

Friends of the Park Handbook



Welcome to the Park Pride Friends of the Park Program!

Hello and welcome to the Friends of the Park Program! We are so excited to work with you to activate the power of your park!

Park Pride has been an important part of the Atlanta parks and greenspace community since 1989, providing leadership, networking, workshops, funding and other resources for citizen-led, park-based initiatives. By taking advantage of all the resources made available to you through the Friends of the Park Program, you'll make gains on building the well-loved park your community deserves and strengthen the fabric of your community in the process.

It is important to know at the outset that changes—both for your park and your neighborhood—won't happen overnight. But by forming an FOP group, you've taken the very first step to making positive changes that will catalyze positive growth and activity that can ripple throughout the community.

We encourage you to make the most of your FOP membership by:

- attending workshops, Park Meetings and social events,
- networking with other *Friends* groups,
- reading and sharing the e-newsletters you'll receive from Park Pride as an FOP leader with the other members of your group, and encourage them to sign-up to receive the e-newsletters directly,
- and asking questions!

Use this handbook as a guide throughout your park improvement journey. In it you'll find:

- a breakdown of what programs/resources are available to you as a Friends of the Park group (also available at <http://parkpride.org/we-can-help/>),
- helpful tips for how to reach your goals,
- a calendar of Park Pride events,
- staff contacts, and more.

Don't hesitate to reach out; we're always here to offer direction and encouragement.

We look forward to working with you this year, and those to come, for the greener good of your park and community!

~ Park Pride

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Park Pride Believes in the Power of Parks

philosophy

Great parks have the power to increase our quality of life and strengthen the fabric of our cities. They are places for members of the community to gather, play, relax, and lose themselves in nature, encouraging mental and physical health. Great parks promote community engagement, safety, and revitalization. They spur economic development and benefit tourism. Great parks make our citizens happy, our communities strong, and our cities sustainable.

mission

To engage communities to activate the power of parks.

vision

A nationally recognized network of locally inspired parks, greenspaces and trails that engages individuals, strengthens communities and transforms Atlanta.

values

Community-Based Approach: Place-based experience and the wisdom of people who live, work and play here are at the center of our efforts. It grounds the work we do.

Systemic Approach: Parks should function as part of a system that supports healthy people, strong neighborhoods, vibrant business districts, a robust economy and a healthy environment.

Connectivity: Parks, greenspaces and trails create opportunities to bridge gaps and barriers within and between individuals, neighborhoods and business districts.

Inclusivity: People of all ages and backgrounds have important voices that should be heard. Parks are for everyone.

Collaboration: Government, nonprofit, business, philanthropic and community partners are central to our success and help us achieve a greater impact.

Passion: Passion for the transformative power of parks, greenspaces and trails is a daily motivator that pushes us to give 110%.

Respect: Each individual has intrinsic value that deserves recognition and respect. We demonstrate respect through active listening, passion with politeness, and openness to multiple perspectives.

Stewardship: We value the resources entrusted to us. We strive for efficient ways to make the most of each dollar.



Park Pride Contacts

who to call

Park Pride staff is looking forward to working with you and helping you achieve your park dreams! Please refer to the contact list below and direct any questions you might have about the Friends of the Park Program or other programs as appropriate.

Tina Arnold

Director of Community Building

Office – 404-546-7970

Cell – 404-723-3116

tina@parkpride.org

Ask Questions About: Atlanta Friends of the Park Program and Community Garden Program

Kayla Altland

Friends of the Park Associate

Cell – 404-371-7330

kayla@parkpride.org

Ask Questions About: DeKalb, Brookhaven, and Tucker Friends of the Park Program

John Ahern

Volunteer Manager

Office: 404-546-6854

Cell: 404-723-3112

john@parkpride.org

Ask me about: Volunteer projects

Andrew White

Director of Park Visioning

Office: 404-546-7965

andrew@parkpride.org

Ask me about: Park visioning or landscape consultations

Rachel Maher

Marketing & Communications Manager

Office: 404-546-7969

rachel@parkpride.org

Ask me about: Event promotions, media inquiries, and Park Pride logo usage

Allison Barnett

Associate Director

Office: 404-546-6760

allison@parkpride.org


Ask me about: Park Pride grants and Fiscal Partners Program

**Park Pride's office is located on the 16th floor
of Harris Tower, Peachtree Center in
Downtown Atlanta:**

**233 Peachtree St, NE
Suite 1600
Atlanta, GA 30303**

Report park maintenance issues, vandalism, downed trees, etc., to the appropriate parks department:

