



Project Cook Guidelines

Responsibilities

For the typical weekend project, cooks provide brewed coffee and hot water on Saturday and Sunday mornings, and breakfast on Sunday mornings; breakfast on Saturday mornings is optional – coordinate this with the project leader. Hot water is also heated and provided for dishwashing. It is the project leader's responsibility to recruit help to clean up after meals.

Cooks will coordinate with the project leaders for picking equipment up from and returning it to the storage unit.

Some cooks may remain in camp during the workday, and provide security for the campsite, equipment, and vehicles. If you do not feel comfortable remaining in camp alone during the workday, check with the project leader – it may be possible for a volunteer to stay with you.

The project leader may ask you to deliver cold drinks to the work crew on Saturday. This may or may not be feasible; work it out with the project leader.

Logistics

Cooks plan the menus, and do the shopping, keeping in mind the budgeted \$10 per person for the weekend, which includes two breakfasts and one dinner. Submit your receipts for reimbursement, using the [Project Expense Report](#). If you don't have receipts (e.g., Farmers Market purchases), simply state this on the Expense Report.

Be prepared for the unexpected. It can rain, snow, blow and all of them together, so have waterproof storage, not cardboard boxes. There is a cook shelter with sides in the storage unit. Unless there is an existing shelter at the project campsite, you should bring this, together with stakes and ropes. (The stakes and ropes are usually packed with the shelter, but you should make certain of this. The shelter sides are packed separately in its own storage bag.)

Draft an assistant, or be an assistant for a veteran cook, and do not be afraid to ask for help at the project and before, especially for shelter set up, dishes, pot stirrers, and clean up after meals. Also request help with camp take down at the end of the project.

Menu Planning

The dinner menu should include appetizers when the crew returns from the worksite, salad, entrée, side dish, and dessert. The returning volunteers are HUNGRY people. Meat portions should be estimated at 4 – 6 ounces cooked weight per person. Ensure that everyone has been served once before announcing seconds. While volunteers are hungry, most are not picky eaters. One-dish meals like spaghetti or stews with sides and bread work well. Leftovers may be offered for lunch on Sunday at the cook's discretion.

Breakfasts may be as simple as bagels or pastries, or may be pancakes, French toast, breakfast burritos, or omelets. Entrée suggestions include stews, spaghetti, enchiladas, lasagna, burgers, hot dogs, and casseroles. Side dishes can be potatoes, pasta salad, potato salad, macaroni and cheese, and corn on the cob. Breads help fill people up, and include corn bread or muffins, bread and butter, dinner rolls, and tortillas. Dessert is practically as important as the entree! Cakes and pies are popular (either purchased or home-baked). Cut-up fruits or a fruit salad is a nice accompaniment for a sponge or shortcake, and leftovers can be used at breakfast as a topping for French toast or pancakes.

Plan your menu from your favorite recipes, multiplying the servings to the number of people attending the project. Allow larger portions for the men than the women.

Prepare your shopping list according to your menu, and shop sales. Sam's Club and Costco are good places for large quantities of staples.

Prepare as much as you can at home, and freeze it for the project weekend. Start early! Do not wait until the Wednesday before a project to shop, precook and pack.

Arrange coolers and bins according to the meal they contain, and keep them organized. Frozen foods help limit the amount of ice you need, especially on hot summer days. Pack perishable dairy products, eggs, cheeses, and mayonnaise in the coolers with your frozen foods or ice. Pre-measure any dry ingredients and label them - sugar and salt look a lot alike!

NMVFO does not purchase alcohol beverages for consumption during the project. Occasionally the cook and/or project leader will purchase wine and donate it for the weekend. This is strictly voluntary, so do not let others pressure you to provide alcohol.

The cook and the project leader coordinate, usually the Tuesday before the project, to establish the headcount for the project. This count needs to

include any agency staff that will stay for dinner. Plan on 3-5 additional servings incase there are drop-ins.

NMVFO is not required to cater to special diets, but often the cook can alter a small portion of the menu to vegetarian desires, simply by leaving some sauce without meat. It is nice if you can, but not required. The project leader should survey the volunteers to determine any special needs, and notify you to determine if your menu is adaptable. The project leader is burdened with informing those with special needs that they may need to bring their own foods.

The projects are usually in remote places and there may not be a store nearby to purchase ice or forgotten items. Make lots of lists!

More Tips for the Cook

It is *your* kitchen, so do not allow people to rummage through your equipment and food without your permission. Remember, you have spent a week or more planning and preparing and organizing to make your weekend easier.

Ask for help with meal preparation and set up, but give specific assignments, and set out what you want them to help with. If they are helping with salad, pull out all the salad makings, knife, cutting board and bowl, salad dressing, etc.

Set up the dish wash station away from the meal preparation area so you do not have to wade through the crowd. Wash dishes, pots, etc. as you prepare the meal so after meal clean up is not so tedious.

