

## Outdoor Wisconsin Leadership School

### Maximizing Your OWLS Experience

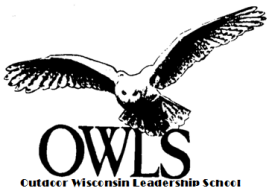


The following information is meant to provide suggestions for maximizing the impact of your upcoming OWLS program. Prior to your program, an OWLS staff person assigned to coordinate your program will contact you in order to gather information regarding the purpose, goals and logistics of your visit. This information will then be shared with the OWLS Group Leaders who will be delivering your program.

In preparation for the conversation between the OWLS staff and yourself it may be useful to think about the following points. It has been our experience that those programs that implement a strategy of pre-program preparation, active transference of learning, and post program follow up, are the most successful at making this experience long lasting.

Towards that end, the following information may provide some areas that you may wish to think about and discuss with the OWLS staff:

- 1. Define your goals for the program:** Are there specific areas of personal/group development that you would like OWLS to focus upon? - Leadership skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, etc.
- 2. Define how you are using the OWLS experience:** Is this experience part of a larger effort for your group (one portion of a leadership development program, part of a personal growth experience, or part of an effort by your work group to recognize and formulate a response to performance issues)? How would you like OWLS staff to connect this experience to what the group is doing back home?
- 3. Participant preparation:** How will the group members be prepared for their visit? Are they being given a set of expectations about the program? Do they know where they are going and why? Have the goals for the experience been shared with the group members? Do they know the basic program schedule, the housing arrangements, etc? Are they being prepared to be outdoors for the majority of the day? Is there buy-in from the group for this experience? Will the group members be participating in any pre-program activities that prepare them for the experience (discussions of the experience/personal expectations, group initiatives, etc.)?
  - a. Have expectations about the use of cell phones, etc. been set? (OWLS requests that these items not be used/brought along during programming periods)
  - b. Have expectations about clothing been shared with participants? Given the nature of the activities utilized by OWLS, participants should wear shoes (not sandals) and loose comfortable clothing appropriate for the weather that can be expected during the time of your visit.



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4. **Post program plans:** Will the group be doing any follow-up activities that reinforce what the group accomplishes at OWLS or is this a stand-alone experience?
  - a. As part of their OWLS program, participants will be led through processing/reflection exercises that ask group members to think about what they have experienced and that encourage the group/individuals to relate their experience to life at home. However, there is often a value to revisiting an experience such as this after participants have had time to relate their experience to life “back home.” This presents a great opportunity for follow up activities that reinforce the lessons OWLS experience, that make connections between what was experienced at OWLS and the work that the group engages in back home and that reenergizes the group after the initial post program high has worn off.
  
5. **Clearly communicate the goals** of the program in any parent, teacher and student information. Group members often focus their expectations (trepidations) on the high adventure portions of our programs, i.e. the High Ropes course or Climbing Tower and forget that there is a great deal of learning that takes place during group initiatives (problem solving tasks) low ropes elements and other activities that focus on developing group bonding, communication, problem-solving and leadership skills. By clearly defining the goals of this experience for participants, parents, etc. and explaining that the overall program entails a variety of activity and experiences that are designed to provide a progression of learning, many of the concerns and uncertainties can be addressed.
  
6. **Make a plan for non program times during your stay:** For groups that are staying overnight at Holiday Home Camp, it is important to remember that OWLS programming runs during the day (typically 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. or so) and therefore there is both an opportunity and a need for groups to plan activities during the evening hours. Holiday Home Camp has outdoor sport areas, fire rings for evening campfires, A.V. equipment, etc. Or, evenings can be used by your group for your own group specific programming/workshops and discussions of what was experienced during the day. Please Note: some activity areas and equipment must be reserved so please discuss these options with OWLS staff.