



Expedition Catalog



A Letter From the Director

Dear Teachers, Organization Leaders, Parents, Guardians, & Participants,

Thank you for your interest in Grand Canyon Youth (GCY)! We are committed to providing the highest quality experience possible. The rivers and canyons of the Southwest provide an incredible setting for learning, adventure, and teamwork. Our unique educational approach, excellent staff, and small group size creates lasting impact for participants.

We believe educational experiences are significantly more valuable when youth are engaged in every aspect of the expedition—from the planning, implementation, and reflection. To this end, together with your group we will explore and develop an educational plan for your expedition that meets your goals. Our 3-step process of pre-trip planning, on-expedition programming, and post-trip reflection ensure a lasting impact. Every expedition includes a community science project and art or other activities as ways to engage youth deeper in the power of place.

Our staff are here to set you up for a successful experience from the logistics, fundraising, and educational aspects of the expedition. Often groups return year after year building on their previous success. We have over 27 years of experience working with a wide variety of schools and groups including youth with special needs, international students, outdoor-focused and traditional schools, scout troops and more. We have an excellent safety record and strive to make our expeditions as affordable as possible.

Our educational philosophy is to inspire curiosity. Sleep beneath a blanket of stars, break down barriers, gain confidence, overcome challenges, and so much more. Come immerse your group in a truly participatory and experiential experience. We look forward to working with you!



Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "E Wharton".

Emma Wharton, MSW
GCY Executive Director

About Grand Canyon Youth

Grand Canyon Youth is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Flagstaff, Arizona.

Our Vision: We envision a diverse and equitable world where all youth are empowered to live with purpose while discovering and caring for self, community, and the natural world.

Our Mission: GCY offers educational outdoor experiences that connect young people to the transformative power of the rivers and canyons of the Southwest.



Our Values

Connection

We explore how to connect and be in harmony with ourselves, our communities, and the natural world. We believe these connections help inspire actions that promote a sustainable, healthy world.

Adventure

We try new things, play, step out of our comfort zones, are present in the moment, and enjoy the rewards of working together as a team.

Curiosity

We are curious about ourselves, each other and our surroundings. As lifelong learners, we are open to new ideas, experiences and perspectives.

Respect

We model and encourage respect for ourselves, one another, and the natural world. We bring people from diverse backgrounds together and promote a safe space for all by committing to social justice including being anti-racist, anti-ableist and gender inclusive.

Intention

We care deeply about the youth we serve, our community, and the places we visit. Our expeditions are intentionally designed to focus on safety, quality, and meaningful, lasting impacts.

Responsibility

We take responsibility for understanding how our actions impact ourselves, others, and the natural world. We show our commitment through service and stewardship.

Our Educational Philosophy



Our educational philosophy is to inspire curiosity and wonder

We believe learning is deeper and more impactful when youth have ownership in the planning process. To carry this out, youth are invited to work with teachers and group leaders to develop an educational theme or inquiry focus for their expedition. Groups are encouraged to plan and implement a group service project and fundraiser before their expedition. We believe this investment in education, service, and fundraising sets Grand Canyon Youth apart in program quality and overall participant experience.

Learning on expedition is driven by student interest and supported by teachers and GCY Field Staff. Field Staff will complement learning with place-based learning, hikes, and river skill development. Youth will learn skills like cooking, leave no trace, and backcountry safety. Every GCY expedition is focused on:

Sense of Place

Personal Growth

Community + Connection

Adventure

Environmental Stewardship

A Sense of Place



GCY emphasizes the place-based learning model. Field Staff plan interpretive stops, hikes, and talks that emphasize the ecology, geology, ancient and modern human history, and current events relating to each destination and expedition's specific goals. Each expedition is unique, and participants have the chance to experience authentic learning in nature.



Explore Through Art



GCY Field Staff love to offer art on expeditions! We have found integrating art, science, place, and community is a powerful combination in nature.



Community Science



Most overnight GCY expeditions include a community science research component that is facilitated by Field Staff or partner scientists.



Adventure

Experiencing wild places, stepping outside of comfort zones, free play, and just having FUN are critical components to any GCY expedition!



Field Staff

"I love giving youth the opportunity to experience something new and push their comfort zone, from something as special as sleeping under the stars for the first time, to the thrill of swimming a rapid. I also love getting to show youth that it's ok to act goofy, have fun, learn, and explore in a way that you seldom can in the front country."

- Wade, GCY Alumni & Field Staff



GCY Field Staff are talented boaters, inspiring educators, positive role models, and mentors for participants. All of our guides have relevant river experience, Wilderness First Responder certifications, CPR certifications, and Backcountry Food Handlers licenses. They are incredibly fun to be around and add so much value to the connections made by participants on expeditions. Many of our guides are also alumni of GCY expeditions!

A 3-Part Education Framework

Grand Canyon Youth uses a 3-part education framework to design engaging educational expeditions. Trip Coordinators work with GCY staff before, during, and after expeditions to prepare high-quality, meaningful curriculum that youth can transfer back to their home lives.

