



National Mountain Bike Patrol Group  
Best Practices Handbook

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**NATIONAL MOUNTAIN  
BIKE PATROL+**

## Introduction

Hello, and thank you for being part of the National Mountain Bike Patrol (NMBP)! You are part of a national organization that has provided hundreds of thousands of hours of volunteer service to countless land management agencies and trail users since its inception in 1994. This manual is intended to provide you with a set of best practices to help organize and run your NMBP group effectively. We are always looking for feedback from our patrol leaders, so please don't hesitate to get in touch. Thanks again for all of your hard work!

Why start an NMBP group? You could volunteer as a solo bike patroller with a little help from your local land agency, but no one is an army of one. The support structure that an NMBP group provides makes it easier and, above all, more fun to volunteer on your local trails. Having a well-organized group helps spread the load so one individual isn't saddled with all of the boring administrative work.

But don't think that you can just "set it and forget it." NMBP groups need upkeep to survive and thrive -- that means recruiting fresh volunteers, mentoring new leaders and maintaining a cooperative and open relationship with land agencies and local IMBA affiliates. It's hard work, but this manual will help point you in the right direction and answer many fundamental questions. However, if you can't find the answers you're looking for, don't hesitate to contact IMBA's patrol coordinator: [patrol@imba.com](mailto:patrol@imba.com).

## NMBP Mission Statement

The NMBP consists of dedicated volunteers partnering with land managers, land owners and emergency personnel, to assist, educate and inform all trail users in order to enhance their recreational experience. Volunteers:

- Assist in medical and mechanical emergencies
- Educate trail users of proper etiquette
- Inform land managers, owners and trail users of trail conditions through monitoring efforts

*The NMBP is part of IMBA, which is a member-supported 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to preserving and enhancing trail opportunities for mountain bikers worldwide. Your membership in the National Mountain Bike Patrol includes IMBA membership.*

# CHAPTER 1 – ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Your patrol group should be organized based on its size and complexity. A larger group of patrollers, or a patrol group working with several different land agencies, will require greater organizational support than a smaller group or a group that interacts with few land agencies. These guidelines are merely a starting point for your group to begin creating an organizational structure that will facilitate growth, address operational needs, interface effectively with land agencies and local mountain bike clubs and recruit new leaders to avoid burnout.

## Leadership

Designated leadership roles are important regardless of a group's size. They ensure that certain critical tasks are assigned to a volunteer who has the time and expertise to keep things running smoothly. Leadership roles often require a time commitment, so it is crucial to select the right people but to also provide them with opportunities to delegate tasks and pass the torch to new leaders when they are ready to step down. As with all volunteer groups, leadership burnout is a constant threat to the organization's wellbeing. One of the easiest ways to prevent burnout is to apply term limits to the leadership roles and cultivate new leadership. If, after two years, a patrol director's term has expired, he or she then has an option to step down if they're ready to take a break.

## Basic Leadership Positions and Duties

### PATROL DIRECTOR

- Directs all patrol activities
- Attends and oversees all patrol meetings
- Handles all disputes
- Coordinates with local IMBA club
- Maintains communication with the NMBP Director at the IMBA office.

### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

- Supervises all patrol activities
- Records and tracks volunteer hours
- Distributes and files meeting minutes
- Assists with handling disputes
- Steps in when Patrol Director is unavailable

### PATROL LIAISON

- Liaison between Patrollers and land agencies. Designating one person is crucial to streamlining and professionalizing communications.
- Is a participating member of the local IMBA club board of directors
- Primary point-of-contact for local land and/or city manager(s)

### INSTRUCTOR

- Please ensure that at least one member of your group is a certified NMBP Instructor
- Trains new Patrollers and refreshes current ones once or twice per year
- Schedules group CPR/First Aid classes; coordinates with land manager to help with training

OTHER HELPFUL POSITIONS: Webmaster, Outreach Coordinator, Events Coordinator, Communications Director (assigned to take photos, write for the group blog and submit field stories to the NMBP Director)

# Bylaws

As with any volunteer organization, it is best to set expectations and requirements to guide your NMBP group's activities. It is important to put all of this down on paper in a collaborative fashion to avoid disagreement or confusion down the road. A bylaws document will be able to answer any questions that may arise about the group's purpose, requirements for membership or anything else.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

What is your group's purpose? Often this is very similar to the NMBP's mission, but you may need to tailor it to meet the specific needs of your area.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

What requirements must volunteers fulfill to become part of the group? Again, this will vary, but some basic suggestions include:

- Membership with local IMBA club.
- Participation in patrol orientation course.
- First aid/CPR certification.
- Membership with IMBA/NMBP.
- Proficiency with basic on-trail bike repair.
- Attendance at a minimum of one trailwork party per year.
- Participate in a minimum of two patrol group events per year.
- Minimum number of hours that must be patrolled each year.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT**

It is best to require volunteers to agree to adhere to a code of conduct. They will be representing your organization, so it is important that expectations are clear and that leadership has recourse if a volunteer's behavior is unacceptable.

