



Bike House Volunteer Guide

Welcome to the Bike House. We're glad you're here. You might not know it yet, but you have nearly everything you need to help us teach people about bikes. This guide and a few days at clinics will give you the rest.

The Basics

Mission Statement

The Bike House is a community-based bicycle repair co-op in Washington, DC. Our mission is to build a place where all people can learn about, work on, and enjoy bikes. We provide free bicycle maintenance services and education through our weekend clinics, mobile bike clinic, and beginner and advanced mechanics classes.

Volunteering at the Bike House

We're all volunteers at the Bike House and believe volunteering should be easy and fun. Volunteers help at the Bike House for a lot of reasons: to learn more about bikes, to meet new people, to share with others and to make our community stronger. As a volunteer, you can expect to do all these things.

Volunteers also make the Bike House better. We're all learning how to do what we do and can always use new ideas and energy. This isn't only about bikes, but about creating an environment where people can learn more and have more fun together. We expect you to do this too.

What we do – Weekend Clinics

Our donation-based clinics are the focal point of our work. The clinics happen every Saturday from 12-3pm at Annie's Ace Hardware in Petworth (typically late Mar-Nov), as well as every Sunday from 11am-1pm at the Bloomingdale Farmer's Market during the market's season (May-Nov). People come to our clinics to:

- Ask advice and get help from our volunteers
- Fix their own bicycles
- Meet other bikers in the area
- Learn about biking in DC

Neither our guests nor our volunteers are required to have maintenance expertise. What is required is the willingness to contribute to a safe, positive learning space, which means setting a good example with personal behavior and helping others do the same. Guests come with all levels of bicycle repair skills and interest. Our goal is to match people who want to learn with people who want to share knowledge. Ideally, people who spend time learning with us will pass what they learn on to others whether as a volunteer at the Bike House or elsewhere.

How we help

Guests come to our clinics to do everything from inflating their tires to building entire bikes from scratch. Depending on what each person needs, we're happy to teach a repair, lend out tools and materials, or direct them to a local bike shop for more assistance. We generally don't encourage long-term projects at the Bike House because we have limited time and space, but if someone is really ready for a challenge, go for it. Just keep in mind that we want to make sure our guests are happy and their bikes whole by the clinic's stated closing time.

Tools and materials

We have all the basic tools at the clinic (think wrenches, screw drivers, wire cutters, files, etc.) and several more bike-specific tools like chain whips and crank-pullers. Our bike stands make fixing bikes much easier, as does our truing stands for straightening wheels. We don't have many parts except a few disposable things like spokes, cable ends, and cable ferrules; we also have cleaning supplies and basic chain lubes and oils. At Annie's, we teamed up with the store to help set up a bicycle section that stocks and sells a range of tubes, cables, and housing (in the electrical section) as well as some basic replacements for skewers, pedals, and handlebar tape. For other parts, and at other clinics, we recommend that people bring their own parts.

Our tools and parts are stored in the loading dock at Annie's and in a nearby storage space at the Bloomingdale clinic.

Running the Clinic

Our clinic depends on the support of all our volunteers and several key roles:

- **Host:** The host serves a focal role making sure that the clinic opens and closes on time, mechanics are occupied, and guests are satisfied. Your role is crucial in ensuring smooth operations as both a manager and an ambassador.
- **Lead Mechanics:** We often have a few ninja mechanics around who can problem-solve all types of repairs. This is not a formal role, but a good resource to know about. Lead mechanics often jump around from project to project rather than focusing solely on one person.
- **Volunteers:** Volunteers teach bike repairs! Volunteers may either work with one guest at a time or in a group of several guests. New volunteers sometimes like to start by shadowing other volunteers.
- **Anne:** Anne is the owner of Annie's Ace Hardware so her support is critical for the work that we do. She graciously and generously lets us run the clinic in her loading dock, so it is very important that we respect her space (like avoiding putting bikes in front of an exit door from the store). If Anne or her employees makes a request of you at any point during a clinic there, please make sure the clinic host has heard the request and that the problem is resolved.

Clinic Roles: The Host

The host has a number of duties both during and surrounding the clinic. Here's a rundown of what you would do as a host:

Before the Clinic

Saturday clinic: Send an email to all Bike House volunteers announcing the weekend events and asking people to sign up. Check the sign-up before the clinic to make sure we have enough people, and if there are few, round up some more. If there are not enough volunteers to run the clinic, send an email to the Google group, post on The Bike House Facebook page and inform the staff at Annie's.

Sunday clinic: Check the sign up spreadsheet on the Thursday before the clinic. If fewer than three people total have signed up or no lead mechanic has signed up, email the Bike House volunteers to let them know that more volunteers or needed. If there are not enough volunteers to run the clinic, send an email to the Google group, post on the Bike House Facebook page and inform the Farmer's Market organizers.

