

1. Christ-Centered

Trail Life USA (TLUSA) is a Christian outdoor adventure program that emphasizes and teaches biblical moral values. The program is unapologetically Christian, but is intended to be presented without feeling overly “churchy” or “religious,” focusing on outdoor adventure, character, and leadership development. The essentials of a Christian worldview are present throughout the entire program.

2. Church-Owned & Operated

The Christ-Centered program of Trail Life USA is delivered to families through local Troops, each of which is owned and operated by a Charter Organization (typically a local church). Charter Organizations vet and select Troop leaders. Each Charter Organization is expected to run its Troop as a ministry of the church. So long as it remains true to the general Trail Life program guidelines this ministry may be uniquely expressive of the Charter Organization’s Trinitarian faith tradition.

3. Outdoor-Focused

We believe there is something special about being outdoors. Camping, hiking, and other outdoor activities help build deep relationships and allow boys to develop character, practice leadership, and experience adventure. The outdoor focus helps a boy appreciate the wonder, majesty, and grandness of God as reflected in His creation.

4. Safety

Trail Life USA is committed to the health, welfare, and safety of our youth, volunteers, and staff. We aim to provide challenging, adventurous, and fun activities in a manner that no injuries occur beyond those that are readily treatable by simple first aid.

5. Courage

Societal shifts and challenges will require the increased demonstration of Christlike character and courage by both adult and youth members as they stand for the timeless values articulated in the Trail Life USA Statements of Faith and Values, which originate from Scripture. With this cultural pressure in mind, we will continually commit ourselves to biblical truths that we are to fear God and not man and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and understanding.

6. Male-Centered Adult Leadership

While women can serve in a number of roles in the organization, Trail Life USA is focused on turning boys into godly men. Our firm conviction is that this can only be done by allowing a boy the opportunity to be mentored by Christian men. All direct contact positions, other than in the Woodlands Trail unit, are filled by men.

7. Volunteer-Driven

Trail Life USA is operated and supported by volunteers at every level. Troop leaders utilize levels of support through Area and Regional volunteer committees. By design, Home Office staff will be kept to a minimum. This is not only good stewardship, it also allows the members to fully invest their passion, skill, and expertise.

8. Program Flexibility

The flexibility principle behind our program elements allows local Troops to adapt the program to fit the needs and teachings of their Charter Organization. Mission-critical and foundational program elements are unyielding and mandatory, but there is sufficient flexibility to fit the needs, culture, and faith traditions of the local Troop and Charter Organization.



9. Shared Leadership

Since the founding of the organization by a wide coalition of leaders in Louisville, Kentucky in June of 2013, Trail Life USA has endeavored to operate under the principle of shared leadership. We appreciate the need for strong leadership at every level but recognize that the greatest strength comes when leaders serve through equipping and releasing others to lead along with them. Therefore, leaders throughout the ministry seek to intentionally involve others in decision-making and to collaboratively share influence.

10. Utilization of Patrol Method

In order to deliver on our promise of "Leadership," youth should be given every opportunity appropriate to their age and development to lead others. We encourage Troops to use the Patrol Method, which puts leadership squarely in the hands of patrols of Trailmen. While adults can and should advise, counsel, make suggestions, and provide oversight to youth leaders, beginning at the Navigator level and fully-implemented at the Adventurer level youth should be planning, organizing, making decisions, and leading in the Troop.

11. Character-Focused, Not Awards-Focused

Although boys in Trail Life USA can experience a robust and challenging awards program, we are more concerned with building character. The focus should always be on building character over merely earning awards.

12. Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is characterized by humility and a willingness to work alongside others and not just "boss" people around. Leading by example and sacrifice are also qualities of servant leadership.

13. Family-Oriented

Trail Life USA is boy-focused and encourages Troops to protect the male-focused emphasis in camping and adventure activities. We also recognize the family as the primary building block of society. In order to facilitate this, fathers are encouraged to participate with their sons, and Charter Organizations are encouraged to create a "family-centered" youth-enrichment experience where on one night, in one location, boys and their dads can participate in Trail Life USA, and girls and their moms can be involved with American Heritage Girls. There are many obvious strengths to this model, and those who are able to experience it will discover lasting impact and accelerated spiritual growth for every member of the family.

14. Decentralized Decision-Making

Pursuant to the Trail Life USA By-Laws, decisions regarding changes to the most important elements of the organization are made by each Charter Organization casting a vote, and not by professionals or delegates chosen by professionals. To ensure fidelity to the principles and values of Trail Life USA, any changes to the Statement of Faith, Statement of Values, or Membership Standards require an 80% acceptance vote by the Charter Organizations.

15. Debt-Averse and Member Dependent

The National Board of Directors is committed to a debt-averse and member-supported organization. Trail Life USA is self-funded with the annual operating budget derived from member fees and store sales. Generous donations are generally used to pay for one-time planned expenses or to provide initial funds for initiatives that will be subsequently sustained by fees and sales. The organization will only accept gifts from which it can clearly benefit without incurring debt from operational or other costs associated with them. This commitment ensures that the primary "customer" of the organization is the enrolled member and not a corporation.

16. Christian Worldview

Trail Life USA maintains that integration of a Christian Worldview is essential in order to accomplish its vision and mission. 'Trail Life USA's Six Essential Concepts of a Christian Worldview' are available as a Distinctive at www.TrailLifeUSA.com.