Suggested expectations:

- Patrollers take personal responsibility for their actions.
- Patrollers will adhere to all NMBP training guidelines as well as IMBA's widely respected "Rules of the Trail."
- Patrollers must represent themselves, the NMBP group and the mountain biking community in a positive manner.

## **BOARD REVIEW**

In order to give the code of conduct "teeth," it is important to have a clear process for addressing concerns with members. Hopefully, it will never be necessary to sanction a volunteer, but it is best to have a process to make sure any issues are dealt with fairly. Suggested policy:

Any volunteer who fails to follow the patrol's code of conduct or acts in a manner that is detrimental to the club, NMBP group, another volunteer or other trail users will be investigated by a review board which will consist of no less than the patrol director, assistant director (unless one of them is the volunteer in question) and two uninvolved patrollers. The outcome of this review can result in, but is not limited to, a warning, probation or removal of the volunteer from the patrol roster.

## **MEETINGS**

Meetings aren't the reason we volunteer, but they are a necessary venue to make sure everyone is aware of the NMBP group's latest activities. It is best to be specific about the frequency and administration of these meetings so they do not become too frequent or burdensome:

- Patrol meetings will be called by a patrol board (director and assistant directors) member quarterly. May be performed via conference call as needed.
- Time and place of the meeting will be announced on the correspondence.
- The meeting will be chaired by the director or the assistant director, in the director's absence.
- Volunteers are required to attend at least two meetings per year.

### **PATROL BOARD MEETINGS**

Suggested policy:

- Held twice per year.
- Called by the board director; place of meeting and time is at the discretion of the director.
- All board members are required to attend.

## CHAPTER 2 – COLLABORATION

*\* This section will be edited in 2012, when participation either with or as an IMBA club or chapter becomes mandatory.*

Clubs and other local organizations work best when they collaborate directly with a local NMBP group to support their shared missions of improving mountain biking in their area. The key point to remember is that everyone is different, so each individual will naturally be drawn to different types of volunteer activities, depending on what appeals to them. Plenty of mountain bikers love trailwork, others would rather volunteer as patrollers or ambassadors while some prefer working behind the scenes performing administrative tasks. There really is a role for everyone to play in mountain bike advocacy; the trick is getting each person pointed in the right direction.

### Areas for Collaboration

#### 1. RECRUITMENT

NMBP groups and IMBA clubs should always be on the lookout for volunteers who can help support the cause. Both should understand the variety of volunteer roles that either group has to offer and be capable of referring the interested mountain biker to the appropriate group or person.

#### 2. RELATIONS WITH LAND MANAGEMENT

Any time the mountain bike community can offer additional support or service to the local land agencies, it will further the cause and improve its chances of obtaining more riding opportunities in the future. The key here is that the IMBA club and NMBP group are both aware of each other's activities in order to coordinate their communications and relationship with the local land agency. Ensure that the agency does not feel overwhelmed or bothered by mixed messages from a disconnected mountain bike community.

#### 3. EVENTS

Everyone likes to party! Local festivals and other events like Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day are great opportunities for the NMBP group and IMBA club to combine their forces to pull off a great party for the mountain bike community. They are also recruiting opportunities for both organizations. Many patrol groups also hold mountain bike skills clinics, special days for beginners and families as well as regular organized rides for all fitness levels.

#### 4. SHARED NON-PROFIT STATUS

The process to become a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization is time-consuming and challenging. If your local IMBA club has already achieved this status, see if it is possible to work under their auspices to avoid reinventing the wheel. If neither of your organizations has non-profit status, work together to apply since you are generally working towards the same ends. Further information on non-profit status is available in the resources section of IMBA.com.

### Keys to Successful Collaboration

**Communication:** It's best if the NMBP group and IMBA club each have designated liaisons responsible for facilitating good communication between the groups.

**Expectations should be clear :** Often, it helps to write up a basic memorandum of understanding (MOU) or similar agreement on how the two groups will endeavor to collaborate. Documented roles and responsibilities should be included in the MOU. Be specific!