- City of Atlanta - 404.546.6813
- City of Tucker - jcollins@tuckerga.gov
- City of Brookhaven - 404-637-0542
- DeKalb County - 404.371.2711



“Without Park Pride, we were just a small group of people hoping to make a difference at our local greenspace. The structure, guidance, and opportunities provided by Park Pride through the Friends of the Park program made all the difference. With their support, we galvanized the neighborhood and completely transformed the site into a destination park.”

~ Veronica Squires, Friends of Reverend James Orange Park



Before You Start:

What You Need to Know

To quickly get on the path to success and make a positive impact on your park, please note the important points below!

1. what is a friends of the park group?

Forming a Friends of the Park group is the first step in improving a public park. A group may start as a civic association committee or with the sole purpose of improving a greenspace. While Friends of the Parks groups can differ in terms of size, scope of work and influence, they have many things in common.

All “Friends of the Park” groups have the following characteristics:

- an open and inclusive group
- of park users (often neighbors & community leaders)
- actively working
- to improve one or more parks (usually one)
- in a defined geographic area (usually a neighborhood)

2. Any physical changes to the park must receive prior approval from the parks department (landowner).

Examples of changes include: installing a bench, plaque or signage, planting shrubs along a walkway, painting a mural, renting goats / sheep to clear kudzu, cutting a new trail, etc.

Refer to “Planning a Project” (p.30) for a step-by-step guide or reach out to the Director of Community Building to discuss your project idea.

3. Some events in parks require permits.

Park events are great for attracting the community into the park and build support for the Friends of the Park groups. Depending on the type of event you’d like to have and the size, a permit from the City or County may be required. **Festival permit applications are due 90 days in advance of the date of the event.**

Refer to the “Hosting an Event” (p.38) for more information.

4. Park Pride grant recipients can only have one “open” grant at a time.

A Park Pride grant must be closed and the project completed before a group may be eligible for another grant.



Publicize Your Group

After you form a Friends of the Park group (FOP), you'll want to let your neighborhood and community know that you've done so. This will help gain awareness for and attract park enthusiasts to your group. Additionally, consistent promotion and awareness building of the park and FOP group will be important when you approach the community to volunteer, attend a park event, or raise funds for a park project. Park Pride has a strong track record of park improvements and community building – creating a strong linkage between your *Friends* group and Park Pride will help build your group's credibility and trustworthiness among neighbors and community leaders.

publicize your relationship with park pride

Once your group is officially formed, please:

1.) Send a Press Release.

- Send a short press release or article to your community newspaper or neighborhood newsletter to let them know you've established an FOP group through Park Pride.
- Highlight the goals of your group, what you hope to accomplish in the park, and detail how neighbors can get involved.
- Reach out to Park Pride's Marketing & Communications Manager for a quote to include from Park Pride and for final review. See official Park Pride "boiler plate" language as part of the sample press release / newsletter article at the end of this section.

2.) Include Park Pride's logo on your group's website or Facebook page.

- We recommend that you establish a web presence for your FOP group. Whether it is a stand-alone website or a Facebook page, the internet is the easiest place for people to find your group, for you to communicate your group's goals and current initiatives, and to raise money for your park (if you set up a Fiscal Partners account with Park Pride).
- Please reach out to the Marketing & Communication Manager for Park Pride's logo, and include it with a link to our website (www.parkpride.org) on your webpage.
- Once your webpage is established, send your url to the Marketing & Communications Manager to include the link on the Park Pride website.

3.) Include Park Pride in Park Events.