Before serving dessert, ensure that the project leader has determined who the clean up crew will be. You cooked so you do not have to clean up! Keep hot water going during meal so it is available for clean up crew. Let them wash, but you should put things away; otherwise you may not find what you need for the next meal.

Lunch on Sunday is OPTIONAL. If there are leftovers and you want to stay and serve lunch, you can, but you DO NOT HAVE TO. If you want to break camp and leave after breakfast on Sunday, that is OK. If there are leftovers and you do not want to stay, inform the project leader that you will leave a cooler and food, and what time you plan to leave.

Find out what the next project is and who the cook and/or leader is, and coordinate how to hand over left over soda, juice, pancake mix, syrup and whatever else can be used. Bring the dish towels and dish cloths home to launder before returning them to the storage unit.

DO NOT LEAVE ANY FOOD, DRINKS, CHIPS, SALSA, CANNED GOODS OR ANYTHING EDIBLE IN THE STORAGE SHED!

Saturday, while the crew is on the trail, RELAX and enjoy nature, or you can join the crew and work on the trail, but you are not required to. Establish what time appetizers and dinner will be ready before the leader leaves for the trail. Establish whether you will want to or need to take cool drinks to the workers around lunch time. If the worksite is farther than you want or are able to hike, make arrangements to meet somebody on the trail or arrange for a drop point and time.

After breakfast cleanup, remember to take the frozen entree out of the coolers to thaw. At cool, high altitudes defrosting may be a slow process.

Safety

Cleanliness: provide soap and water or hand sanitizer for volunteers to use before eating.

Bears: some campgrounds have bear-proof containers for food, but do not plan on their availability. Bears can open your car like a can of beer, so do not think the food will be safe in your vehicle. Do not sleep in the same clothes you cook, or keep them in your tent in, because bears will think you are food since you smell soooo good. Do not keep food in your tent!

Chipmunks and squirrels: will get into anything, but not do much damage. The plastic storage bins with secure lids are a fair deterrent, but not critter proof.

Bugs: take bug spray. Keep food covered or in containers until ready to serve. Encourage everyone to keep foods covered after they serve themselves. Keep trash and garbage a reasonable distance from the kitchen area.

Water

Water is not always available at the campsites. Check with the project leader for availability of water. Take water for kitchen use if needed, but you do not need to provide water for the entire work crew. Ask the project leader for help if you do not have enough water containers (or space for them in your vehicle) for cooking and cleaning needs.

Sample Menu, Shopping List, Equipment List and Plan

Let's assume we have a weekend project with 15 volunteers + 4 agency staff = 19 total (12 men/7women). We'll plan for approximately 25 servings. Water is available at the campsite.

Menu

Breakfast Saturday morning:

Coffee, tea, hot chocolate
Bagels, cream cheese, and jelly
Oranges and apples

Dinner Saturday evening:

Appetizer

Chips and salsa, queso and guacamole

Entree

Chicken stew
Tossed salad
French bread and butter

Dessert

Chocolate sheet cake

Breakfast Sunday morning:

Leftover fruit from Saturday
Coffee, tea, hot chocolate
Pancakes with syrup and butter

Shopping List

Potato chips, 2 bags
Bagels, 32-36 assorted
Cream cheese, 1 large tub
Butter, 1 pound
Tortilla chips, 2 bags assorted flavors
Salsa, 1 large bottle
Jelly, 2-3 jars different flavors
Queso, 3 jars
Pancake mix, 3 boxes or 1 bag
Syrup, 1 large bottle
Guacamole, 3 cartons
Chicken, 6-8 pounds thighs and drumsticks
Carrots, 2 large bags mini size (for salad and stew)

Potatoes, 7-10 pounds
Celery, 2 bunches (for salad and stew)
Chicken broth, 2-3 quart boxes
Tomatoes, 3 large cans with garlic
Salad dressing, 2-3 different kinds
Bay leaf
Iced tea and soda, 5-6 6packs
Onions, 2
Capri sun or similar, 2-3 12 packs
Garlic, 1 head
Romaine lettuce, 6 heads
Cucumbers, 3
Radishes, 1 bunch
Cherry tomatoes, 2 baskets
French bread, 4 loaves
Coffee creamer, 1 small container or half and half, 1 quart
Cake mix, 1 -2 boxes
Frosting mix, 2 cans
Eggs for cake mix
Apples, 15
Oranges, 20
Coffee, 1 pound
Sugar, 1 small box

Equipment List (Available from the Storage Unit)

Stove
Propane tank
Lighters or matches
3 roll-up tables
Cooking (pop-up) shelter (with stakes and ropes)
Tarp sides for shelter
Griddles for stove
Pump pot for coffee
2 percolator pots
1 water kettle
Pancake turner
Assorted knives
Large bowl for salad
Salad tongs
2 large pots for stew
Serving spoons
3 coolers
Plastic tub for for coffee pots and fixings
2 bins for pots and pans and stuff
Flatware and blue enamel plates

