

Steering Committee

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FOP Leader Application 2018 Cover Letter

Build your community. Make an impact. Grow as a leader.

Dear FOP Leader Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in the First-Year Outdoor Program, the oldest and largest pre-orientation program at Harvard College. Since its inception in 1979, FOP has worked hard to provide fun, inspiring, and safe pre-orientation trips for incoming students. The program owes much of its success to the wonderful leader community, and the Steering Committee hopes that this letter will answer some of your questions about applying to become a FOP leader.

What is FOP?

The First-Year Outdoor Program (FOP) is an introduction to Harvard that takes places across the lakes, mountains, and trails of New England. In 2017, 383 incoming freshmen participated in FOP on 39 trips led by 78 upperclassmen all over Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. While on campus, the FOP participants and leaders continue to learn from each other and support one another, creating spaces for reflection and growth throughout the year.

The mission of FOP is to provide group, adventure-based activities that promote the development of social support and self-awareness for first-year students and leadership development for members of the Harvard community. The central values of FOP are compassion, the equality and intrinsic worth of all people regardless of identity, responsibility to community, and care and responsibility for the environment.

Next year, FOP trips will run from Monday, August 20, 2018 to Sunday, August 26, 2018. Commitment as a leader begins on **Wednesday, August 15, 2018** and runs through **Sunday, August 26, 2018**.

What kinds of trips are there?

- **Backpacking Trips** are six-day treks through the forests and mountains of New England.
- **Switch-Canoe Trips** include canoeing and backpacking. Leading a switch-canoe trip requires additional lifeguard certification training.
- **Service Trips** include backpacking and one to two days of trail work. Service work ranges from onsite construction to the clearing of trail debris.
- **Cabin Trip** will spend the week learning about one location from a variety of perspectives. Students will stay in cabins and use different methods to develop a deeper understanding of the place they are staying. Previous trips have included site exploration of the Harvard Forest.

What makes a good leader?

FOP leaders take on a serious responsibility guiding a group of 8 to 12 first-year students and must have the capacity to learn both outdoors and interpersonal skills. Applicants must be able to learn and demonstrate the following skills by the end of training:

- Communicate and work effectively with a co-leader
- Discuss views on the Harvard experience with an open-minded perspective
- Navigate potential conflicts between group members while maintaining group safety and balancing individual and group needs
- Engage with difference in a thoughtful and respectful manner
- Demonstrate comfort and confidence with technical skills necessary for backcountry travel
- Effectively handle emergency and unexpected situations

FOP leaders promote the development of social support and self-awareness for first-years. FOP is looking for applicants who convey strong interpersonal skills and who are able to foster a positive environment for group bonding and self-exploration, drawing on their own experiences as well as the comprehensive spring training. FOP leaders are dedicated to acting as a resource for students throughout the fall trip and following their return to campus.

Since FOP is conducted in a backcountry setting, leaders are faced with particular challenges regarding the safety and comfort level of participants on their trips. With this in mind, FOP looks for applicants with a sound decision-making capacity and a readiness to improve their outdoor skills. Potential leaders should have the desire to become comfortable in the outdoors, but no prior experience is necessary!

The strength of FOP depends on the involvement, support, and breadth of experiences of its leaders. FOP values having leaders of different ages, backgrounds, interests, identities, and perspectives.

Applicants should also view the experience of leading a FOP trip as an opportunity to develop their leadership skills, explore different styles of leadership, and engage with different perspectives. FOP takes feedback and growth seriously in the continued development of leaders.

Misconceptions about being a FOP leader

- Applicants do **NOT need to have participated in FOP** to be a leader! Many of our leaders did not participate in FOP as first-years.
- Applicants do **NOT need to have outdoors experience**. FOP accepts trainees of all levels of experienced and will teach trainees the necessary outdoor skills to lead a successful trip. Applicants must be interested in learning about backcountry safety and spending time outdoors.
- Applicants do **NOT need to own equipment or pay for training**. FOP will cover all of the necessary costs and allows leaders to rent equipment at no cost.

How do I become a leader?