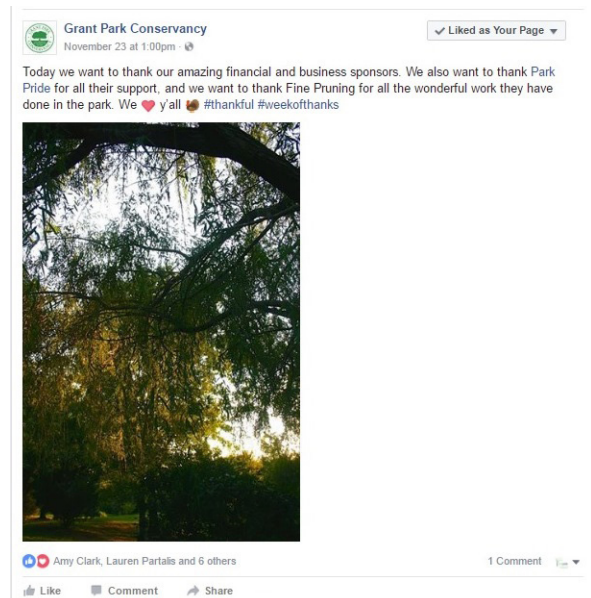
- Alert Park Pride to when you're hosting an event in your park, and we'll add it to our park calendar and help promote through social media.
- Please include Park Pride's logo on any printed or digital promotional materials.
- Reach out to Marketing & Communications Manager for final approval of logo use.

4.) Tag Park Pride on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram Posts

- Tagging Park Pride on social media is an easy way to highlight your FOP group's connection to the nonprofit and ensures that we'll see and share your post, boosting the awareness of your group and the park projects you're undertaking / events you're hosting.
- "Like" Park Pride on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ParkPride/>), then tag in posts using @parkpride.
- Follow @ParkPride on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/parkpride>) and Instagram, using hashtag #forthegreengood in posts.

5.) Acknowledge Park Pride in your Friends of the Park group successes

- Whether you've just completed a major park improvement project or hosted a nature walk, please acknowledge Park Pride as a partner in success in any newsletter articles or social media posts you make.



for the greener good

sample press release

Neighbors Form Friends of XYZ Park to Steward Park Improvements & Strengthen Community

Group will gain access to park resources and services through Park Pride's Friends of the Park Program

Location, Date – Park enthusiasts around XYZ Park have announced that they've officially created a Friends of the Park (FOP) group in partnership with Park Pride, the only Atlanta-based nonprofit that engages communities to activate the power of parks.

Park Pride and members of the XYZ community recognize that great parks increase the quality of life of residents by supporting healthy people, strong neighborhoods, vibrant business districts, a robust economy and a healthy environment. Creating a Friends of the Park group is the first step taken by communities to create positive, long-lasting change in parks. Participation in the FOP Program helps communities identify goals and priorities for their park, and provides the volunteers, tools, materials, training and funding to achieve their goals.

Quote from FOP leader or more general info about the group – Why did you decide to form a Friends group? What are the goals of the Friends group for the park? What do you hope to accomplish for the park and the community? How has Park Pride been a supportive partner thus far?

Park Pride currently works with over 150 local Friends of the Park groups in the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County.

Quote by Park Pride

Call to action – Provide details about how to get involved, such as attending an upcoming FOP meeting, volunteering at a park workday or inviting the public to a park event, and encourage readers to visit your park's website or Facebook page!

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About Park Pride:

Park Pride is the only Atlanta-based nonprofit that engages communities to activate the power of parks. Working with over 150 local Friends of the Park groups, Park Pride provides leadership and services to help communities realize their dreams for neighborhood parks that support healthy people, strong neighborhoods, vibrant business districts, a robust economy and a healthy environment. Park Pride is active in greenspace advocacy and educating both civic leaders and the general public about the benefits of parks, and annually hosts the Parks and Greenspace Conference. Learn more about Park Pride at www.parkpride.org.

sample social media messages

Facebook

"We're excited to announce the formation of the Friends of XYZ Park! Together with @ParkPride, we'll work to improve the park for all visitors and strengthen our community in the process!" (include a photo)

