 'assignment editor' in the news room. Since WT events are on a weekend, alert the 'weekend assignment editor' at each outlet as these individuals likely make decisions about what gets covered during those times.

Create a database of participating reporters/editors and outlet names complete with mailing addresses, emails and phone numbers. Use this list for distributing announcements and making follow-up telephone calls to ensure that reporters received your materials and plan to cover the event. Media directories are available on the Internet and your local library. (Brands include Burrelle's Media Guide, Bacon's Publicity Checker, Gebbie's Press Directory, Broadcasting Yearbook, and Editor and Publisher). Consider Web-based sources as well.

Outlets You Should Put on Your Press List

- Local newspapers
- Local radio cable and TV stations (network affiliates)
- Local magazines
- Weekly newspapers
- Activity Organizations newsletters
- Associated Press wire service
- Shoppers and neighborhood papers
- Local American Hiking Society and other similar non-profit groups

Press Release Basics

Hundreds of press releases are sent to the media daily and most are read no further than the second or third paragraph before a decision is made to pursue the story or not. Remember to:

- Include Who, What, When, Where, Why and How in the first paragraph. The most important information should be written first to attract editors and readers. Be accurate with names, numbers, statements, and quotes.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short. The release should be one page (never more than two) single-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12-pt. type. Write in the active voice. It is more powerful and requires fewer words.
- Include a centered headline near the top of the first page.
- Include a quote from an officer of your organization by at least the third paragraph of the release. This will identify your organization and add interest to the text.
- If using two pages, type 'more' at the bottom of page one and '###' at the bottom of page two.
- Double and triple check for accuracy, spelling and punctuation. A professional release is more credible.
- Mail, fax or hand deliver releases, and plan for them to arrive at least seven days before you want the story to appear.
- Call your contact after submitting your release to see if he/she intends to cover the event. Follow-ups are critical if you hope to get attention. Talking to reporters by phone may build relationships with them that could result in better, more complete coverage of your event.

Media Kit (Optional)

A media kit goes beyond simple press releases in that it is a compilation of materials that 'sells' your event to the press, possible sponsors and perhaps "celebrity" participants. A media kit typically would include:

- Pocket folder to hold news releases, fact sheets, and other materials;
- Press release about the event;
- Marketing materials about your facility;
- Newsletter or other material from any non-profit groups that you may be affiliated with on Winter Trails especially if you include a "fundraising" element to your event;
- Article about a previous Winter Trails event;
- Stickers, patches, pins or other "giveaways".

Additional tips can be found at www.wintertrails.org.

Media Outlets

Radio

Local radio stations can play a valuable, promotional role in your event and attract a lot of participants. Ask local radio stations to cover the event itself on their news programs. You can recruit a radio sponsor which may be identified as the 'official WT station', who could broadcast live from the event. The week leading up to Winter Trails, the station could offer listeners t-shirts or other memorabilia.

Consider recruiting a station "personality" to emcee your event, depending on its scale. Pick a station with the most appeal to your target audience. Call the station and ask to speak with either the directors of marketing or promotions, or the personality you've targeted. If they agree, ask them to provide their own sound system. This will save you time and money.

Television

To enhance local television coverage, invite reporters to your venue prior to your event. This gives you advanced publicity and it gives the reporters a chance to collect footage of the venue that can be used to augment coverage.

Tip - Contact television meteorologists in addition to regular reporters. Urge the meteorologists to deliver their local weather reports from the event location the Friday before the event.

Public Service Announcements (PSA's)

PSA's are advertisement-like messages made on behalf of or in support of nonprofit groups. This element would apply best if your event is tied into a local charity or cause. Radio and television stations air PSA's free of charge as a community service. PSA's are not as prevalent as they once were but are an option worth exploring in your market. Under the right circumstances PSA's can be an effective promotional tool.

Web Sites

Seek out Web sites for activity-oriented organizations and clubs (particularly non-profits) and send information about Winter Trails. Offer a reciprocal arrangement or make them a deal. [Post information about Winter Trails on the HOME PAGE of your own Web site and send information about your event to the editor of the \[www.wintertrails.org\]\(http://www.wintertrails.org\) Web site.](#)

Other Promotional Ideas:

- Write an editorial, or letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
- Invite local pastors, politicians and community leaders. It's courteous and promotes word-of-mouth publicity.
- Send information to faith-based youth groups and pastors two weeks in advance for inclusion in church bulletins before the event.
- Hang large signs or banners over the site two weeks before the event.
- Print fliers and distribute through your own channels and ask local non-profits and activity-based organizations to do the same. Flyers at your facility can stress a "bring a newbie" theme.
- Distribute posters in local merchants' windows, bus/train stations, outdoors stores, professional offices, and homes near the event site. Post them on bulletin boards in schools, churches, theaters, and youth and fitness centers, library, town hall or YMCA to develop interest.
- Get local classroom and/or physical education teachers to create school projects for students to pique interest.
- Take advantage of the free classifieds offered by some weekly newspapers.
- Give an exclusive bit of gossip about a celebrity appearance or unique attraction to a column notes writer.
- Ask for a paragraph plugging the event in other organizations' newsletters. Promise to reciprocate.

