



National Leadership Conference 2026 Participant Handbook

My own self, at my very best, all the time



Dear Conference Participant,

We're excited to welcome you to the 2026 National Leadership Conference! The American Youth Foundation has been operating since 1925 and now serves more than 6,000 young people like you each year.

By enrolling in this conference, you have chosen to develop yourself and build leadership skills in a supportive and encouraging environment. High school and college student leaders from across the nation will join you this summer at Camp Miniwanca in Michigan.

When you leave NLC, you depart with new skills and tools, an appreciation for your own inherent strengths and abilities, and new friendships that will last a lifetime.

This handbook, the [NLC Packing List](#), and the online participant forms contain all the information you need to prepare for the National Leadership Conference. Please review this handbook and complete all forms available in [CampBrain](#) as soon as possible.

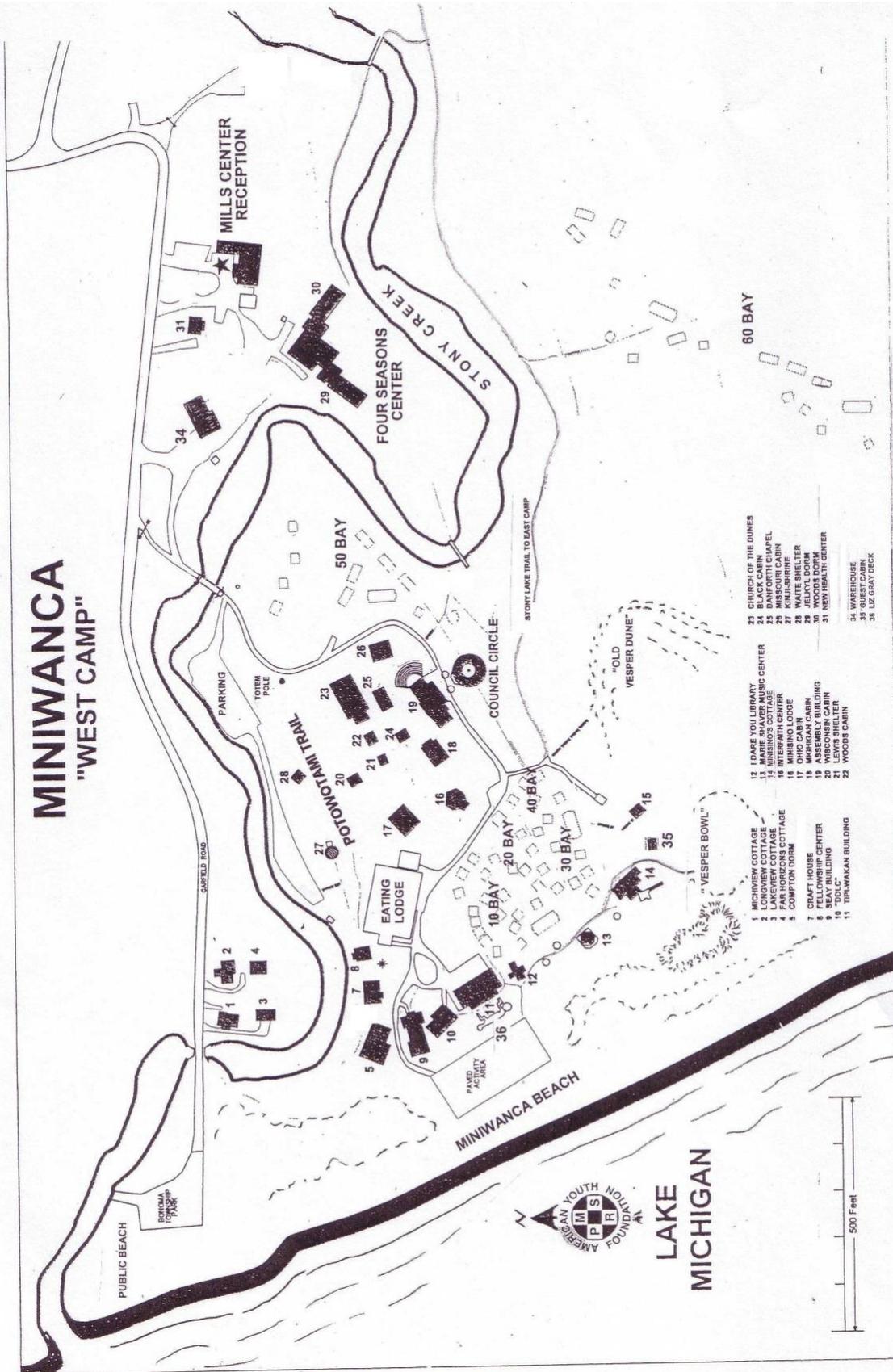
You created your [CampBrain](#) account when you registered for NLC. You will log in to [CampBrain](#) when to make online payments, access health forms, or upload additional information to complete your registration.

If you have any questions, please call or email the NLC Directors at nlc@ayf.com or 231-861-2262.