Twitter / Instagram

We've partnered with @parkpride to form a Friends of the Park group to make improvements to XYZ Park. Join us at our next meeting on DATE (include a photo)



Park Pride Can Help

Resources & Program Descriptions

Park Pride provides the resources to help you engage your community to make the most of your park.

membership growth & development

Workshops

Park Pride hosts workshops to develop skills that support the growth of effective Friends of the Park (FOP) groups and builds the capacity of group members to make positive changes in their parks. Trainings cover topics such as:

- group and leadership development
- goal setting for public spaces
- fundraising
- basic landscape design
- activating your park
- hosting volunteers
- applying for grants

See the calendar included for workshop dates, or visit the calendar on Park Pride's website.
<http://parkpride.org/events/>

Advocacy

Park Pride serves as the "voice" for Atlanta's park system and helps FOP groups serve as the "voice" for their parks and communities. We develop responses to emerging park issues in Atlanta and the metro area and build and maintain strong relationships with key partners, including elected officials. Park Pride will work with FOP groups to develop communication strategies to effectively address issues in their own parks with the parks department, members of City Council or County Commissioners. FOP group members will be invited to attend key meetings with the City or County to show their support for parks.

Learn more about Park Pride's advocacy platform on the website.
<http://parkpride.org/what-we-do/advocacy-platform-initiatives/>

Park Meetings

Park Pride's monthly Park Meetings bring together FOP group members and park advocates from across Atlanta and DeKalb for education, networking and support. Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month (7:30 – 9 A.M.) in a different park. Attendees hear the stories, challenges and successes of Friends groups from all corners of the city. Park Pride's Executive Director and the Director of City of Atlanta Office of Parks provide updates on system wide issues and successes. Meetings are a great opportunity to connect with and learn from the achievements of other Friends groups.

Refer to the Park Pride calendar to learn of upcoming meeting locations.
<http://parkpride.org/events/>



Check-Ins

Park Pride schedules yearly check-ins with FOP groups. Staff will help your group develop goals and a plan of action for the coming year, and direct you to resources and workshops that will help your Friends group reach its goals.

Annual Parks & Greenspace Conference

Georgia's largest parks and greenspace conference draws a diverse group of individuals united by a common desire to improve parks and greenspace and strengthen communities. Through education and inspiration, the conference focuses on best practices for managing and developing parks, with an emphasis on the role that attendees can play in improving their parks and the quality of life in their community (health, environment, economic development, revitalization, etc.). FOP group members are encouraged to attend the conference, and a limited number of reduced-rate scholarship registrations are provided to active group members.



Reach out to the Director of Community Building to learn more about the conference and receiving a scholarship. Visit the conference webpage for more details. <http://parkpride.org/conference>

park planning assistance

Park Visioning Program

Led by a professional landscape architect on Park Pride's staff, a community is taken through a process of compiling community input to determine their needs and to design (or re-design) their neighborhood park. In essence, the process converts a community's dream into a conceptual master plan. The Park Visioning process not only energizes the community to improve their quality of life, but it provides them with powerful tools for soliciting private funding and lobbying for public funding to help reach their goals.

Refer to the Park Pride website for all information. <http://parkpride.org/we-can-help/park-visioning/>

fundraising / funds management for park projects

Grant Programs

From the smallest clean-up project to a full-scale park overhaul, Park Pride's matching grant programs offer multiple options for Friends of the Park groups to fund their ideal greenspace.

*Refer to Park Pride's website for all eligibility requirements and restrictions.
<http://parkpride.org/we-can-help/grant-programs>*

- Small Change Grants – Up to \$2,500 (supported by the Cecil B. Day Foundation). Park Pride's Small Change Grant offers matching awards to Friends groups just beginning their park improvement efforts, enabling them to leverage support from neighbors and local businesses.