Utilize your own networks:

- Distribute to your database a “buddy day” incentive to get new customers.
- Run a feature article, photos, and an ad in your newsletter.
- Activate your telephone chain to be sure everyone is informed.
- Build up word-of-mouth promotion. Buttons and bumper stickers promote discussion.

TOOLS You Can Use**Tools available for your event at www.wintertrails.org include:**

- Release Forms
- Media Kit with Generic Press Releases
- Winter Trails Poster
- Winter Trails Brochures

Note: This outreach plan may also be used in the promotion and marketing of your host site.

Feel free to contact our national Winter Trails event manager Reese Brown, 802/226-8092 or reese@rdbevents.com with any questions.

Section III: EVENT EXECUTION AND FOLLOW UP

Set-Up

Waivers - Take every precaution to ensure that accidents don't happen. Have every Winter Trails participant sign the event waiver/release form and that these forms are sent back to the SIA office in McLean, VA. The address is Winter Trails/SIA; 8377-B Greensboro Drive; McLean, VA 22102.

General Guidelines

Make sure participants are channeled through the registration area. This helps ensure that all participants complete the waiver form regarding liability protection and name capture for the database. **NOTE:** It is critical that you return waivers to the SIA office. Even though you have your own liability insurance, it helps protect all of us and it helps national organizers determine the actual number of participants in Winter Trails events overall.

Any exhibits and/or displays should be placed along attendees' anticipated lines of travel. Strategically orient concessions, raffles and other attractions near exhibits or displays to make it easy for participants to see any special features of your event.

Consider having a special press table at the event if you expect media to attend and place your press materials there. It can also be a place for reporters to conduct interviews. Consider a microphone and a 'multi box' that allow radio and TV stations to plug into the sound system. Again, this will depend on the size and scope of your event and is optional.

Event Day Media Coverage

Find out what reporters want to know or see during/about the event, and provide that information/service to the best of your abilities. Make sure your media contact is accessible so that press queries can be handled quickly and knowledgeably – even if it is you.

If you plan any special presentations during WT Day, introduce reporters to speakers, or others who can provide a good quote or perspective. Offer suggestions for photo opportunities to photographers, print media assignment editors and local TV stations.

Site Responsibilities

Although Winter Trails events vary and each event maintains its own identity, some consistency is important. These include:

Parking

Parking is participants' first impression. If designated parking facilities are inadequate, consider having someone directing the parking and traffic or an alternative lot nearby.

Registration

The registration procedure is critical to a good event so your should be smooth and efficient. It also is very important for record keeping and security. If this process is slow and laborious, it will send the wrong message.

Registration is the control point for your event so it is crucial that every participant completes the release form.

Your registration area is the first place your participants will come and all participants will walk through this area. Post clear signage and designate a greeter as they enter the area to point people in the right direction and explain the procedure. Large signs help.

It is ideal to have an area or table where forms are filled out before they arrive at the point where the waiver forms are processed. This will relieve pressure and lines at the registration table from people spending time filling out the forms.

Procedure:

- After parking, participants enter registration area and are directed to complete the registration form by the greeter.
- After completion, they move to the Registration Table where they must present a picture ID.
- The registration person verifies information on the Registration Form with driver's license and completes the rating card.
- The participant receives the completed rating card and a copy of any registration information. They then present the registration card when they demo equipment.

Published Schedule

If you have events planned during the day or if you plan to organize a President's Challenge Clinic (see separate guidelines), post a schedule in the form of a handout or poster where all attendees can find it. This also will be helpful if you have an announcer for tours or other activities. A schedule reduces the number of questions asked by participants and keeps them informed of all happenings, thus creating a better environment for them.

Sanitation

What sanitary facilities are available on site? Some Winter Trails sites are on National Forest or Park Service land. Will you need additional portable facilities and, if so, what is the cost? A good rule of thumb is a minimum of one portable toilet for every 50 people you expect to attend. Sanitary also includes water availability for drinking water. If water is not available on site, determine how much you will need to supply and how it will be dispensed.

Kids Programs

Since Winter Trails is marketed to children and adults, including special children's activities makes parents happy and more willing to return. If you are an alpine resort with a tubing park, consider a special coupon that will offer this activity after the Winter Trails experience.