We look forward to seeing you this summer!

Sincerely,
Michael Harter, Erin O'Brien, and Beth Wilson
National Leadership Conference Director Team

MINIWANCA "WEST CAMP"



- 1 DARE YOU LIBRARY
- 2 MARIE SHAYER MUSIC CENTER
- 3 MINNISO'S COTTAGE
- 4 MINNISO'S COTTAGE
- 5 MINNISO'S COTTAGE
- 6 MINNISO'S COTTAGE
- 7 OHIO CABIN
- 8 MICHIGAN CABIN
- 9 MICHIGAN CABIN
- 10 MICHIGAN CABIN
- 11 WISCONSIN CABIN
- 12 WOODS CABIN
- 13 LEWIS SHELTER
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- 23 CHURCH OF THE DUNES
- 24 BLACK CABIN
- 25 DANFORTH CHAPEL
- 26 DANFORTH CHAPEL
- 27 KINJ-SHRINE
- 28 WHITE SHELTER
- 29 JELLY DOOR
- 30 JELLY DOOR
- 31 NEW HEALTH CENTER
- 32 NEW HEALTH CENTER
- 33 NEW HEALTH CENTER
- 34 WAREHOUSE
- 35 GUEST CABIN
- 36 LIZ GRAY DECK



LAKE
MICHIGAN

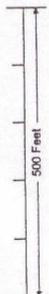


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American Youth Foundation Vision, Mission, and Values

Our Vision

Inspired people unleashing their best in the world

Our Mission

The American Youth Foundation dares people to discover and celebrate the very best in themselves and others, inspires them to explore diverse perspectives and complex challenges, and emboldens them to live courageously, engaging their full capacity.

Our Values

We believe how we act and interact reflects who we are as a community. In practice, at the AYF we value...

Investing in Youth

Empowering youth is the core of our mission. We aim to offer equitable access to outdoor, experiential adventures. We seek to amplify youth voices as they recognize their own agency, articulate their ideas, and act with bold purpose throughout their lives.

Stewarding the Environment

Our programs foster a sense of respect and reverence for the natural world. We commit to using only what we need in order to minimize our impact on the planet. We practice environmental stewardship, conserving resources for future generations and offering the experience of connecting deeply with the natural world.

Enkindling Inner Sparks

Each person has inherent strengths and passions that, when ignited, form the foundation of best self and a balanced life. We challenge people to be brave, think creatively, develop wholehearted social connections, and explore their values and beliefs.

Belonging in Community

Our communities are joy-filled, optimistic, hopeful places where each person is encouraged to explore through play and express their own authentic spirit. We aspire to create spaces where all people are included and feel a sense of belonging. In these thriving program communities, diverse perspectives provide a foundation to build greater understanding and foster equity.

Growing Together

Teamwork and collaboration provide essential tools for overcoming challenges. We believe powerful growth happens when we live in community, set boundaries, and take healthy risks. To adventure daringly with the support of others is an opportunity to put our best selves into action.

Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

The American Youth Foundation invites all people to be their own best selves. We seek to create communities where no one is excluded because of who they are. We enthusiastically welcome staff and participants with diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and identities that align with our mission and values. The AYF continually assesses our practices and policies through cultural awareness and inclusivity. Our community understands that we are lifelong learners.

We value each person's right to fully experience our programs free from prejudice and harassment based on race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or other aspects of their identity. We honor and welcome participants and staff of all gender identities, including transgender and [gender-expansive individuals](#).

We believe diversity in our communities enriches the program experience for all, provided everyone feels safe to be their authentic self. We welcome the expression of different ideas and perspectives that do not infringe on others' right to authentically exist.

All reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate participants with different experiences, conditions, strengths, and abilities. Our goal is to include as many participants as possible; however, we are limited in what we can provide in terms of medical care and our current physical sites. We partner with families in a thorough [medical review process](#) that looks at both physical and mental, emotional health to determine if we can safely serve their participant.

DEIB Values

The AYF is home to all who dare to live in intentionally inclusive community: who see diversity as necessary for growth, equity as a practice to solving historical systemic problems, and inclusion as a step toward creating a vibrant and thriving space where all can belong.

The American Youth Foundation values...

- **Embracing diversity** as the active, lifelong practice of welcoming and celebrating the uniqueness of all individuals. There is inherent value and dignity in every human life. The AYF community intentionally seeks to invite people who hold a broad range of identities and backgrounds as we build new communities each year.
- **Equity** as the distribution of resources to individuals according to their specific needs. The AYF will actively pursue equity for all in ways that honor individual needs while addressing systematic disadvantages that limit access to our programs. We will support community members by continuously reviewing our approach to programming and the experiences we offer.

- **Inclusion** as intentionally valuing all lived experiences. Inclusive communities allow everyone to be their genuine, best selves. We expect each person in our communities to be open to exploring differences, as long as those differences honor others' right to belong.
- **Belonging** as the genuine feeling of being mutually welcomed, accepted, respected, valued, and empowered. Through the AYF's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we will work together to create experiences where everyone is invited to be their true, authentic, best selves.