1 - Pre-Expedition

After establishing expedition logistics, Trip Coordinators work with GCY to build a Curriculum Plan for all three parts of the expedition. Involving youth in planning their expedition is recommended, and leads to greater buy-in, better preparation, and a stronger, more meaningful expedition.

2 - On Expedition

Trip Coordinators work with GCY Field Staff to carry out activities and accomplish goals outlined in the Curriculum Plan. Each expedition will also include interpretive stops, hikes, camps, teachable moments, and activities that inspire curiosity complementing the expeditions goals.

3 - Post-Expedition

Connecting the expedition experience back to participants' everyday lives is incredibly important and allows participants to continue to build meaning from their experience. Trip Coordinators will plan post-expedition opportunities to strengthen transference for all participants.

Expedition Destinations

Colorado River

Diamond Down, 4 Days

Verde River

Clarkdale Section, 1 Day

San Juan River

Upper San Juan, 4 Days

Lower San Juan, 5 to 7 Days

Full San Juan, 7 or 8 Days



Diamond Down

Colorado River
Diamond Creek to Pearce Ferry

4 Days
54 River Miles

Class III Whitewater
Experience Grand Canyon

Run exciting rapids, hike to spring-fed waterfalls, and debate resource management on the Colorado River! This 4-day expedition allows groups to access Grand Canyon by river – a truly magical experience. Travel the Diamond Down section on a journey through the last rapids and side-canyons of Grand Canyon, feeling the entire system change as it reaches the flat-water of Lake Mead, the reservoir created by the Hoover Dam. Your group will travel on oar-powered rafts and paddle boats, with a motor boat for gear support.



Grand Canyon is the homelands of the Nucu (Ute), Pueblos, Diné (Navajo), Hopitutskwa (Hopi), Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute), Havasu Baaja (Havasupai), Kvav-Kapai (Hualapai), Pipa Aha Macav (Mojave), and Nuwuwu (Chemehuevi) peoples

Upper San Juan

San Juan River
Sand Island to Mexican Hat

4 Days
27 River Miles

Class II Whitewater
Travel an ancient landscape

Travel through the heart of Ancestral Puebloan culture on this incredible stretch of the San Juan, a major tributary to the Colorado River! Hike up magical side canyons to learn about culturally important archaeological sites, including petroglyphs and ancient ruins. You will pass through incredible geological formations, like Comb Ridge, as you transition from open plains full of cottonwood trees into the deep and beautiful San Juan Canyon.



The San Juan River is the homelands of the Nucu (Ute), Pueblos, Diné (Navajo), Hopitutskwa (Hopi), and Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute) peoples

Lower San Juan

San Juan River
Mexican Hat to Clay Hills Crossing

5 to 7 Days
56 River Miles

Class III Whitewater
Travel San Juan Canyon

The lower section of the San Juan offers a truly immersive nature experience. Beginning near Goosenecks State Park, this remote stretch of river takes you through the heart of the San Juan Canyon, with side canyons to explore and exciting whitewater to paddle! You will also have access to incredible hikes that take you through geological layers and help you get up close and personal to the area's history.



The San Juan River is the homelands of the Nucu (Ute), Pueblos, Diné (Navajo), Hopitutskwa (Hopi), and Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute) peoples

Full San Juan

San Juan River
Sand Island to Clay Hills Crossing

7 or 8 Days
83 River Miles

Class III Whitewater
Immerse in river life

Enjoy the magic of both the upper and lower sections with a Full San Juan expedition! You will travel 83 miles on the river, experiencing all of the archaeological sites, hikes, canyon views, and natural adventures that the San Juan has to offer. Studies show that the longer youth are out in nature, the more significant the impact. So what are you waiting for?



The San Juan River is the homelands of the Nucu (Ute), Pueblos, Diné (Navajo), Hopitutskwa (Hopi), and Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute) peoples

Notes from Past Participants

"After returning home, I realized that the everyday things I do have such an impact on the world and its ecosystems. I now think of my actions as part of a larger scale, thanks to the experience and the amazing guides and scientists on the trip."

- Leo, GCY Participant

"Every gcy trip is a lesson in teamwork. It is a lesson in accepting people's differences and point of views. It is a lesson in working together when wind is blowing over tents and wreaking havoc. I cannot even innumerate the things I have learned on this expeditions that I will cherish forever."

- Camilla, GCY Participant & Volunteer

"My GCY trip made me feel more confident in myself and my ability to connect with other people and a place. Today I try to remain in the positive mindset that I found in the Grand Canyon. I feel more relaxed now than I have in a long time. I try to remind myself that it is okay to be uncomfortable sometimes."

- Anonymous, GCY Participant

"The river taught me so many lessons, and continues to reveal so much more to me. My confidence in all aspects of my life and passion for the outdoors would not be what it is without my GCY experience."

- Maddie, GCY Participant & Field Staff

Notes from Teachers

"I am blown away every trip at the transformations that are made and the passions that are sparked. This trip is so important to show students how tangible science can be and how free their spirits can feel even when working hard, which is something they never get in their school environment."

- Taylor, GCY Trip Coordinator

"Having used other guides in the past for river trips, it really is exceptional what [GCY] offers. The attention to all of the details, the focus on safety, plus the interaction with the students/families and the educational component you all provide creates such a positive experience. The students in my van on the way home were all raving about their experience."

