Field Trip Organization 101
Chicago River Fieldtrip

A field trip to the Chicago River can be a wonderful experience for teachers and students, providing a memorable learning experience. If you are new to outdoor field trips it can seem daunting. Here are some suggested steps to help make the process go smoothly.

Decide on field trip organization
Due to bus schedules, field trips usually last two to four hours, including time for lunch. We suggest you bring no more than 60-75 students to the river at once, and divide students into groups no larger than 15, each group having its own adult leader (a parent, teacher or teacher’s aide). There are two main ways to organize students on a field trip:
1. Students rotate through a series of activities, each student having the opportunity to try everything.
2. Students are divided into expert groups. Each group delves deeply into one or two activities. Groups then report back to the entire group.

Decide what you want your students to do
There are a wide range of activities students can do at the river. We suggest picking a three to six activities and choosing a variety of different types of activities. For write-ups of all the activities listed below, check out our website under field trip activities. Of course, feel free to create your own idea for field trip activities.

Water Quality Testing: 5th-12th
Using test kits we have for loan, students can test the waters for pH, turbidity, nitrates, phosphates, dissolved oxygen, biological oxygen demand, total solids and fecal coliform.

Macroinvertebrate Collection: K-12th
Students can collect and identify macroinvertebrates (small, backboneless organisms living in the water) to determine the quality of the river. Younger students can simply observe and characterize the animals they find. If you don’t have your own equipment, you can borrow all the equipment you will need from us.

Ecology Studies: K-12th
Students can investigate the ecology of the riverbanks and land surrounding the river through transects, nature walks and observation activities.

Active Games: K-12th
Students often get very excited on field trips; an educational active game can provide them with a constructive outlet for their extra energy.

Observation & Reflection: K-12th
Students can hone their observation skills as they take guided nature walks, scavenger hunts and make detailed drawings. Take time to let students soak it all in and understand what this visit to nature means to them.

Stewardship Activities & Restoration: K-12th
Students can help with physically restoring natural areas to health. Some activities can include trash pick-up, invasive species removal, native plantings and native seed collection.
Recruit and train teachers & chaperones
Most school districts require a teacher or chaperone for each ten students. This kind of coverage is a necessity at the river. Each student group should have an adult. In addition, you may need activity leaders to lead the different stations at the river. **Friends can provide one staff person per field trip. This person can provide a brief introduction to the river at the beginning of the field trip and lead one of your activities. All other activities must be led by your staff.**

Decide if you want Friends' staff there to help or not
If you would like a staff person to help the day of or if you would like to borrow any equipment please contact Friends at least two weeks in advance. The earlier you contact us the more likely we (or our equipment) will be available on your preferred dates.

In class before the field trip
We have found it very helpful if before the day of the field trip students are: familiar and comfortable with the content behind the activities they will be doing are already divided into their working groups and have reviewed in their groups what their tasks are. We also recommend reviewing the safety recommendations. **It is very important that students do some work in the classroom before the field trip.**

Decide when you want to go
Decide when you want to go. It’s best to check with us first to make sure your date(s) is free. If you need help, contact us. Trips can be done seven days a week, and can be scheduled whenever our education staff is available. For fall and spring trips, we suggest you contact us at least one or two months in advance to schedule your field trip as dates get booked quickly. Winter is a great time of year for a trip as well (as long as you don’t mind the cold).

Decide where you want to go
There are a variety of sites for field trips ranging from city parks to forest preserves. Sites can be found as far south as 135th Street and as far north as Lake Forest. Choose a site based on descriptions, driving directions, parking, and access that suits your needs and the activities you've chosen. If you need help deciding on a site, or would like a recommendation, please contact our education staff. If you have a site you would like to visit which is not on our list, we would be happy to check it out. Feel free to contact Friends of the Chicago River for assistance.

Complete your Field Trip Needs Form
Complete the Field Trip Needs Form and return it to Mark Hauser, email: mhauser@chicagoriver.org, or fax: (312) 939-0931. **We cannot book your trip until we have the information on the form, so please send it to us formally lock in your date!**

Obtain a county permit (if necessary), school permission and buses
If you choose a Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) site you must fill out and turn in an Education Permit Request Form to the FPDCC at least two weeks before your field trip. The permit can be obtained from Friends’ website. You should also call (708) 771-1088 to make sure bathrooms are unlocked the day of your field trip. In addition, you will need to get permission from your school district and hire your own bus.