The AYF and the National Leadership Conference

For over 100 years, the American Youth Foundation has developed young leaders and the adults and institutions that serve them. Collectively, participants and staff represent every state and several countries, as well as a variety of economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. AYF is a nonprofit youth development organization with locations in Shelby, Michigan; Center Tuftonboro, New Hampshire; and St. Louis, Missouri.

NLC Staff

Capable, tireless, and committed to serving youth, NLC staff are volunteers who are personally invested in the AYF mission and philosophy and provide the highest quality programming. They represent a variety of ages and professions, including as high school and college educators, business professionals, social and human services workers, and artists. Many staff members are graduates of the program, who also attend thorough staff training prior to the eight-day conference to provide a quality experience.

NLC Participants

The NLC community is diverse in background, experiences, and identities, but we all share a common bond – the aptitude and motivation for leadership and positive youth development.

For eight days, we will build an intentional community focused on discovering new lessons about ourselves and learning new ways to create communities based on leadership, personal commitment, respect, and affirmation. NLC provides a unique opportunity for individuals to experience leadership training in an intentional community, then take this new knowledge to their schools and communities.

Young people come to NLC through several ways:

- National Leadership Award recipients who are selected to receive the I Dare You! Scholarship
- Corporations, organizations or individuals can sponsor individuals, groups or teams of students
- Participants who pay their own tuition
- Participants who apply for financial aid

NLC Location

The National Leadership Conference takes place at Camp Miniwanca, one of two program centers operated by the American Youth Foundation.

Located in Shelby, Michigan, Miniwanca boasts 360 acres of forested dunes along one mile of Lake Michigan beachfront. Meandering trails, a variety of wildlife, as well as an inland lake and shallow creek, complement this beautiful landscape. This natural setting away from busy towns and roads sets up Miniwanca as a place to reconnect with yourself.

There is also unique architecture at Miniwanca, most notably a large bonfire and performance circle made by stonemasons in the early 1930s called the Fire Circle. Various program buildings also dot the landscape providing an ideal setting for learning and growth. Miniwanca is a rustic camp facility and provides everything a person needs to truly develop into their best self.

NLC Outcomes and Objectives

Discovering and Developing Your Own, Best Self

AYF program days are filled with new experiences designed to encourage participants to develop a deeper understanding of who they are and what they are capable of achieving – their own, best self. They will grow in confidence as they learn to celebrate their unique sense of self, while taking advantage of opportunities to put their best self into action.

Participants will:

- Value themselves as unique, capable individuals.
- Grow in self-confidence as they discover more about their capacities.
- Explore how their values and “Best Self” influence their decision-making.
- Recognize their agency, articulate their ideas, and act with purpose.

Growing Through the Four Folds

AYF’s Four Folds is a signature framework through which participants assess their strengths and areas of growth through four complimentary facets of life (mental, physical, social, and reverential). Our program days provide diverse activities in each “fold” creating opportunities for young people to stretch their minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits.

Participants will:

- Reflect on the mental, social, physical, and reverential different facets of their life, identifying strengths and areas for exploration and growth.
- Practice developing clearly defined goals and taking healthy risks
- Gain resilience as they work through the challenges of trying new things
- Identify how each day includes opportunities in all four folds.

Working Together to Build Community

When youth come together to create AYF program communities, they gain a greater understanding of their impact on the people around them. They develop the skills for creating and maintaining healthy friendships and gain a greater understanding of their role and value within a group. Participants create shared expectations for how they will have fun and work together successfully, with safety and kindness at the core. Programs provide opportunities to strengthen relationships, practice acting with integrity in navigating challenges, and share in the responsibility of caring for a larger community.

Participants will:

- Develop skills important to creating and maintaining healthy friendships

- Practice effectively working within a group to achieve a common goal
- Learn positive leadership skills and show support for others
- Identify their role in creating a sense of belonging within community

Making a Positive Difference in the World

In AYF programs, participants are called to reflect on their actions and impact —both positive and negative - gaining a greater understanding of the positive difference they can make for others. Staff members guide in making connections between program and home, identifying how their actions each day have the power to make a positive difference in their communities and the world around them.

Participants will:

- Recognize how their actions and interactions impact others
- Take responsibility to act for the good of others and for a sustainable environment.
- Make connections between lessons learned in program and how they apply to home.
- Develop a greater understanding of how everyday actions have the power to make a positive difference in their communities and the world around them.

NLC Objectives Over Four Years

The National Leadership Conference is intentionally designed as a progressive four-year program that culminates with a final class presentation. Each year, participants find value even if they cannot return the following year. Upon completion their fourth year, participants will:

- Be able to facilitate discussion among their peers.
- Effectively present in front of a group.
- Lead a group through a healthy decision-making process to accomplish a task.
- Expand their ability to take effective roles in groups.
- Develop relationships with peers who have diverse opinions and backgrounds.
- Understand avenues and methods available to them to create positive, sustainable change.
- Be able to create and develop an inclusive community.
- Internalize values of best self, balanced living, service to community, respect, diversity, and sustainable environment.