- Community Building Grants - \$2,500 - \$50,000 (supported by The Home Depot Foundation). Park Pride's Community Building Grant Program provides matching grants to Friends of the Park groups for the implementation of lasting park improvement projects.
- Legacy Grants - \$50,000 - \$100,000 (supported by the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation). Park Pride's Legacy Grants are only available to Friends of the Park groups within the City of Atlanta and provide matching grants for significant improvements to park spaces.
- Tree Grants – Up to \$5,000 (supported by the City of Atlanta Tree Recompense Fund). Tree Grants are only available to Friends of the Park groups in the City of Atlanta and offer matching grants for groups to plant trees in parks.

Fiscal Partners Program

Park Pride can serve as the nonprofit fiscal agent for Friends of the Park groups raising money for park improvements. For a small fee, Park Pride will accept donations, acknowledge each gift with a thank-you letter, track contributions and expenditures, conduct all tax reporting, provide regular financial reports and maintain a donor database. **This program allows Friends groups to apply for grants (Park Pride and otherwise) and to receive a tax benefit for their donations without having to obtain a 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.**

Refer to Park Pride's website for all program information, eligibility and application to enroll.
<http://parkpride.org/we-can-help/fiscal-partners/>

Fundraising Manual

Fundraising for park projects can be challenging as each park, park project, and community is unique! However, there are some tried and true tactics to successful park fundraising. Park Pride has compiled methods and case studies in our Fundraising Manual, as well as ideas for how to adapt the tactics to fit your own needs.

This manual is available for download from the Park Pride website.
<http://parkpride.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Park-Pride-Fundraising-Manual.pdf>

volunteers and project support



Volunteer Program

Park Pride organizes groups of volunteers—church groups, college groups, corporate volunteers, etc.—from 10 to 500 people to help maintain Atlanta and DeKalb parks. Groups work on everything from spreading mulch to building trails and boardwalks. Hundreds of groups and thousands of volunteers are coordinated annually. FOP groups can request volunteer support from Park Pride's Volunteer Manager to bring in a large number of volunteers to help complete a large project. We cannot, however, guarantee volunteers will be available on specific dates.

Refer to Park Pride's website for more information about the Volunteer Program.
<http://parkpride.org/we-can-help/volunteer-program/>

Tool Shed

Additionally, if a Friends of the Park group organizes their own community workday (50 people or less), they may request tools (gloves, shovels, loppers, etc.) from the Park Pride Tool Shed, our collection of tools that are available to *Friends* groups conducting volunteer work days in their parks.

Refer to the website for more information.

<http://parkpride.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PP-Tool-Shed1.pdf>

Material Support

With sufficient notice, the City of Atlanta and DeKalb parks departments can supply mulch to parks. Atlanta's Office of Parks also makes available a limited supply of annual plants in late spring/early summer and in some cases, supplies landscape timbers, benches and other materials. Park Pride coordinates the distribution of these resources.

Reach out to Park Pride's Volunteer Manager for support.

community garden planning and installation

Community Gardening Program

Community gardens bring positive activity into parks and provide a way for neighbors to join together and forge strong community bonds. Park Pride can help you navigate the approval process to install a community garden in your park and provide insight on how to cultivate a strong network of engaged gardeners. Monthly community gardening emails provide how-to guides, harvest calendars, local gardening events, and more.

Learn more about Park Pride's Community Gardening Program on Park Pride's website.

<http://parkpride.org/we-can-help/community-gardens/>



Selena Butler Community Garden

park activation



Park Play Library at Boone Park West

Park Play Library

It's Park Pride's mission to engage communities to activate parks! One way we do that is by providing play equipment, free of charge, to registered FOP groups to use to attract neighbors into the park.

Refer to Park Pride's website to learn more about the types of equipment we have available and how to request. <http://parkpride.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PP-Park-Library1-1.pdf>

Key Principles of Transforming Your Park

Be inclusive.

A community is comprised of many people from all walks of life. Include everyone in your group that wants to contribute positively to your park. Since different people have different perspectives, listen and allow people to contribute their experiences and expertise to park projects.

The community is the expert and has expertise.

An important starting point in developing a concept for any public space is identifying talents and assets within the community. Interview people who can provide historical perspectives, insights into how the area functions, and understanding of critical issues and what is meaningful to people.

