

Teacher Training

Goals

When a Mighty Acorns program is starting, it is the partner's responsibility to train teachers to successfully deliver the program to their students. By the end of their training session, teachers must be comfortable with the concept of biodiversity and competent at teaching the curricular activities. Training should model all activities for which a teacher will be responsible, including the pre- and post-visit activities for that teacher's level.

Typically, the partner provides assistance throughout the first year of the program, including training (classroom and in-the-field for three seasons) and support (volunteer recruitment, handouts, paying for bus trips if necessary, etc.). After the first year, the school and/or the volunteers may be able to assume responsibility for many of the tasks listed in the previous "Chart of Responsibilities." Mighty Acorns program goals include teacher investment and independence. Achieving these goals requires support and intensive seasonal training (fall, winter, spring) in the first year so that teachers will feel capable of taking on these responsibilities in subsequent years.

Teacher training begins with an introduction to biodiversity and it is completed when they are empowered with new knowledge and skills to bring stewardship education to the students in an ongoing fashion.

The division of responsibilities for the program will vary from partner to partner, and perhaps from school to school. For example, a partner may require, or simply prefer, that its own staff be present at all field trips. In this case, the teachers and partner could become co-leaders and handle different components of the field trips. The partner and school may wish to rotate assignments from trip to trip, so that the teachers gain a well-rounded experience, learn more, and increase their investment in the program. Similarly, a

member of the partner staff or a volunteer may enjoy being in the classroom with the students. In this case, the partner or volunteer may visit the class for pre-trip orientation.

Strategy

The following recommendations are the result of the collective experience of many Mighty Acorns partners. The guidelines focus on introducing the program to teachers, scheduling field trips and training dates, and providing the ingredients for a quality training program. While these guidelines focus on teachers, many also apply to volunteers.

- Use a variety of ways to present materials to teachers. Demonstrate techniques and concepts by using hands-on methods, modeling, small group activities, open discussion, etc.
- Make sure that teachers are aware of all details for which they will be responsible. For example, if teachers must arrange bus transportation, make sure they know it. Go through the checklist in the "Chart of Responsibilities" for the teachers item by item, making sure that all details are clear to all.
- Emphasize that during the first year the partner will model pre- and post-trip activities with the teachers so they understand and are able to do these activities with their own students in the classroom. Explain that these activities are integral to a well-rounded educational experience in biodiversity and are therefore essential.
- Leave time after each activity to allow teacher input on how the activities were done and/or how they should be modified for their students. (If time is limited, an alternative is to model pre- and post-trip activities for the teacher in the classroom with the students. In this case it is important that the teachers understand that they will be responsible for doing these activities the following year.)

- Insure the teachers have signed the “Teacher Contract,” defining their responsibilities and outlining the benefits of their participation in the program. Many partners experience a higher level of commitment from teachers as a result of written agreements.
- Distribute an evaluation form for the training session, soliciting feedback on the field trip experience and overall training experience, (see following sample). Invite comments that will help improve future training sessions.

Materials

Below is a complete list of materials for your first training session. Most of these materials need to be distributed only once and can be skipped for subsequent training.

- Make the Teacher’s manual. You will need one copy for each teacher. The manual consists of the following sections of the Mighty Acorns Program Manual.
 - Part I-Introduction to the Mighty Acorns Program
 - Part II-The Mighty Acorns Curriculum. Include all introductory material for this part, but include only the level for which you are training the teacher. It is suggested that you distribute the entire year’s curriculum in the fall, although you may prefer to distribute the curriculum for each season at that season’s training. Note: If you distribute the full year’s curriculum at the fall training, you may later need spare copies of winter and spring activities for teachers who do not bring their manuals to winter and spring training.
 - Part VI-General Background Information
 - Part VII-Resources
 - Part VIII-Glossary
- Prepared classroom activity materials for the season. Partners find that it greatly benefits the teacher if the materials needed for classroom activities are already prepared and ready to use. For details, refer to the instructions at the beginning of each activity.
- Chicago Wilderness’s *An Atlas of Biodiversity*, one copy for each teacher. To obtain copies, contact the Chicago Wilderness Education Team Assistant (312-665-7444).
- Chicago Tribune Supplement, one copy for each student (30 copies per teacher). To obtain copies, contact the Mighty Acorns Program Director (312-665-7442).
- “Teacher Contract,” one copy for each teacher, if not already signed at the planning meeting.
- Checklist of teacher’s responsibilities for the season, arranged chronologically, one copy for each teacher. You can use the responsibility chart as the basis for this list.
- “Parent Letter” one copy for each teacher. An example is on the following page.
- Location of field-trip site, map, and other relevant site information, one copy for each teacher. Not only will teachers will need this to get to the site for the outdoors portion of the training, but it will be useful for the children’s field trips as well.
- Sheet with time(s) and date(s) of field trip(s), pre-trip orientation(s) for the children, and your phone number; one copy for each teacher.
- Chicago Wilderness video. (This need not be distributed, just played.) This is an excellent, short introduction to Chicago Wilderness and all that it has to offer.
- “Habitactics” and instruction sheets. “Habitactics” is an interactive computer program on CD-ROM designed to teach students about natural-areas management. (The instruction sheets will aid the school’s computer administrator in setting up the program.) To obtain the CDRom, contact the Missouri Department of Conservation (573-751-4115).
- Optional resources such as plant and animal identification books/sheets to aid in the further study of local biodiversity and stewardship efforts.