Life at NLC

A Typical Day at NLC

The National Leadership Conference follows the AYF's core curriculum, while taking advantage of the uniqueness of the site and staff. A typical day at NLC looks like:

Morning

- Wake up around 7 a.m.
- Personal and cabin cleanup
- Optional Polar Bear swim
- Call to Community: Morning reflection and journal writing
- Breakfast
- Leadership development session

Afternoon

- Personal time
- Lunch
- Community activities
- Interest workshops
- Community forums

Evening

- Personal time
- Dinner
- Night's Doings: Fun large or small community activities
- Evening Reflections
- Cabin time
- Lights out around 10:30 p.m.

Cabin Living

At Miniwanca, each cabin has bunk beds and can accommodate up to eight people. The cabins are rustic: there is no electricity, windows are screened, and restrooms and showers are available in centralized bathroom facilities nearby. Expect to step out of your normal routine and adopt a simpler lifestyle for the duration of the conference.

Cabin living arrangements are an opportunity to make connections, and we intentionally mix participants from different backgrounds to help build our community. Only those assigned to a cabin are allowed to ever be in that cabin or cabin area.

Weather in Michigan

It is not unusual for the weather to vary during the week of the conference. At Miniwanca, it is usually warm during the day (75 to 95 degrees F), cool in the evenings (50 to 60 degrees F) and chilly at night (40 to 60 degrees F). Please pay close attention to all items on the [NLC Packing List](#), as they will help you prepare for outdoor living in a wide variety of conditions.

Choose your Challenge

All activities follow the "challenge by choice" or "choose your challenge" philosophy. The AYF expects full participation in all conference activities, but you are empowered to determine how you participate. NLC staff are trained to help participants assess their abilities. All participants must adhere to NLC policies.

Behavior Expectations

To create a healthy, respectful, inclusive, and supportive community, we challenge you to see and expect the best in yourself and others. Your conference community needs your immediate

and constant commitment, trust, and support for living and learning. The community expects you to value, be inclusive, and be accepting of others. We are confident if you maintain a high standard for yourself and follow the behavior guidelines in this handbook, you will have an outstanding conference experience.

NLC Community Contract

The American Youth Foundation's National Leadership Conference at Miniwanca will challenge you to be your best. This is an opportunity to explore and grow mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually. Everyone is expected to abide by the policies below and expectations outlined in the NLC Community Contract. All participants (and their parent or guardian if younger than 18) must sign this [contract via CampBrain](#) or in-person at registration before conference begins.

NLC Policies and Procedures

Alcohol, Tobacco, Cannabis, and Illegal Drugs

We prohibit all forms of tobacco, alcoholic, cannabis, and illegal drugs for reasons of safety, insurance, state laws, courtesy, and concern for health. **Violations will result in dismissal, and the participant will be sent home at their expense or their family's expense.** Our Dismissal Policy is also outlined in this handbook.

Cell Phones

Disconnecting from technology and being fully connected and present in community and nature is a crucial element of NLC. on being in community and in nature. **Smartphones, tablets, handheld video games, smartwatches, e-readers, or any other Internet-connected devices cannot be used during conference programming.**

Participants will check their smartphones or other Internet-connected devices into safekeeping during registration. If a phone call outside of these times is necessary, a staff member can make arrangements for that call.

Email/Internet

Email or Internet access is not available to conference participants.

In Case of Emergency

In case of an emergency at home, families may call **231-861-2262, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. ET.** If there is no answer or if you call during non-business hours, an automated message will tell you how to activate the emergency paging system. Please leave a message, stating the name of the participant, the nature of the emergency, and information for the person the participant should contact if necessary. Please be aware that participants in program are not centrally located; however, we will reach them as soon as possible.

Immunization

The American Youth Foundation requires Miniwanca participants are immunized in accordance with the state of Michigan camp licensing requirements. If during a program there is an

outbreak of a communicable disease for which a participant is not immunized, families are responsible for immediately removing their participant from program until AYF determines it is safe for them to return.

Lost Items after Conference

All clothing and personal items are clearly labeled with the participant's name. Personal items left at conference will be forwarded via UPS at the owner's expense if the owner's name is identifiable. Unclaimed or unmarked items will be donated to a local charity.

Miniwanca is located on sand dunes, making it hard to locate items lost in the sand. Please leave any jewelry, irreplaceable keepsakes, and other expensive items at home. **AYF is not responsible for valuables left in cabins and common areas.**

Luggage

You will need enough clothing for the entire conference since there is no laundry service; however, bring essentials only as cabin space is shared with others. [Please carefully review the NLC Packing List.](#)

If you are traveling on any AYF Transportation, please bring only one suitcase or duffel bag, a sleeping bag and pillow, and a school-size backpack.

Additional or heavy luggage that cannot be travel with the participant should be shipped prepaid at least two weeks in advance. We suggest your shipments be insured. You may also arrange to have luggage shipped home via UPS/COD approximately one week after the close of the conference.