Applicants must complete two stages prior to their confirmation as leaders. The first, Trainee Selection, constitutes the application and interview processes. The trainees selected following

the interview must then complete a comprehensive training process throughout the spring semester, culminating in a nine-day training trip. Upon successful completion and evaluation, trainees are confirmed as leaders.

Sometimes, trainees whose skills need significant improvement may be required to complete additional training over the summer or after leading in the fall. Additionally, a trainee may be asked not to lead a FOP trip if the trainee's skills are significantly lacking after the training trip.

With that said, once trainees have been selected, FOP is committed to doing everything in order to help trainees successfully complete training. In exchange, FOP asks for a significant commitment of time and effort on the part of trainees.

Trainee Selection Process

- (1) Submit FOP leader application response form with two letters of evaluation.
- (2) Applicants will be informed if they are selected for an interview.
- (3) Interviews are scheduled to take place during the first few weeks of the spring 2018 term.

If past years are any indication, trainee selection will be a highly competitive process. In a typical year, FOP receives over 130 applications and will select a cohort of approximately 55 trainees. The Steering Committee will notify applicants about final decisions by email on or before February 19, 2018.

Letters of evaluation should be completed by people who have observed the applicant in a position of leadership or responsibility such as a high school teacher, extracurricular leader, teammate, advisor, or employer. FOP participants may request a letter from their leader.

Generally, it is discouraged to submit an evaluation from a roommate or close friend. Likewise, it is often helpful to submit evaluations from individuals with diverse perspectives of the applicant (i.e. submitting evaluations from two FOP leaders is not recommended.) Please look at the letter of evaluation questions in advance and choose an appropriate individual.

Provide evaluators with the following information:

1. Full Name (Ensure that it is the same name entered on the response form.)
2. Whether the applicant has waived their right of access to the letters of evaluation under FERPA. The waiver is included in the application response form.

The link to the letter of evaluation form can be found at fop.fas.harvard.edu/apply-lead.