## Collaboration with Local Land Agency

It's probable that the land on which your local trail system lies is owned, or at least managed by, a local, state, or federal land management agency. A good working relationship with local land managers is the key to a successful NMBP group. Each area has its own unique trail use issues and local land managers are aware of these.

Local land management agencies include city and county parks and recreation areas. State-level agencies include parks, forests, and recreation areas. At the federal level, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Forest Service (USFS), and National Park Service (NPS) are the key agencies.

BLM, USFS, and NPS manage almost one quarter of the land in the U.S. Land managers oversee recreation on public lands and they are responsible for decisions regarding trail access, new trails and trail closure.

## Getting Started

There are many ways to establish a partnership, so prepare to be flexible and approach the opportunity with an open mind. Be receptive to your land manager's thoughts and input and try to accommodate their needs. Here is an example of the steps for building a partnership:

- 1. Determine the best contact person.** Often, land agencies have employees who are specifically assigned to volunteer groups and projects. Collaborate with your local IMBA club – they likely know the important contacts within your land agency.
- 2. Contact the relevant agency employee and schedule a meeting to discuss the opportunity.** Provide a brief “sales pitch” to explain the benefits of your idea. Point them to the NMBP website (NMBP.org) for additional information as needed. Be sure to explain that while the Patrol performs many functions, enforcement is not one of them. Faced with dwindling resources and budget cuts, most land managers will welcome the idea of having a volunteer mountain bike patrol assisting all trail users.
- 3. Meet with your local land manager.** Prepare a list of benefits that the patrol intends to provide the agency. In many cases, acting as the eyes and ears for the land manager is the patrol's best service. Be prepared to provide the land manager with a list of supplies or training that the patrol might need. Work with the land manager to identify activities that the patrol and agency could do together, such as trail maintenance projects or search and rescue.
- 4. If the agency is amenable to your proposal, determine what next steps should be taken.** For some agencies, a handshake agreement is sufficient to allow the NMBP group to patrol. In other cases, a formal agreement, like a memorandum of understanding or voluntary agreement, is necessary. Follow your land manager's lead, as they will likely know the easiest and most effective way to formalize the partnership.
- 5. Communicate!** Establishing a partnership with your land agency is only the beginning. Collaborate with your agency contact to determine their communication preferences to keep them apprised of your group's work. Many agencies, like the U.S. Forest Service, count volunteer hours toward their particular unit, so make sure you're helping them maximize the benefit of your NMBP group's work.

## Chapter 3 – Ambassador Program

The Trail Ambassador program is built upon the same principles that have driven the NMBP program for over ten years - assist, educate and inform. Trail ambassadors are an on-trail presence that can assist riders with mechanicals, inform trail users who have questions about the area and provide information to land managers who want an extra set of eyes and ears. What sets the program apart is a low barrier to entry. They are not required to be CPR/first aid certified and not expected to provide medical assistance when on the trail. It is a great way for NMBP groups to get more volunteers involved, and it can be used as a stepping-stone for some who would like to try patrolling.

Ambassadors are part of the local NMBP group. They need to go through a basic orientation with their local NMBP group and/or land manager to be appropriately trained to volunteer on trails. They will be expected to communicate directly with the NMBP group to set a volunteering schedule, alert them of emergencies, plan events and coordinate with land management.

### Ambassador Program Advantages

- 1. Low barrier to entry.** Many people would like to volunteer with an NMBP group or IMBA club, but for a variety of reasons, they don't take the most important step of getting started and participating. Volunteering with the NMBP is a great alternative to trailwork for people who are too busy or don't like swinging tools. The Ambassador program is a great starting point because the training requirements are minimal and the membership is less expensive.
- 2. Increased trail presence.** Although ambassadors aren't trained to the extent that patrollers are, they are still knowledgeable volunteers who can help in a variety of circumstances and represent the mountain bike community in a positive manner.
- 3. Recruitment opportunity.** Even NMBP groups with extensive outreach programs can only do so much to bring in new blood to keep their group fresh and prevent leadership burnout. Some of your best volunteers might just be waiting for the right opportunity to participate, and the Ambassador program is a great way to get them started as NMBP volunteers.