AYF is not responsible for luggage lost en route to and from the conference; we will do our best to help you locate anything misplaced during the conference.

Mail

Mail is the best way to maintain contact with family and friends. Participants are encouraged to bring paper, envelopes, postcards, and stamps to send messages home.

Meals/Food

We provide three well-rounded, nutritious meals per day. Additionally, there will always be a snack station located in the dining hall to be used by participants who need a little something more for the day. **Because we have participants and staff with severe food allergies, outside food, candy, and gum are not allowed at Miniwanca.**

Miniwanca's menu does not include tree nuts, and our kitchens do not serve food containing peanuts, peanut butter, or peanut oil in their ingredients. Note that some snacks and desserts we serve may contain trace amounts of peanuts or they may have been manufactured in a facility that processes peanuts. Vegetarian, dairy-free, and gluten-free options are available at each meal.

Please disclose any dietary needs in your registration information so we can determine if the Miniwanca Food Program can meet your needs.

Medication

All medications, **including over the counter and vitamins**, must be turned into the Health Team at check in. No medication of any kind is allowed in the cabins or living spaces. Please review our [Health Policies](#) for more information.

Personal Electronics

Smartphones, tablets, e-readers, music devices, video games, blow dryers, or curling irons are not needed during the conference. If you are traveling with any electronic devices, they should be checked into Safekeeping during registration for the duration of the conference. You will be able to check them out for programming purposes.

Pets

Pets are not allowed on our site.

Photographs

The AYF will document the entirety of the conference program with photographs and videos. These items will be available at the end of NLC through a password-protected SmugMug gallery.

These photos will be used for AYF marketing, educational, or grant reporting. If you or family would prefer your image not be used in marketing materials, please indicate your preference on the Permission to Release Information Form during the registration process.

Participants are allowed to bring disposable cameras or digital cameras (not Internet-connected) for personal use, but the AYF is not responsible for any damage to personal cameras.

Remaining on Site

Participants must remain on the site for the duration of the conference unless you are part of an authorized activity in the company of conference staff. **Failure to abide by this rule will result in dismissal from the conference.**

Safekeeping of Valuables

Items such as money, plane tickets, passports, car keys, smartphones and other personal electronics, and jewelry will be checked in upon arrival and placed in safekeeping. Your valuables will be locked and secured in safekeeping in the office. When you wish to retrieve items, you may retrieve such items from safekeeping during designated times and return them to safekeeping when you are finished. **AYF is not responsible for items left in cabins and common areas.**

Safety/Security

You will be given a nametag bolo during registration. Bolos must be always worn, so we know everyone on our site is a welcome, invited individual. Please seek out a staff member if you see anyone without this item on their person.

Spending Money

There is very little need for money while at NLC. Optional items may be purchased during conference, including a class t-shirt (\$15 to \$25).

Telephone Calls During Conference

As already stated, we do not allow use of cell phones and other personal electronic devices during the conference program. **We ask that all cell phones be turned into safekeeping at registration because they are a distraction and unnecessary during program.** We encourage all participants to “unplug” to stay present in the community and make face to face connections with others at the National Leadership Conference. Most participants find that living in community without the distractions of technology is a refreshing and empowering experience.

Vehicles

If you drive to the conference, you **must** register your car during check-in and turn in your car keys for safekeeping until the end of conference. You cannot use your vehicle during conference.

Visitors

We ask that participants have no visitors during the conference.

What to Bring with You

Please carefully review the [NLC Packing List](#) for a complete list of all required clothing and equipment. We also encourage you to bring other things from your cultural and religious traditions, such as music or books, to be used in programming. We encourage you to bring any items, games, stories, or musical instruments to showcase your talents and interests.

What to Leave at Home

Pocket knives, hunting knives, hatchets, axes, lighters, matches, candles, or fireworks are not allowed at Miniwanca. **Participants and staff may not bring weapons of any kind, drugs or drug paraphernalia, alcohol, tobacco products, vapes or vape materials to Miniwanca.**

Possession of any of these items is grounds for immediate dismissal. Please see [the NLC Packing List](#) for a list of all prohibited items.

Health & Wellness at NLC

The health and safety of AYF participants and staff is our highest priority. The American Youth Foundation relies on our partnerships with participant families to ensure the well-being of our communities each summer. **For the most up-to-date information, please consult our [Health & Wellness Policies online](#).**

To provide the best care for each participant, the Health History Form must have accurate and current information on their physical and mental health.

Miniwanca maintains a modern Health Center with a registered nurse and assistant health officers in residence, as well as an advising physician. All AYF staff are trained in CPR and first aid.

The registered nurse assists with medical needs onsite and in the backcountry. Under the guidance of the camp medical advisor (a local physician near each site), the AYF evaluates health problems and injuries at the Health Center. If necessary, they use telehealth, local urgent care, and local hospitals for outside medical care.

If a participant requires treatment from an outside health care provider, families are notified as soon as possible. They are also notified if their participant spends the night in the Health Center.

