Field Trip Information for Teachers

Field Trip Locations

Most field trips take place at our main campus. Note the following addresses as some GPS mapping may take you to the wrong location.

Blandford Nature Center (main campus): 1715 Hillburn Ave NW, Grand Rapids, 49504
There is parking for buses and cars at this location.

The Blandford Farm (farm programs): 3145 Milo St, Grand Rapids, MI 49534
There is limited parking for cars at this location, and no bus parking. Buses may drop off at this location and then park at our main campus parking lot.

Phone for both locations: 616-735-6240

Booking your Field Trip

Cost

The cost of a field trip is $9 per student per program, with a minimum program fee of $100. We require a minimum of 1 teacher or other adult chaperone for every 5 students in attendance. These required adults are free. Extra adults are welcome at $5 each (our regular admission fee). Fees for additional adults still apply even during our “Admission Free” months. As a non-profit that does not receive any public funding for operations, these charges reflect a large discount on our actual operating costs. We do not usually have scholarship funding available as the donations and grants our organization receives already subsidize our field trip programs.

Field Trip Numbers

Our programs are fully guided with low student-to-Blandford Educator ratios in order to provide the best personal content with a high level of engagement. We can host up to 60 students per program, and we cannot accommodate program overlaps. If you have more than 60 students, you will need to book multiple days/times. Payment instructions will be sent with your program confirmation email. We request payment at least 1 week prior to your program. If this is a hardship, we may be able to make alternate arrangements by special request.

Field Trip Booking Process

Please use the Field Trip Booking form found on this page of our website to request a field trip. It provides us with all of the information we need to get the process started. We do not hold dates until the booking request form has been filled out. If you have a quick question prior to requesting a field trip, you may email registrar@blandfordnaturecenter.org This is also the email to use if you are making special program requests, including unusual student numbers or custom program content. After we receive your request, we will get back to you with further questions or a confirmation of your booking. During the fall, this may take up to 2 weeks as we are fielding a lot of requests at the beginning of the school year.

Chaperone Policy

We require at least 1 adult chaperone (these include teachers, parents, parapros, or any other adult) for every 5 students, with a minimum of 2 chaperones no matter the group size. Chaperones must stay with the group throughout the program. Under no circumstances should a Blandford Educator be left with a student group without any chaperones. Teachers will be provided with Guidelines for Chaperones when they receive their field trip confirmation email. Please share these guidelines with your chaperones prior to your field trip.

Lunch and/or Self-Guiding Before or After your Program

Groups may elect to stay for lunch and/or self-guiding time before or after their field trip. Due to limited space for lunch, groups must notify us if they plan to stay for these activities, and this plan will be indicated in your confirmation email. If your plans change after you receive your confirmation, please let us know. We have a limited number of picnic tables in the Schoolyard adjacent to our parking lot, and we try to coordinate groups using this space, especially during our busy spring season. If another group is already booked to use this space, we may direct you to another area to eat, including our patio. Groups must dispose of all garbage after lunch or snacks.

Due to extremely limited indoor space, we cannot normally accommodate groups who wish to eat indoors. This means that eating indoors in the winter months is generally not possible. If your group is traveling a long distance which makes it impossible to complete a field trip and eat lunch at a normal time, please contact us to see if we have any on-site lunch options available for your planned day, or include this request in your booking form.

If planning to stay for self-guided exploration, we will attach maps with suggested routes and activities as well as a scavenger hunt and bingo sheets for you to print for your group. We recommend adding no more than 30-45 minutes to your trip for one of these activities (lunch or self-guiding) and no more than 1.5 hours if you plan to do both. We find that groups who plan to stay longer than this find their students are very tired and their enjoyment of the day is diminished. Please remember that we are almost entirely an outdoor nature center, and therefore we do not have indoor space for groups to congregate and rest.

Cancellation Policy

In the event of severe weather, including extreme snow or rain, high winds, extreme heat or cold, or tornado conditions, we may cancel your program. We carefully monitor the weather and strive to make calls about cancellations as early in the day as possible. Please check your messages if you are concerned about a possible cancellation. If we do cancel, we will try to reschedule, and if this is not possible, we will refund your program payment. If you choose to cancel your program for reasons other than severe weather, you must do so at least 7 days prior to your scheduled program in order to receive a refund. After this time we do not offer refunds for voluntary cancellations.

Click here for a link to our Field Trip Payment and Refund Policies

Adjusting your Expected Attendance Numbers

You have until 1 week prior to your program - your payment due date - to make adjustments in your student or chaperone numbers. If you wish to add students to your program, requests must be made in writing ahead of time and are not guaranteed, depending on the availability of Blandford Educators. Similarly, we request an accurate count of extra chaperones when booking/paying for your program. Many of our spaces have capacity restrictions, so large numbers of chaperones (more than 1 for every 2 children) can make movement and attention in our programs difficult. If you bring a large number of chaperones, adults may be asked to wait outside of program spaces (for example, our Wildlife Center) so that we can fit all students into those spaces.

Preparing for your Field Trip

Pre- and Post-Trip Learning Materials

All teachers receive optional pre- and post-field trip learning materials with their field trip confirmation email. You may choose to use these materials to supplement your learning before or after your trip.