### Designate an ambassador liaison within the group

As your NMBP group builds its ambassador ranks, it is best to find a volunteer who is willing to act as the liaison within the group for the ambassadors' activities. This individual's over-arching objective is to ensure that the ambassadors fit well within the patrol group's structure and activities, to help coordinate their work with the rest of the patrol group to avoid confusion or miscommunication. This role might only be necessary in a large NMBP group, but it's not a bad idea to assign it to someone in the early stages of a group's development to head off any issues before the group's size becomes unwieldy.

### Tips for coordination

1. Organize one group ride per month with all of the patrollers and ambassadors. This should be a fun, social opportunity for people to get to know each other a little better and informally keep abreast of everyone's activities. Like any good mountain bike ride, it should end at place where food and drinks are plentiful!
2. Keep an online schedule on a website, blog (free through Blogger and Wordpress) or calendar (such as Google), where patrollers and ambassadors can check in on who is patrolling when.

3. Use an hours log to track activity and monitor trends. Who is riding most often? When? Where? The NMBP has an online site that can be used for this purpose, but make sure that whatever you choose works best for your group and your local land agency.
4. Try to find a mode of communication -- two-way radio, cell phone or other -- that works well in your area but is also easy for all of your volunteers to use. That way, patrollers and ambassadors can communicate quickly and easily while on the trail, especially in the event of a backcountry emergency.
5. Make sure to debrief your volunteers if they attend to an incident on the trail. Look at the event objectively and critically to make sure that everything was handled properly. If possible, write up a brief report to share with the rest of the NMBP group to keep them abreast of areas for improvement or (hopefully) a job well done.

## Chapter 4 – NMBP Group Activities

### Annual Schedule

As an NMBP group grows and matures, it becomes more than just a framework for community service. In fact, from the outset, the group's work is balanced with a healthy dose of social activity to keep things fun and strengthen friendships. Consider using a basic schedule of events that can become annual traditions to bring the group together and introduce new participants to the organization. It helps show volunteers that they are appreciated and prevents the group from becoming insular or cliquish. Suggestions:

- Major training event once per year, usually at the start of riding season
- Refresher at some point, sometimes in conjunction with training event or prior to a race or festival
- Social event/fundraiser, often a few months before riding season to get people in the loop and excited about the coming season before they make other commitments
- Other activities like Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day or Subaru/IMBA Trail Care Crew visits
- Group rides at the speed of the slowest rider and appropriate venue

### **SUGGESTED TRAINING STRUCTURE:**

- One weekend event covering CPR/FA and NMBP training
- Geared towards new recruits, but open to all
- Incorporate rides every day
- Scenarios
- Involve other organizations like local EMS or land agencies. This is a great opportunity for collaboration and will help the respective groups better understand each other.

## Chapter 5 – Incentives

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any community organization. If the volunteers are happy and motivated, the organization will flourish, but if they don't feel like their work is appreciated or recognized, they'll quickly find another way to spend their free time. All successful NMBP groups find ways to reward volunteers for their service, to inspire them to commit their time to the organization and, above all, to thank them for their time. Here are some examples of how your group can incentivize volunteers to get them involved and keep them coming back year after year:

- Run an hours competition to reward the volunteers who donate the most time.
- Focus on both quantity and quality of hours. Some trails or areas need more attention and should be weighted more heavily.
- Count other outreach activities as well, such as Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day or trailwork. Their roles as NMBP volunteers can extend beyond simply patrolling.
- Provide incentives for volunteers who work at parks or trails that have a greater need. Work with your land agency to determine what their priorities are.
- See if you can tap into your local club's incentive program to better integrate the NMBP group with the other volunteer groups and activities.
- Seek prizes and discount offers from the local business community, especially bike shops and restaurants, for top volunteers.
- Host a fun picnic at the beginning or end of the riding season/year and encourage volunteers to bring the whole family. This can be a great way to introduce prospective volunteers to the group.

## Chapter 6 – Patrolling at Events

Events are a great opportunity for patrol groups to perform outreach in their local community. Often, patrols use events to fundraise or recruit new members. NMBP groups volunteer at events ranging from races to festivals to kids events, like bike rodeos or Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day. In all of these circumstances, a few fundamentals must be in place for a successful event:

### Expectations

The NMBP group and event organizer must establish set roles and expectations for the patrollers at the event. Draft a memorandum of understanding (MOU) prior to the event so everyone is on the same page. Event staff and patrollers must have a communication plan so patrol volunteers can relay information to appropriate event staff. Does the group have a booth? Will it perform medical service? How many patrollers are expected to be on site? Is the organizer compensating the patrol group for its time? Also, get a clear idea of what to expect in terms of the course, participants, spectators and venue.