Clinic Set Up

Saturday clinic: Arrive at 11:45am. When the other volunteers start to arrive, work together to bring up all the materials from the cabinet, including stands, tools, cleaning supplies, and some parts. If it's particularly hot or raining, we have a

tent that you can put up. Also make sure that a garbage bag is placed in a prominent location and place the donation box and information materials, like Bike House business cards, out on the table.

Sunday clinic: Arrive at 10:45am at the designated storage spot (changes periodically). Materials may need to be moved up to 1 block. If it's particularly hot or raining, the Market organizers have a tent for us that they keep at the entrance to the market, in the stand on the right. Ask for Ted. We usually set up next to the Wild Greens stand, across from the bakery stand.

During the Clinic, the host serves multiple roles:

- *Help guests learn:* Greet new guests and make them feel welcome. When someone arrives, ask if the guest has ever been to the coop before and how they learned about us. Then have the guest sign in on the clip board and tell you about their bike. Once you have a sense of the problems to be solved, find a mechanic who can help. If there's a wait, put the guest in a group with others learning similar things. If people are learning, people are happy.
- *Make sure guests are aware that we're a volunteer-run, donation-based organization:* When you sign a guest in, it's useful if you mention that we are an all-volunteer, donation-based organization. You can also mention that in addition to cash, we also take donations via Venmo and Paypal. This information is listed on the donation boxes and we have cards with this information you can hand out to each guest. No one needs to give us a donation, but if people are happy and able to contribute, their donations make it possible to keep the organization running and helping others.
- *Help mechanics teach:* Since the host is generally overseeing each clinic, it is on the host to make sure that all the guests are learning and happy. Sometimes this might involve helping the mechanics slow down and be better teachers. Check in and ask the guest what s/he is learning - this provides an opportunity for our guests to teach and really cement what they've learned!
- *Watch the clock:* If there is a long line of people, or few volunteers, meaning things are running slowly, let the guest know that there is a wait but they are welcome to use our tools and make the repairs themselves in the meantime. Make sure you keep your eye on the time and only accept late-arriving guests if their repairs can be done before closing time; we do need to be finished on time to accommodate our hosts at Annie's and the Farmer's Market. Give a 30-minute and a 15-minute warning to volunteers and guests to help them finish in time. This helps mechanics and guests complete jobs and makes for happier mechanics and guests alike.
- *Document the Action:* Make a note of any needed items such as supplied, missing tools, or other ideas to make the clinics smoother. Also keep track of any fun stories or big successes – those are fun to share later. If you have a camera, take pictures for our website. You can send all this to the Bike House listserv after the clinic.

After the clinic: The host has a few more things to take care of when the clinic is over:

- Ensure tools and materials are put away and cleaned up.
- Count up all the received donations and then have another volunteer double-check the count. The host (or a trusted volunteer) should later PayPal the donated amount to thebikehouse@gmail.com.
- Invite volunteers to go out for refreshments afterwards and keep the fun going!
- Sending a "shoutback" to the group via email is how we keep everyone up to date. Include the date, location, host, number and names of volunteers, number of guests, total donation amount and any good stories or insights from the day, including pictures.
- The host should also email the Parts Clerk if any supplies are needed.

Clinic Roles: New Volunteers

As a new volunteer, you may either work directly with guests or shadow another volunteer, depending on your comfort teaching and fixing bikes. When you come to the clinic as a new volunteer, be sure to do the following:

- **Introduce yourself to the host.** Let the host know what projects you are comfortable with and what skills you would like to learn. If you would like to help with repairs, ask the host if there's someone in need. If you would like to shadow another mechanic, ask the host to pair you with a person or project.
- **Put on an apron.** This identifies you as someone who can help.
- **Get involved.** If you do not have much experience fixing bikes, the host can assign you someone more experienced to shadow, or have you assist with hosting. Teaching can be intimidating at first but the sooner you start the easier it will get. Remember, you can always ask other volunteers and guests if you don't know how to do a repair just yet. When in doubt, always ask another volunteer for help or ask the host if they can find a volunteer who can lend a hand with the repair.
- **Make sure the guest is holding the tools.** Where possible, the guests should be doing (or attempting to do) the repair themselves. The goal of the clinic is not just to repair the bike, but also – and principally – to teach bike repair.
- **Keep learning.** Build out your tool set of bike repairs by observing new projects. All of our volunteers have a different set of skills and can learn a lot from each other.
- **Improve what we do.** Please feel free to take the initiative to improve the Bike House after you check in with other volunteers about it.

What we do - Other Activities

Outside our standard clinics, there are lots of other ways we can help people work on, learn about, and enjoy bikes. Here are a few activities we've got in mind. As a new volunteer, you are more than encouraged to join all these activities and think of more.