Styrofoam cups
Aluminum foil
Plastic zip bags for leftovers
Coffee filters
Tea
Hot chocolate mix
Non-stick spray
Dish washing pans
Dish washing detergent
Bleach
Dish towels
Dishwashing sponge
Dishwashing scrubber
Pot holders
Paper towels
Toilet paper
Trash bags
Napkins
Salt and pepper shakers
Lantern and propane cylinder

Plan: Sequence of Events

- Monday or Tuesday before project, touch base with the project leader to verify number of participants.
- Monday or Tuesday after numbers established, shop for provisions.
- Tuesday and Wednesday, plan on cooking, cooking, cooking.
- Make cakes and frosting and freeze them.
- Cook stew and separate meat from veggies and freeze meat separately from veggies (the rationale for this is carrots and potatoes get funky if they are frozen).
- Thursday visit storage shed and pick up items on list and others you see that might be useful.
- Thursday evening pack boxes so they are organized according to meal, and label them if helpful. Gather and pack your personal camping gear and have ready to pack in car.
- Friday, pack car and go. Attempt to arrive at project site before dark, but this is not always possible. Ask for help setting up the shelter when you arrive. (The project leader may transport the shelter, stove, and propane tank and set them up prior to your arrival if you pre-arrange this. This is very helpful but not always possible.)
- Friday at campsite, set up stove, and prepare coffee pots and hot water pots for an easy start Saturday morning.
- At camp, establish with the project leader the start work time so you can adjust the coffee and breakfast time for Saturday morning. Allow

at least 1/2 hour for the coffee; the water may be very cold. Also establish appetizer and dinner time.

Clean-Up

Have the project leader ask for volunteers to do the pots, pans, and dishes after dinner. Have hot water and a wash station set up and have soap and towels available. Plan to put things away and pack up leftovers so you know where things are for the next meal.

At the end of the project be sure the stove is cleaned well and packed in the carrying case. Also make sure pots and pans, griddles and enamel dishes and utensils are washed well and dried well before packing away for return to the storage shelter. Clean and dry coolers and dish towels before returning to the storage unit.

When returning items to the storage unit, PLEASE put things back where you found them. The shelves will be labeled to help with organization. **DO NOT LEAVE FOOD, DRINKS, CHIPS, SALSA, PANCAKE MIX OR SYRUP, OR ANYTHING EDIBLE IN THE STORAGE UNIT, EVEN IF IT IS IN A SEALED CAN, JAR, BOX OR PACKAGE.** Make arrangements to pass them off to the next cook or project leader.

How to Make VFO Coffee

- Fill percolator with water to max fill (20-cup) line.
- Tear small hole in center of coffee filter and place in basket
- Add 1 tablespoon of coffee for every 2 cups of water
- Install basket cover and place on stem in percolator
- Set heat to medium and watch for first bubbles in percolator bulb
- When bubbling every 1-2 seconds, reduce heat and perk for 7 (seven) minutes
- At end of 7 minutes, remove from heat and allow to set for about 5 minutes before transferring into the pump pot, or pouring into cups.
- After 1-2 cups have been removed, take off top and remove basket and stem and set aside. BE CAREFUL, THIS IS VERY HOT

Tips

DO NOT LET THE EARLY RISERS RUSH OR PRESSURE YOU FOR COFFEE. IF THEY ARE THAT DESPERATE, TELL THEM THEY CAN MAKE IT THEMSELVES! Set up coffee pots the night before.

Cooking Equipment Checklist

(Customize this for your project; all items are in the Storage Shed)

- Stove
- Propane tanks
- Lighters and matches
- Shelter (with stakes and ropes)
- Shelter sides
- Tarps
- Tent poles for tarps
- Tent stakes for tarp
- Roll up tables
- Coolers
- Coffee pots
- Water kettles
- Pot holders
- Towels
- Dish washing tubs
- Dishwashing detergent
- Bleach (for rinse water)
- Sponges
- Pot scrubber
- VFO plates and flatware
- Styrofoam cups for coffee
- Coffee filters
- Coffee
- Pump pot for coffee
- Hot chocolate and tea
- Creamer and sugar
- Paper towels
- Napkins
- Toilet paper
- Trash bags
- Plastic tub for coffee things

- ___ Knives
- ___ Serving utensils
- ___ Salt and pepper
- ___ Foil and plastic zip bags for leftovers
- ___ Pots and pans as needed for menu
- ___ Serving bowls
- ___ Griddles for stove
- ___ Lantern for cook shelter
- ___ Propane for lantern
- ___ Plastic bins for transporting food and cooking equipment
- ___ Non-stick spray
- ___ Cutting boards
- ___ Can opener
- ___ Grater

Please note that some of the consumables (e.g., coffee, coffee filter, Styrofoam cups, foil, plastic bags, etc.) may not be stocked and you may have to purchase them.