- Jim, GCY Trip Coordinator

"I saw many new friendships taking place, and just a general opening of all the youths towards each other in a way that has absolutely not taken place this year in the classroom. They all left the trip crying and hugging each other, even though we will all be together Monday."

- Lauren, GCY Trip Coordinator

For more information, and to see Frequently Asked Questions for teachers and group leaders, visit the GCY website at:

www.gcyouth.org/group-school

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I sign my group up?

If you think a GCY expedition might be right for your group, head to our [Inquire](#) tab and complete the GCY Expedition Planning Form. This will help our Expedition Team start to get to know your group, what you're interested in, and what destination might be the best fit. Planning a quality expedition typically takes about four-six months. Please take this into consideration when requesting dates.

Which destination should I choose for my group?

Every destination is unique and easily customizable to the needs of your group. The Southwest is an incredible classroom! Taking into consideration goals for your group, age and experience, financial capacity, travel logistics, and other factors, GCY's Expedition Team will work with you to help you decide which destination is the best fit for your group.

How much do expeditions cost?

The price of GCY expeditions varies with destination, group size, and additional logistical support needed. We do our very best to ensure that price is not a barrier to participation. Through fundraising efforts, GCY is able to subsidize over 60% of all expedition costs. Because of this, we are able to keep our expeditions at about one third to half of the price of similar commercial operations. Longer expeditions, small group sizes, and transportation or camping support will all impact the overall price of the expedition.

Are there Financial Aid scholarships available? How does my group qualify for Financial Aid?

GCY may have Financial Aid funds available to support your group. If you think your group will need access to funding sources in addition to family capacity and youth fundraising, reach out to our Expedition Team to discuss this possibility.

How many adult chaperones should we bring?

We want you to bring enough adult chaperones to feel comfortable managing your group. Typically, groups bring 2 to 4 adults (Trip Coordinators), depending on the size of their group. Two trip coordinators per expedition may participate at no cost. Any additional adults will be charged the participant price. Keep in mind that you will have GCY guides along as well, and too many adults on an expedition may have negative impacts on a group's experiences.

Can parents come along?

We strongly recommend parents **do not** come on expeditions with their children. Youth have drastically different experiences when they are away from their parents – they push comfort zones, create deeper bonds with peers, develop independence, and learn more about themselves. If a group needs to send parent volunteers with their expedition, we recommend that parents and children go in separate groups.

More Frequently Asked Questions on the next page

Frequently Asked Questions

What will the sleeping arrangements look like?

Overnight expeditions will typically sleep at a different camp each night. GCY provides each participant and adult chaperone with a 'sleep kit', which includes a sleeping bag, sleeping pad, tarp, and sometimes a sheet. While participants are encouraged to sleep out under the starry night sky, we also provide tents in case of weather or other group considerations.

Because we are committed to providing a supportive environment for all our participants, our camp boundaries and sleeping arrangements are not always based on binary gender decisions. Additionally, environmental or logistical factors out of our control may impact the camping arrangements we can provide. We know each group and camp will be different, so our Field Staff will work with you to respect and accommodate the needs of every individual.

Does GCY have a set curriculum?

GCY does not have a set curriculum, or set of activities that happen on every expedition. Each group determines their own goals, and works with GCY to develop an expedition that will help them reach those goals. Group Leaders & Teachers are expected to bring 1-3 activities that they would like to lead. GCY guides will lead teambuilding activities, games, interpretive talks, art projects, hikes, and other activities that complement each group's goals. Before the expedition, GCY will help you develop activities, discussions, and other structures to meet educational goals, and succeed in all of the Pre-Trip Requirements. Teachers, if you are considering bringing your class on expedition, finding activities that connect to curriculum standards is a great way to bring a different breadth and depth to your group's learning.

What are the Pre-Trip Requirements?

Youth are more invested in an experience if they have worked for it and earned it themselves. To achieve this, participants are required to complete three Pre-Trip Requirements: Educational, Service, and Youth Earnings Components. Learning about their destination before participating helps students better connect to place; doing service projects in home communities helps prepare youth to form a cohesive community in the outdoors; and earning a portion of the trip cost makes youth feel financially invested. GCY can provide guidance and resources to help Trip Coordinators develop, complete, and succeed in all of these requirements.

What if there is an emergency?

Most emergencies can be prevented by encouraging everyone to take care of themselves and adhering to safety guidelines. GCY guides are certified Wilderness First Responders, and travel with a satellite phone and first-aid materials. Guides will ask you to help youth listen to and follow all safety instructions. If there is an incident, GCY office staff will work with guides to organize any needed support and contact parents. If you are nervous about any aspect of the expedition, please contact us for more information.

Is there anything else I should know?

We have supported hundreds of group leaders/teachers through the process and we are here to support you too! While our website is full of valuable information, you can always reach out to us with any questions you have. Planning an expedition for your group does not have to be overwhelming, and we cannot wait to help!

Plan Your Adventure Today

expeditions@gcyouth.org

928.773.7921

www.gcyouth.org