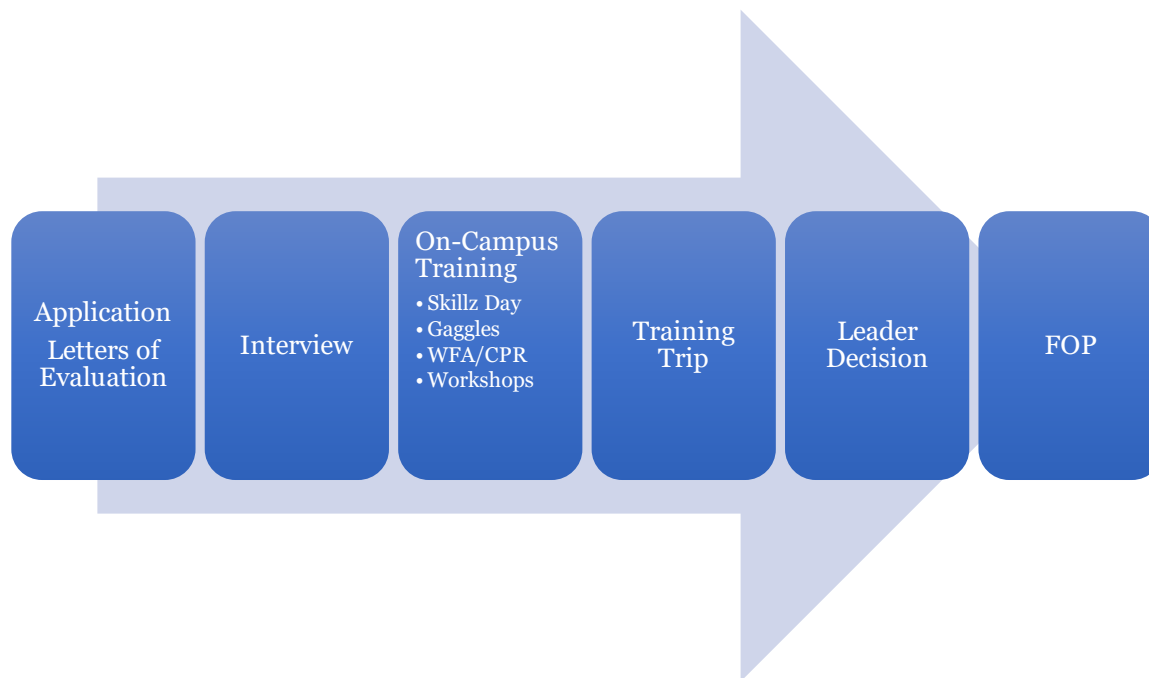
Spring Training

Final selection as a trainee is dependent on the completion of the comprehensive training process detailed in the "Training Requirements" section, including successful evaluation following the training trip.

FOP takes training requirements seriously and every year there are individuals who do not complete training as a result of absences and scheduling conflicts. FOP expects trainees to be present for all required trainings, but realizes that conflicts arise. Although Steering Committee cannot make allowances for individuals who are not available for training trips or FOP trips, exceptions to other requirements can be made on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of Steering Committee.

By alerting Steering Committee to conflicts early, there is a higher likelihood that trainees will be provided alternative training options. Failure to inform Steering Committee in advance of conflicts will reflect poorly on the trainee during spring training and may result in the trainee being asked not to lead.

If an applicant foresees a **significant and unavoidable conflict** with any of the training requirements, please describe the exact nature and timing of the conflict in the designated section of the application. If the applicant is selected for an interview, Steering Committee will discuss any clarifications regarding the applicant's conflicts at that time.



Training Requirements

IMPORTANT DATES

- (1) Welcome Meeting: February 21, 2018, 7 p.m.–8 p.m.
- (2) Skillz Day Kickoff: March 3, 2018, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
- (3) Wilderness First Aid and CPR certification: April 7–8, 2018 or April 21–22, 2018 (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- (4) Skillz Day Review and TT Reveal: April 28, 2018, 9 a.m.–2 p.m.
- (5) Training Trips: May 13, 2018–May 21, 2018
- (6) Pre-FOP: August 15, 2018–August 19, 2018
- (7) FOP Trips: August 20, 2018–August 26, 2018

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- **Weekly Training Meetings** (TBD): 2-hour session each week, timing varied based on trainee availability
- Office Hours: 5 volunteer hours during spring term (minimum of 2 hours in Equipment Room)
- Additional Workshops (TBD): Up to two additional workshops on weekday evenings

- Lifeguard Certification classes (TBD — Switch only)
- Canoe Skillz Day (TBD — Switch only)

Anything else applicants should know?

- All current freshmen, sophomores, and juniors are eligible to apply.
- Students who will be on leave for either the spring 2018 or fall 2018 terms are **not eligible** to apply.
- The cost of leader training is paid for by FOP. Equipment (including backpacks, clothing, and sleeping bags) can be borrowed from FOP at **no cost**.

Applicants who have submitted applications in previous years are encouraged to consider applying again. Many leaders, including Steering Committee members, were not selected the previous times they applied, and have since become an integral part of the leader community. Extra time is often beneficial to the applicant because of the additional leadership opportunities and opportunities for growth that exist in that timeframe.

What comes next?

FOP will be hosting combined **information sessions and open houses** to talk about the program and the process for becoming a leader. Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. Current leaders will also be in attendance to discuss their experiences in the program.

- Thursday, November 9, 2017, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Science Center Hall C
- Sunday, November 12, 2017, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Harvard Hall 104
- Wednesday, November 22, 2017, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Science Center Hall B

Additionally, application mentors are available to provide advice to applicants about the written application or speak more about the program. Contact information and bios of application mentors are available at fop.fas.harvard.edu/people/role/application-mentor.

Inquiries about logistics, especially training dates, the selection process, or requirements, should be directed to the Steering Committee.

The application deadline is **Wednesday, December 6, 2017 at 11:59 p.m.**

Letters of evaluation are due by **Sunday, December 10, 2017**. Application and letter of evaluation submission instructions are posted at fop.fas.harvard.edu/apply-lead.

We look forward to reading your application. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions.

Sincerely,
Steering Committee of the First-Year Outdoor Program

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