Bike Maintenance Classes

During the main season, we run regular bike repair classes for new mechanics. These four-session classes cover the foundational building blocks in bike maintenance: general inspections and vocabulary, gears, brakes, and wheels. Volunteers can take the classes and help teach them. We frequently have new ideas for one-off classes, too.

Youth Classes

Working with young people is fun and rare for a lot of us. Bike House volunteers often participate in D.C.-based activities to improve the bike community, like working with local schools or with WABA. If you want to get more involved or hear about great opportunities, let the People Clerk know and we'll put you in touch with the right person.

Skillshares

We sometimes hold more informal skillshares where Bike House volunteers and guests get together to learn from each other about a specific topic. Topics include winterizing your bike, building a wheel, and other advanced mechanics techniques. More topic ideas welcome.

Fun Events and Rides

Sometimes we just want to hang out and ride bikes together. Here's a sampling of some fun things we've done: happy hours and get-togethers after clinic, winter "Coldest Day of the Year" rides, and huge Bike House fundraisers with music, a DJ, and lots of friends. Keep an ear out for upcoming events and let us know if you think of something we should do or join in on.

How we teach bike repair

Teaching bike repair is what the Bike House is all about. We use the following guidelines when we teach. Be sure to ask an old volunteer if you have questions – they have lots of teaching tricks!

Do it yourself

When a volunteer is helping a guest, the guest should do most of the work. There are a few ways to teach someone a repair that allows them to do it on their own:

- Demonstrate the repair first and allow the person you're helping to repeat the activity. You can undo the repair you have just done, or if you have fixed a paired part (like a brake), allow the person to repeat the repair on the other one.
- Describe the repair while the person you're helping is completing the activity.

As a key, we try to follow the phrase “don't take the tool out of someone's hand.” If you did, it probably means you got too excited and should give it back.

You don't need to be an expert to be a teacher

Go ahead and jump in, while being clear with guests about your limitations. It's okay to learn alongside the person you're helping as long as they are aware that that is the situation. Above all, do not give advice that you do not know is accurate—just guessing is only okay if the guest understands that you're not sure. Get a manual, or ask another volunteer for help. We have a few copies of our own bike repair zine if you learn best by reading, and we have a lot of knowledgeable people who love to talk about bikes and bike repair if that's how you learn best. When this is the case, sometimes it's helpful to manage expectations by saying “we'll learn this together, and ask for help when we need it.”

Work with the person before the bike

Figuring out what someone knows or wants to learn is often much more difficult than figuring out what's wrong with a bike. Here are some tricks we use to be more understanding teachers:

- Assess prior knowledge. A good way to do this by simply asking the guest, “tell me about your bike.” Our mechanics find that they can learn a lot about person's history, understanding, and prior experiences in bike repairs just by opening the door to let the guest talk.
- Check for understanding as you go.
- Ask them to repeat back what they learned.

Make the space safe for all

We strive to maintain a safe space for all people. As a volunteer, this means helping guests and other volunteers use encouraging, positive language and treating each other with respect. A few things to consider:

- We often make assumptions on how much someone knows about bikes based on arbitrary judgments such as gender, class, race, or the tightness of one's pants. Question your assumptions. They can make it hard to learn and to teach.
- Being nice is great. Being too nice might make people uncomfortable. Don't flirt in the shop.

Use the right tool for the right job

Every type of repair requires the use of at least one specific tool. In other words, there is a right tool for the job. You may observe people using tools other than the right tool. You are encouraged to suggest to these folks that they can use the more appropriate or efficient tool instead. Avoid telling people that they are doing something wrong or incorrect. You are also encouraged to remind people how to use tools properly if you observe improper tool use.

Being a Volunteer

Responsibilities

We ask that all volunteers attend an orientation, volunteer at clinics, and serve as role models in creating an open learning environment. We also encourage volunteers to join us at biweekly organizational meetings (below), participate in other events and activities, or help behind the scenes in outreach, community engagement, or new projects.

Meetings

We hold meetings approximately once a month to talk about the big picture for our organization. Normally, each meeting has some balance of updates on new projects, problem solving around issues, and brainstorming new ideas. They're fun and everyone is welcome! Meetings are announced via the Google Group volunteer listserv.

Clerkships

We have several volunteer "clerks" who take on specific responsibilities that are best handled by a single person or pair. The roles are: one Communications Clerk; one Treasurer; one Parts Clerk, who keeps track of our things; one People Clerk, who runs volunteer orientation; and one Classes Clerk. Clerkships are rotated several times each year at the organizational meetings and are a great opportunity to take on a formal role at the Bike House. Clerks are also great resources on all things Bike House.

Board

The Board of Directors consists of three to ten people who have been active volunteers for at least six months and/or have special knowledge that to contribute to The Bike House. Board members serve 2-year terms, and elections are held once a year for any vacancies. The Board ensures that The Bike House runs smoothly and keeps the mission at the front of everything we do.