Clinics and Seminars

Providing clinics and seminars are a great opportunity to engage your guest while providing functional and interesting information about snow sports, equipment and the local area. Keep them relatively short and to the point. Fun clinics that have been presented include: Igloo building, kids games, dressing for winter, tracking and more. This is where the President's Challenge Clinic can play a role.

Signage

Hang WT and WT sponsor banners, if supplies, in prominent positions. This helps with the program branding and makes it easy for participants new to snow sports to identify the event. Also, hang a Winter Trails banner in a prominent position at the entrance to the event. This may be the only logo ID participants will see.

Services offered at your event - such as restrooms, first aid, childcare (if provided) and information/lost-and-found - should be clearly marked with identification and directional signs. Make sure your staff and volunteers know where services are located.

Time Limited Demos

If not already doing so, you may want to consider putting a time limit on the length a person can be out on a pair of skis or snowshoes. This will help to insure that you do not run into long lines of people waiting. If you have a large event, a President's Challenge Clinic can offer participants an activity while they are waiting to demo snowshoes and/or skis.

Hot Chocolate / Sampling

Partner with a local group or supermarket to supply hot chocolate or other snack items to your guests. It is a great offering that everyone will enjoy.

POST EVENT FOLLOW UP

Administration

Again, please remember to promptly send back the waiver forms to Winter Trails; SIA; 8377-B Greensboro Drive; McLean, VA 22102. We will compile a database for you and return it upon request. Your list of participants will not be shared with other venues. We need the documentation for tracking Winter Trails success.

If you have comments from participants or comments of your own, please forward them.

THANK YOU!

Continued Publicity and Exposure for YOU

National organizers can give you additional publicity after your event via the Winter Trails Web site. Take and send us your event photos and quotes from participants. These tools also help with next year's publicity.

Digital: The preferred format is .JPG. Preferred resolution is 72 dots per inch (DPI). Preferred size is no more than 500 pixels on the longest (or widest) side of the photo. This format will get the photo on www.wintertrails.org FAST (It takes a minute or two per photo to get photos using this format onto a Web page.)

You can submit photos in other formats (such as .TIF or .BMP) and other resolutions (up to 300 dpi), but this requires slightly more time for conversion, about two to four minutes per photo.

Photos may be e-mailed to rbrown@snowsports.org or you can mail a disk to Reese Brown, PO Box 32, Cavendish, VT 05142. An FTP address can be provided.

For all photos submitted: Photos *must* have this information – event name, location and date of photo. If the photos don't have this minimum amount of information, they won't be posted.

How many should I send? We try to post as many photos as possible but a good guideline is no more than a dozen photos from each location. If you take several photos of the same scene, please send only the best one.

Option: SAMPLE FULL DAY SCHEDULE FOR EXPANDED WT EVENT

Following is a sample internal schedule of events if you plan to build a more elaborate program for your WT event. This is distributed to all staff and names who are responsible for each item. This provides an easy reference of all events and is easy to use. Although this schedule is a SAMPLE for an all-day event, it can be adapted for use at venues that offer Winter Trails from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

6:00am	Arrive Site	All Staff
	Check venue; straighten fence and tents if needed	
7:00	Set-up volunteer area	Volunteer Coordinator
	Set-up Sound System	Volunteer
	Set-up Registration	Registration Coordinator
7:30-8:30	Demo area move-in	Demo Coordinator
8:00	Parking people in place	Parking Coordinator
8:30	Registration staffed	All Registration
9:00-3:00	Gates Open	
9:00	Demo area open	Demo Coordinator
10:00	First Guided Tour	(Leader Name)
11:00	First Kids Event	Kids Coordinator
11:00	Outerwear Layer Seminar	Demo Coordinator
11:00-2:00	Food Court Open	
12:00	Second Guided Hike	(Leader Name)
12:00	Second Kids Event	Kids Coordinator
12:00	Food Intake Seminar	Demo Coordinator
1:00	Third Guided Tour	(Leader Name)
2:00	Fourth Guided Tour	(Leader Name)
2:00	Third Kids Event	Kids Coordinator
2:00	Avalanche Safety Seminar	Demo Coordinator
4:00	Demo area closes	Demo Coordinator

Option: SAMPLE 1/2 DAY SCHEDULE FOR AFFILIATE WT EVENT

Following is a sample internal schedule adapted for use at venues that offer Winter Trails from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Morning	Check venue; straighten fence and tents if needed	
12:00	Set-up volunteer area	Volunteer Coordinator
	Set-up Registration	Registration Coordinator
1:00	Gates Open	
1:30	First Cross Country Ski Instruction	(Instructor Name)
2:00	First Kids Event	Kids Coordinator
2:30	Second Country Ski Instruction	(Instructor Name)
3:00	Second Kids Event	Kids Coordinator
4:00	Demo area closes	Demo Coordinator

Organizers and Vendor Contacts

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