### Preparation

Ensure that all of your patrollers are properly prepared to volunteer at the event. Provide a refresher course to help them brush up on their skills. Have experienced members brief the group on past experiences. Each patroller should thoroughly ride the trails that will be used for the event. All patrollers should have expert knowledge of the trails and property so they know where accidents are most likely to occur and can effectively guide emergency professionals to various parts of the property. Work with your race organizer to create appropriate signage to prevent crashes. Also, ensure that there will be ample medical supplies available for the patrol's use and that the volunteers will be provided with food and drink.

### Communication

Maintaining proper communication is critical. All patrollers should be connected, whether via cell phone, handheld radio or other device. Further, the patrol should have a direct line of communication with the event organizer and local emergency services. Establish communication protocol prior to the event. Often it's best to have a designated dispatcher in the patrol group. This person is the main point of contact with all outside services and relays information from the patrollers to the organizer or emergency professionals.

### Patrolling

Have a few patrollers riding the course to check for problems. At a race, it is best if they leave after the last racer has left the venue, that way patrollers will be able to ride the majority of the course before they are caught by the leaders. Bring extra course marking tape, and provide medical assistance as requested and record racer number as well as usual data. Do not provide mechanical assistance unless cleared ahead of time by promoter to do so. In most races, outside mechanical assistance disqualifies the racer. Always keep at least one patroller at the start/finish venue area, stationed at your patrol's designated tent or base camp.

Always ensure that the event organizer and your patrol group are working closely with the landowner or land manager. The rules set by your local land management agency or landowner trump all.

## Planning Timeline

### **WEEKS TO MONTHS BEFORE:**

1. Tap into local resources for support, like a local coffee or sandwich shop for food and drinks specifically for the patrol. Often, the racers and promoters have their own, in which case you might ask the promoter to provide food.
2. Make sure patrollers have supplies as needed, both in terms of bulk supplies and individual packs. Send out email reminders on recommended gear once the promoter provides specifics.

### **WEEKS TO DAYS BEFORE:**

1. Confirm that volunteers are committed and available.
2. Secure AED if resources and training allow.
3. Remind patrollers of necessary gear, meeting times, location, charge lights/radios, perform mechanicals on bikes.
4. Plan egress routes (whether on the trail or elsewhere) to get injured riders quickly into the hands of medical professionals. Determine suitable staging location(s) that vehicles can easily access and know how to get to these areas from anywhere on the course in order to extricate an injured rider as quickly as possible. Plan ahead of time so that each patroller knows where they are in relation to the staging areas.

*Debrief your patrol after the event and make detailed notes for next year.*

## Communication With Event Promoter

Communication before, during and after the event is crucial to ensure that your group meets the event promoter's expectations and that none of the participants are put at risk due to any confusion. Know what they expect from your NMBP group, and ensure that they know what you expect from them.

- Communicate with the event promoter on specifics: What type of event? How many participants? What trails are being used? Will there be spectators? How will we communicate with local EMS? Will the event require medical helicopter services? Clarify if the NMBP group is expected or at least allowed to provide mechanical assistance -- some races prohibit this.
- Determine an approximate number of patrollers needed for the specific event.
- Ensure that the NMBP group will be recognized in event communications, flyers and other public relations material.
- Agree on what the event promoter will provide to the volunteers. Things such as food, schwag, raffle entries, etc. are nice perks.

## At the Event

- Arrive early to finalize the course, determine where stationary patrollers are needed and set a schedule for roving patrols. Ride the course before the race to ensure patrollers will not become a liability and for extrication routes, tough spots where people are likely to go down, water drops/feed stations, etc.
- Check radios. Allocate them as follows: one at base, one with each pair of patrollers and one with race promoter.
- Ensure that race promoter mentions your group and why it's there at the racer meeting, including what you will be wearing and for racers to watch for you on course if they need assistance.
- Patrol in whatever format (stationary, roving patrols, mix, etc.) the situation demands.

## Gear

- Many NMBP groups opt to place a placard on a patroller's back or pack, rather than the front of the patroller/bike. Racers always look ahead and think they need to pass everyone ahead. This may help avoid confusion.
- Carry spare water for participants, either more in your hydration pack than you need or an extra water bottle or two, depending on time of year, weather and location.
- SAM splints are light, compact, and universal. They can be used from ankle to neck and everywhere in between. Label these with your organization and a working phone number, as they are ff\$15 each, and you can get them back easier if you do this. Use an old inner tube for a shoulder sling, which works better than most true "medical" slings and is more readily available.
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