A doctor is on call for consultation and emergencies. Hospital facilities are available nearby. Our Health Center staff follows the standards of the American Camping Association and the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services.

Medication at NLC

Families must list all prescription medication and over-the-counter medications, including vitamins and supplements, on the Health History Form and must give all medication to the Health Team on Opening Day.

NLC participants should bring all medications in their original bottle, labeled with participant name. Prescription medications should be brought in their original prescription packaging with original prescription labels, including participant name, date of birth, and medication dosage and administration instructions. **The Health Team will not administer any prescription medications without this information from the pharmacist.**

For the safety of all, participants are not allowed to keep any prescription or over-the-counter medication, even as-needed medication, with their personal belongings while at NLC.

The Health Team secures all medication in the Health Center and administers it at mealtimes and before bed each day unless otherwise noted on the Health History form.

Families should not send common medications like Benadryl, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen with their participant, as AYF Health Centers are well-stocked with these items. We also strongly discourage sending vitamins, as all meals provide plenty of nutritious food.

Illness Prevention

Please pay attention to how participants are feeling in the 7 to 10 days prior to NLC, and if they spike a temperature or are diagnosed with an illness, please contact and inform the Miniwanca Health Team.

If a participant is unwell in the 24 hours before NLC, please do not travel to Miniwanca. Call the Miniwanca Health Team for guidance and next steps. We thank you for helping keep illness out of our NLC community!

Participant Insurance

The Health History Form must contain family health plan information and **a copy of the family's insurance card (front and back) must be [uploaded to CampBrain](#)**. If necessary, family insurance information will be given to the healthcare provider. Full payment is the responsibility of the participant and their family. If the family does not have insurance, the family will be billed directly by the hospital or provider.

Release Policy

In the event of an injury or illness during the conference requiring the departure of a participant, the Health Officer and/or Conference Director will contact the family to obtain written permission and to make travel arrangements for departure from the site. Families are responsible for all travel costs. If a participant is released due to injury or illness, there will be a prorated refund.

Participants younger than 18 will not be permitted to leave Miniwanca with anyone other than a parent or legal guardian unless we receive written permission from those parents or guardians. AYF policy and state law require written permission listing the names of people with whom the camper may leave on the [Travel Form available on CampBrain](#).

Dismissal Policy

The reasons for a participant's dismissal from conference generally fall into three categories:

- Behavior issues: Those behaviors that compromise the physical or emotional safety of self or others.
- Failure to abide by the Behavior Guidelines.
- Unprepared physically, mentally, socially, or emotionally for the conference.

Though we attempt to provide positive intervention, to make sure a participant can change or respond to the issues, the AYF reserves the right to dismiss and remove a participant immediately from the conference.

Expectations for conference behavior stem from the idea that a participant's actions, statements, and attitude should demonstrate respect for self, others, and the world around them. Our staff makes every effort to create an environment that helps participants understand and meet these expectations.

If a participant's actions, statements, or attitudes negatively impact the community or if the participant is physically, mentally, socially, or emotionally unprepared for the conference program, AYF staff will intervene. The conference staff and/or conference director will meet with the participant to discuss the issues, outline more appropriate behaviors, and set goals.

If the issues continue to have an impact on the participant or conference community, families will be contacted. Conference staff will inform them of the situation and ask for any suggestions they may have to improve the behavior or address the issue. Families will then talk with their participant about the situation. Families' involvement is often a key to helping a participant succeed at conference. Families will assist in setting specific goals for behavior and outline consequences. Both the participant and their families will be advised if dismissal is a possible consequence at this time.

If the issues or inappropriate behavior continues, the participant will be dismissed. Families will be contacted to make travel arrangements for their participant's immediate departure from conference. **Families are responsible for all travel costs should your participant be dismissed.**

The possession and/or use of tobacco, cannabis, alcohol, illegal drugs, or dangerous weapons are grounds for immediate dismissal. In addition, any participant who behaves in such a manner that their own safety or the physical or emotional safety of others is jeopardized will be immediately dismissed from the conference. Due to the areas listed above, there is no refund for dismissal.

NLC Travel Information

Please make sure you complete the [Travel Form on CampBrain](#) so the NLC staff knows when and how to expect your arrival. If you experience **any** change to your submitted travel plans, please call Miniwanca at 231-861-2262.

Driving to NLC

Please arrive at Miniwanca **between 1:30 and 4:00 p.m. (no earlier or later)** to provide ample time for registration.

If you are younger than 18, you must have written permission from your parent or guardian to travel to Miniwanca via car. If any participants younger than 18 accompany you, they must also have written permission from their parent or guardian on file.

If you are driving yourself to NLC, you must turn in your car keys, which will be kept in safekeeping for the duration of the program. You will not be allowed access to your car or use of your car during NLC.

If you are delayed and arrive 4:00 p.m., please follow the signs to the West Camp Parking Lot. Once your car is parked, please walk and follow the signs to registration.

