



Best Practices for Increasing Trail Usage by Hikers and Walkers

An overview of Hike Ontario's
Research Findings 2006-2007

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About Hike Ontario

For the past 32 years, Hike Ontario, a not-for-profit federation of Ontario's Hiking and Walking Trail Groups has been serving the needs of the hikers and walkers of Ontario.

Our current membership consists of 25 trail clubs and over 13,000 individuals.

Guiding Principles of Hike Ontario

- 1. Encourage Hiking, Walking & Pedestrian Trail Development**
- 2. Promote active transportation & healthy lifestyles**
- 3. Enhance Environmental Awareness & Appreciation**

Project Backgrounder

- In 2006 Hike Ontario received funding under the Trails for Life program to research best practices for increasing trail usage by hikers & walkers
- A research consultant was retained and research and data collection was completed in Jan 2007
- Best Practices Manual is now in final design phase and will be made available in June 2007



Target Audience

- **Hiking and Walking organizations**
- **Parks and Recreation staff**
- **Conservation Area & Parks staff**
- **Municipalities**
- **A broad range of Special Interest groups (Health Units, Resorts, private landowners)**
- **Trail Builders, and more**

The 5 Essential Best Practices

1. **Enhance the Trail Experience**
2. **Collaborate**
3. **Target Specific Population Groups**
4. **Market the Experience**
5. **Evaluate Results and Modify**

Best Practice #1: Enhance the Trail Experience

Better Trails = More people on them

The Ideal Trail Experience includes:

- **Great trails**
- **Great activities**
- **Great trail users**

Characteristics of Great Trails

- Proximity
- Accessibility
- Diversity
- Connectivity
- Signage
- Safety
- Aesthetics
- Maintenance
- Amenities

Characteristics of Great Activities

- **Organized and non-organized activities**
- **Self guided opportunities**
- **Guided walks and hikes**
- **Events and Festivals**
- **Packaged programs**
- **Special incentive programs**

Characteristics of Great Trail Users

- **Responsible & Safe**
- **Informed**
- **Stewards**
- **Promoters**
- **Advocates**

Best Practice #2:

Collaborate

- Partner with stakeholders
- Establish leadership & governance
- Build your Resource Capacity
- Develop collaborative strategies
- Plan strategically

Best Practice #3:

Target Specific Population Groups

Ontario's trails are for everyone.

- **Engage & provide opportunities for groups known to use trails less frequently; older adults, children & youth, girls & women, low income families, people with disabilities and visible minorities**
- **Understand the needs, desires & characteristics of specific population groups as they relate to exercise, recreation and active transportation**
- **Enable & empower all citizens to get involved**

Best Practice #4: Market the Experience

- Develop and commit to a public relations plan
- Brand your trail or experience
- Provide clear and accurate trail information
- Create a website providing easy access to current information and virtual experiences
- Establish mutually beneficial marketing relationships
- Make friends with the media

Best Practice #5: Evaluate & Modify

Evaluation is an essential part of good program management.

“The only man who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measurements anew every time he sees me, while all the rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them”

George Bernard Shaw

Best Practice #5: Evaluate & Modify

- **Develop a framework for evaluation**
- **Involve stakeholders**
- **Enhance your credibility: communicate your findings openly**
- **Integrate results in decision making processes**
- **Foster an evaluation culture: Make it part of your everyday business**

Next Steps

- **Distribution of Best Practices Manual to Ontario trails community**
- **Development of web-based version of document**
- **Continued research & data collection to ensure relevance of document**

Questions?

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