Suggested Dress

Blandford field trips are designed to take place outdoors in all kinds of weather. We do not cancel field trips except in cases of extreme wind, rain or cold. While we may spend some time indoors, every field trip has more than one outdoor element which will happen even if it is raining, snowing, windy or cold. As long as the weather is not severe, your group will go outside! Therefore, please ask students (and chaperones!) to dress for the weather. This includes coats, hats, waterproof mittens or gloves, and shoes that can get wet and muddy. Students are much happier and better able to learn when they are warm and dry. If the forecast calls for rain and you do not want your students to be outside in it, then you will need to cancel or request to reschedule your trip, because we do not have the facilities to accommodate field trips entirely indoors.

Arrival Time

Plan to arrive 5 minutes prior to the start of your program. With only 1.5 hours for your field trip, it is important that we start on time in order to complete all of the planned activities. If your group arrives late, it is unlikely that we will be able to extend your program time, and we may have to eliminate activities in order to complete the program at the scheduled time.

Bus Parking

Buses should park along the east side of the parking lot next to the two tan-colored shipping containers (aka the “bus depots”). Please ask your bus driver to pull as far forward as possible as we may need to fit more than one bus in this area. Buses can remain parked in this area throughout the duration of the field trip unless instructed to park elsewhere by Blandford staff. Bus drivers are welcome to visit and sit inside the Visitor Center during the program.

Parking and Arrival Instructions for Drivers

We generally have plenty of parking for groups that come in cars. However, our parking may be tighter during our popular “Admission Free” months or when we are hosting rental groups. We encourage groups to carpool when possible to avoid parking issues. Upon arrival, we ask arriving chaperones to assemble on the sidewalk outside the Visitor Center until the entire group arrives. A Blandford staff member will then meet your group outdoors shortly before your program time and will escort you into our Education Center. We ask parents not to congregate in the lobby of the Visitor Center.

Program Format

Upon arrival, your group will be met by one of our Blandford Educators and escorted either inside our Education Center or to our outdoor patio. We will begin with a short 5-10 minute introduction as a large group. For most groups of 15 or more students, we will then break down into smaller groups, each with an assigned Blandford Educator, and head out to begin our activities. There will be instructions in your confirmation email explaining how many small groups are needed for your program. Please have plans for how you wish to break down your students into smaller groups before your field trip begins, as this allows us the groups to disperse and start our activities faster! We aim to have no more than 15 students per group in order to maximize learning and interaction with the activities. All groups will do the same activities but in different order. Activities include things like walking the trails, visiting the indoor Wildlife Center and outdoor Wildlife Trail, playing games, and doing other exploratory activities. At the end of planned program time, groups will walk back to the bus or another gathering point to rejoin the larger group before departure. If your group is planning to stay for

photos, snack, lunch or self-guiding following the guided program, teachers should communicate to chaperones where to meet following the program. The Blandford Educators assigned to your program will give important instructions for groups staying for lunch or self-guiding after a program. If students need to use the bathrooms before departure, please send 15 or fewer students at a time into the Visitor Center. Students must be accompanied by chaperones when entering the Visitor Center.

Bathrooms

The main bathrooms are inside the Visitor Center. There are also bathrooms inside the Education Center (where field trips begin). There is one exterior-entrance bathroom on the back side of the Visitor Center. To find this bathroom, walk along the right side of the building over the large patio and the entrance is around the corner on the back of the building.

Water

There are water fountains and a water dispenser inside the Visitor Center. If you are requiring students to bring a water bottle, please have them fill their bottles before arrival. Water bottles are recommended during high-heat months and especially for the Predator-Prey program, but please remember to take them with you when you depart.

Sunscreen and Bug Spray

Our woods do contain mosquitoes and ticks, though these are usually only a problem during wetter weather. You are welcome to apply bug spray on students, but we ask you to do this prior to your program starting. We do not provide bug spray to schools and our Educators are not able to apply it to students.

Photography Policy

We ask parents not to take photos during the field trip, especially without express permission from the teacher/leader of the group. This includes photos of our Blandford Educators.

After your Field Trip

Feedback and Evaluations

Following a field trip, teachers will receive an evaluation form via email. This form is anonymous (we do not track emails). Your feedback is extremely important to us as we continuously work to improve our programs and ensure that we are meeting the needs of our teachers and students. Additionally, as a non-profit that receives no city, county or state funding, we use teacher feedback in our applications for grant funding and support from donors. This fundraising helps us subsidize field trips (by more than $40 per student) and keeps them affordable at $9 per student. Please take a moment to fill our feedback survey so we may continue to serve the community with affordable field trips. If you wish to make additional comments or discuss your experience in more detail, you may reach out to Samantha Kotarski, Program Manager, at samantha@blandfordnaturecenter.org or by calling (616) 735-6240, ext. 105.

Questions?

- For general scheduling questions, questions about field trip content, special requests, etc, please contact our Registrar at registrar@blandfordnaturecenter.org.
- For questions or issues on the day of your field trip, call our Front Desk at (616) 735-6240.