Charter Bus from St. Louis

The St. Louis charter bus to Miniwanca is only available for first- and second-year participants. The AYF will email the location of the bus departure by early June.

Bus riders should arrive **no later than 5:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 13**. They will turn in all medication to AYF staff at this time.

Baggage storage on the buses is limited. Participants are allowed one suitcase/duffel bag, one small carry-on bag (such as a backpack), a sleeping bag and pillow. No footlockers, please.

Two AYF volunteers chaperone charter buses. All meals and snacks are provided; NLC participants do not need to bring additional money for the trip.

Charter Bus from Cincinnati

The Cincinnati charter bus to Miniwanca is only available for first- and second-year participants. The bus will pick up and drop off at the Finneytown Board Office, 8791 Brent Drive, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231

Bus riders should arrive **no later than 7:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 13**. They will turn in all medication to AYF staff at this time.

Baggage storage on the buses is limited. Participants are allowed one suitcase/duffel bag, one small carry-on bag (such as a backpack), a sleeping bag and pillow. No footlockers, please.

Two AYF volunteers chaperone charter buses. All meals and snacks are provided; NLC participants do not need to bring additional money for the trip.

Taking Mass Transportation to NLC

Flying to NLC

Anyone flying to NLC must fly into [Gerald R. Ford International Airport \(GRR\) in Grand Rapids, Michigan](#). **This is the only airport where the AYF offers shuttle pickup service.**

- If you arrive at the airport by 12:30 p.m., you will depart on a 1:00 p.m. shuttle.
- If you arrive at the airport between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m., you will depart on a 4:30 p.m. shuttle.

The AYF cannot guarantee your transfer to Miniwanca if you schedule a flight to arrive at the airport after 4:00 p.m.

Upon arrival at the airport, proceed to the baggage claim area, gather your luggage, and locate the AYF staff member in the baggage claim area.

Should your flight be delayed, the AYF will still provide transportation to Miniwanca. If the delay means you will arrive very late in the evening, the AYF may need to make hotel accommodations on your behalf and at your expense. The AYF cannot provide transportation late in the evening; all pickups will take place the following day.

Please contact your airline for any specific rules they have for travelers younger than 16.

Ferry Travel to NLC

The Lake Express is a car/passenger ferry that runs between Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Muskegon, Michigan. AYF Transportation will be available to meet **the 4:00 p.m. ferry only**. You must book your trip directly with the [Lake Express High-Speed Ferry online](#) or by phone at 866-914-1010.

Note: Please check the ferry policies regarding minors, as you will be responsible for providing your own chaperone.

Commercial Bus Travel to NLC (*arriving at Greyhound Terminal in Grand Rapids*)

All commercial bus riders must travel to the Greyhound Bus Terminal in Grand Rapids. **This is the only bus terminal where the AYF offers shuttle pickup service.**

- If you arrive at the bus station by 12:00 p.m., you will depart on a 1:00 p.m. shuttle.
- If you arrive at the bus station between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m., you will depart on a 4:30 p.m. shuttle.

AYF cannot guarantee your transfer to Miniwanca if you schedule an arrival to the bus station after 4:00 p.m.

Upon arrival, gather your belongings and wait for or locate the AYF staff member at the terminal.

2026 Arrival Information

Third- and fourth-year participants must arrive on **Friday, June 12, 2026.**

First- and second-year participants must arrive on **Saturday, June 13, 2026.**

Travel Method	AYF Pickup Location	Travel Date	Time participant should arrive at pickup location	Time AYF transportation departs from pickup location	Additional AYF Cost
Car <i>Miniwanca</i>	n/a	6/12/26 and 6/13/26	Arrive at camp: 1:30 to 4:00 p.m.	n/a	n/a
Charter Bus <i>St. Louis</i>	AYF will email location by early June.	6/13/2026	5:30 a.m.	6:00 a.m.	One-way: \$200 Roundtrip: \$390
Charter Bus <i>Cincinnati</i>	Finneytown Board Office, 8791 Brent Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45231	6/13/2026	7:30 a.m.	8:00 a.m.	One-way: \$200 Roundtrip: \$400
Plane <i>Grand Rapids</i>	Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GRR) Grand Rapids, MI	6/12/26 and 6/13/26	Shuttle 1: 12:30 p.m. Shuttle 2: 4:00 p.m.	Shuttle 1: 1:00 p.m. Shuttle 2: 4:30 p.m.	One-way: \$55 Roundtrip: \$100
Commercial Bus <i>Grand Rapids</i>	Greyhound Bus Co. The Rapid Central Station 250 Grandville SW Grand Rapids, MI 49503	6/12/26 and 6/13/26	Shuttle 1: 12:30 p.m. Shuttle 2: 4:00 p.m.	Shuttle 1: 1:00 p.m. Shuttle 2: 4:30 p.m.	One-way: \$55 Roundtrip: \$100
Ferry <i>Muskegon</i>	Lake Express Muskegon Terminal 1918 Lakeshore Drive Muskegon, MI 49441	6/13/26 and 6/13/26	4:00 p.m. ferry arrival	4:15 p.m.	One-way: \$30 Roundtrip: \$60

Closing Day Travel Plans

Driving from Miniwanca

Plan to depart Miniwanca between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. **Staff will not be able to supervise participants after 11:00 a.m.**

Those picking up a participant should meet them in the West Camp parking lot. Those who drove themselves to Miniwanca can retrieve their car keys from safekeeping after breakfast on Closing Day.