How to learn more about bike maintenance

Everyone learns differently and at a different pace. The Bike House offers a variety of ways to learn, which you may combine as needed:

- Shadow a knowledgeable volunteer at a clinic
- Offer to learn along with a drop-in shop participant (manuals are available)
- Take one of our four-session bike mechanics classes
- Request a skillshare or host one
- Learn from the bike repair zine, other manuals, or the great number of resources online

Our Clinics

Annie's Ace Hardware: 1240 Upshur St. NW, Washington D.C. 20011

- Saturdays from 12 – 3 pm, late March through November

Bloomington Farmer's Market: 1st & R St NW

- Every Sunday from 11-1 pm, June – November

Anacostia Library: 1800 Good Hope Rd. SE

- Select Saturday afternoons during the summer; hours vary

Our Story

The Bike House came together in the spring of 2009. At the time, DC hadn't had community-based bike space for several years and a few different groups were working separately to build one. When these groups caught wind of each other, all it took was a few ads on craigslist, some phone calls and emails, and a few weeks of exciting discussion to plant the Bike House seed.

We held our first clinic at a fish fry behind the People's Media Center on the first hot day in June 2009. Of the eight volunteers that day, only one of us would admit to knowing anything about bikes. The rest of us fiddled with air pumps and marveled at the strange machines before us. We all need to start somewhere. We learned though, and by the time we moved to the alley behind Qualia a few months later, we had a core of about 15 volunteers with a growing knowledge of bike maintenance and teaching tools.

Then, in 2012, Annie's Ace Hardware opened in Petworth and graciously invited us to host our clinics at the loading dock. Since that time, we've built a solid presence in the community and now frequently help 30-50 guests each Saturday afternoon (with particularly high numbers of guests on nice, sunny days). An outdoor clinic, it runs from late March through November and closes up over the winter. This remains our largest clinic.

Since 2009, we have also hosted a seasonal Sunday clinic at Bloomingdale Farmers Market. This clinic is slightly smaller than the clinic at Annie's, helping 10-20 people each week, but there's a devoted group of volunteers ensuring that their neighbors have easy access to affordable bike repair.

In 2013, we also began holding summer clinics at Anacostia Library. In partnership with DC Public Libraries, WABA, Gearin' Up, Phoenix Bikes, and other organizations, we open up shop on select Saturdays and help dozens of people fix their bikes at these huge clinics.

To date, we've helped thousands of guests fix their bikes throughout Washington, DC. In 2016 alone, we held 94 clinics and classes throughout the city. Although volunteers come and go, relocating to other cities and even starting new bike clinics in those cities, we're proud that there are always a group of volunteers who step up, allowing the clinic to continue each year. We hope that you'll be a part of that tradition and offer suggestions for how to make the clinics better.

How to Stay in Touch

There are a few different ways to keep in touch:

- **TheBikeHouse.org** -- Check out upcoming classes and events.
- **Facebook** – The Bike House – <https://www.facebook.com/bikehousedc/>
- **Bike House Volunteers List** - We use this list to send once-weekly emails for the weekend volunteer sign-up and other major events, usually on Thursday. To join the volunteer mailing list, sign up to volunteer at www.thebikehouse.org.
- **Bike Housemates Internal Listserv** – This is our smallest, but highest traffic list, only for those interested in the inter-workings of the Bike House, including the updates on the Monday meetings and other new developments. To join the 'housemates' list, email thebikehouse@gmail.com with your request.

Bike House Listserv Code of Conduct

Please do not post or send any communications to the group that are defamatory, malicious, or disrespectful communication targeting race, gender, age, class, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, physical characteristics, education, or disability. If you are not sure whether something you are about to send about these topics is defamatory, malicious, or disrespectful, it probably is. Please always sign your emails with your real name.

This discussion group is meant to be used to communicate matters directly relevant to the functioning of the organization and its volunteers. Please limit reposting from other groups and sharing of issues and articles not directly related to our activities.

Discussion groups and email communications, by nature, are not private. They are public and, while the practice is discouraged by etiquette and these guidelines, they can easily be forwarded. That said, any email that starts as a private communication off the group should not be forwarded to the group without the permission of all parties to the original email. Be aware that you are responsible for all of your communications and their content while using the discussion group or email list.

If an issue occurs with the communications of another person in discussion groups or email, please try to resolve the matter constructively by contacting that person directly, talking it through, using your own good judgment, and assuming the best intentions

The list moderators will contact any individual when content that person has posted is inappropriate and represents a pattern of abuse. If the abuse continues, the moderators may suspend the rights of the

abuser to participate. If a suspension occurs, we will notify the group so that you all can monitor your moderators and provide feedback, up to and including asking us to step down.