If you are younger than 18, you must have written permission from your parent or guardian to leave Miniwanca via car. If any participants younger than 18 accompany you, they must also have written permission from their parent or guardian on file – no exceptions.

Charter Bus (*St. Louis*)

The charter bus to St. Louis is available for all participants. Bus riders will depart Miniwanca at 10:30 a.m. ET. The AYF will email the location of the bus pickup by early June. The bus should arrive **between 6 and 7 p.m. CT.**

Baggage storage on the buses is limited. Participants are allowed one suitcase/duffel bag, one small carry-on bag (such as a backpack), a sleeping bag and pillow. No footlockers, please.

Two AYF volunteers chaperone charter buses. All meals and snacks are provided; NLC participants do not need to bring additional money for the trip.

Charter Bus (*Cincinnati*)

The charter bus to Cincinnati is available for all participants. Bus riders will depart Miniwanca at 10:30 a.m. ET. The bus will drop off at the Finneytown Board Office, 8791 Brent Drive, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231. The bus should arrive **between 5:30 and 6 p.m. CT.**

Baggage storage on the buses is limited. Participants are allowed one suitcase/duffel bag, one small carry-on bag (such as a backpack), a sleeping bag and pillow. No footlockers, please.

Two AYF volunteers chaperone charter buses. All meals and snacks are provided; NLC participants do not need to bring additional money for the trip.

Traveling by Plane

Anyone flying home must depart from [Gerald R. Ford International Airport \(GRR\) in Grand Rapids, Michigan](#) after 2:00 p.m. This is the only airport where the AYF offers shuttle drop-off service.

The AYF shuttle will depart Miniwanca around 10:30 a.m. and plans to arrive at the airport around 12:30 p.m. **The AYF cannot guarantee on-time arrival for any flight departing the airport before 2:00 p.m.**

Please contact your airline for any specific rules they have for travelers younger than 16.

Traveling by Ferry (*departing from Muskegon, MI*)

The Lake Express is a car/passenger ferry that runs between Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Muskegon, Michigan.

The AYF shuttle will provide transportation to the 10:15 a.m. ferry only. This means participants will have to leave the conference before the Closing Assembly. If staying for the Closing Assembly is important to you, please find a different method of transportation. You must book your trip directly with the [Lake Express High-Speed Ferry online](#) or by phone at 866-914-1010.

Note: Please check the ferry policies regarding minors, as you will be responsible for providing your own chaperone.

Traveling by Commercial Bus

All commercial bus riders must travel home via the Greyhound Bus Terminal in Grand Rapids after 2:30 p.m. **This is the only bus terminal where the AYF offers shuttle drop-off service.**

The AYF shuttle will depart Miniwanca around 10:30 a.m. from Miniwanca and plans to arrive at the bus terminal at 1:45 p.m. **We cannot guarantee on-time arrival for any bus departing the terminal before 2:30 p.m.**

Departure Information
June 20, 2026

Departure Method	Location where AYF will drop off participants	Arrival Time at Drop Off Location	Additional AYF Cost
Car	n/a	Depart from camp between 10:30 and 11:00 a.m.	n/a
Charter Bus <i>St. Louis</i>	AYF will email location by early June.	6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	One-way: \$200 Roundtrip: \$390
Charter Bus <i>Cincinnati</i>	Finneytown Board Office, 8791 Brent Drive, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231	5:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	One-way: \$200 Roundtrip: \$400
Plane <i>Grand Rapids</i>	Gerald R. Ford International Airport Grand Rapids, MI	The AYF shuttle will arrive at the airport around 12:30 p.m. Flights should be scheduled after 2:00 p.m.	One-way: \$55 Roundtrip: \$100
Ferry <i>Muskegon</i>	Lake Express Muskegon Terminal 1918 Lakeshore Drive Muskegon, MI 49441	10:15 a.m.	One-way: \$30 Roundtrip: \$60
Commercial Bus <i>Grand Rapids</i>	Greyhound Bus Co. The Rapid Central Station 250 Grandville SW Grand Rapids, MI 49503	AYF Transportation will arrive at the station around 1:45 p.m. Commercial bus departures should be scheduled after 2:30 p.m.	One-way: \$55 Roundtrip: \$100

Additional Resources

Please visit ayf.com to find additional resources and the most current information regarding summer 2025.

See you this summer!



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Miniwanca

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The American Youth Foundation dares people to discover and celebrate the very best in themselves and others, inspires them to explore diverse perspectives and complex challenges, and emboldens them to live courageously, engaging their full capacity.

My own self, at my very best, all the time.