Create a place, not a design.

The goal is to create a park that has a strong sense of community and uses that collectively add up to something more than the sum of its parts. Think about other parks and public spaces in your area... how can your park be a unique community destination?

Look for partners.

Partners are critical to the success of a park improvement project. Invite a wide range of people and organizations to participate in the Friends of the Park group efforts early in the process but also extend additional invitations to partner as momentum and excitement begins to build.

Learn by observing and asking.

By looking at how people are using (or not using) parks and asking what they like and do not like about them, you can determine what makes them work or not work. Create a vision with the Friends group and community that reflects what people want the park to become. The vision needs to come from the community and should instill a sense of pride in the people who live and work in the surrounding area. You might consider applying to Park Pride's Park Visioning Program for assistance.

Start with small projects.

The complexity of public spaces means that you cannot expect to do everything right initially. The best parks experiment with short term improvements that can be tested and refined over many years.

You are never finished.

Good Friends of the Park groups respond to the needs, opinions and changes in the community and require on-going attention. Amenities wear out and priorities change. Being open to the need for change and having the flexibility to change is what builds great public spaces. Continue to learn more and exchange ideas at the annual Park Pride Conference and monthly Park Meetings.

Visit the Park Pride website for Park Meeting dates. <http://parkpride.org/events/>

for the greener good



“Had we not made the connection with Park Pride, I doubt that we would have accomplished as much as we have in the development of the Jennie Drake Park.”

**~ Pauline Drake, Friends of
Jennie Drake Park**

Grow Your *Friends* Group

building your group

1. Identify Core Members

In the early stages of establishing a group, most of the work is done by a few people. This group should meet often, and report their progress to—and get feedback from—the general membership.

2. Hold a General Interest Meeting

To find people who care about the park, schedule a meeting in a public place and invite everyone you know. Publicize the meeting any way you think will work: post flyers all over the neighborhood, post on social media or print in community newsletters. Use the meeting to discuss the park and what people want done there.

3. Organizational Structure

Register your group annually with Park Pride's Friends of the Park program. Informal *Friends* groups that occasionally pick up trash and plant flowers can do a good job of beautifying a park without even giving their group a name. But if you have larger goals for your greenspace, you need more structure to help your group stay organized, handle money responsibly, and keep track of important information. Giving structure to your group will help it achieve its goals. Examples of ways to shape and give definition to your group are listed below:

- **Elect Leaders.** Elections ensure that your group is democratic versus having one person make all the decisions. Regular elections also mean that many members get opportunities to lead.
- **Create Group Goals.** Come to an agreement within the group on three priority goals for the coming year. Share these goals with the larger community, including elected officials, the parks department and Park Pride. See "*Setting Smart Goals*" (p.24).
- **Form Committees.** Committees are a great way to delegate responsibility and find new leaders. By sharing the work, responsibility, and credit among many people, committees help you get more done.
- **Offer Memberships.** By officially recognizing and documenting members, you create a support group—people you send emails to, ask to volunteer and donate, and count as "members" when you are asking someone else for money and need to illustrate park support.
- **Develop a Group Name and Logo.** A name helps group members identify with the collective and feel as if they're all on the same team. A logo represents the manifestation of that identity, used on flyers, email, letterhead and business cards, and helps build recognition of the group within the community.



Friends of Jennie Drake Park

- **Hold Regular Meetings.** Meetings keep your organization from turning into a one-person show. They are a great opportunity to report to members and ask for input.
- **Maintain Regular Communications.** Keep members informed and engaged through email, website, Facebook and / or newsletters.
- **Keep a Record.** For the group to continue successfully when leadership changes, you should retain and pass on letters you have written and received, newspaper articles, photographs, grant and legal documents, membership lists, etc.

4. Continue Recruiting and Engaging

Use every opportunity to promote the Friends group and talk about your goals. Once someone comes to a meeting, you need to work to actively keep them engaged or they may not return for a second. Keeping members engaged is challenging but necessary. A few tips for keeping members engaged include:

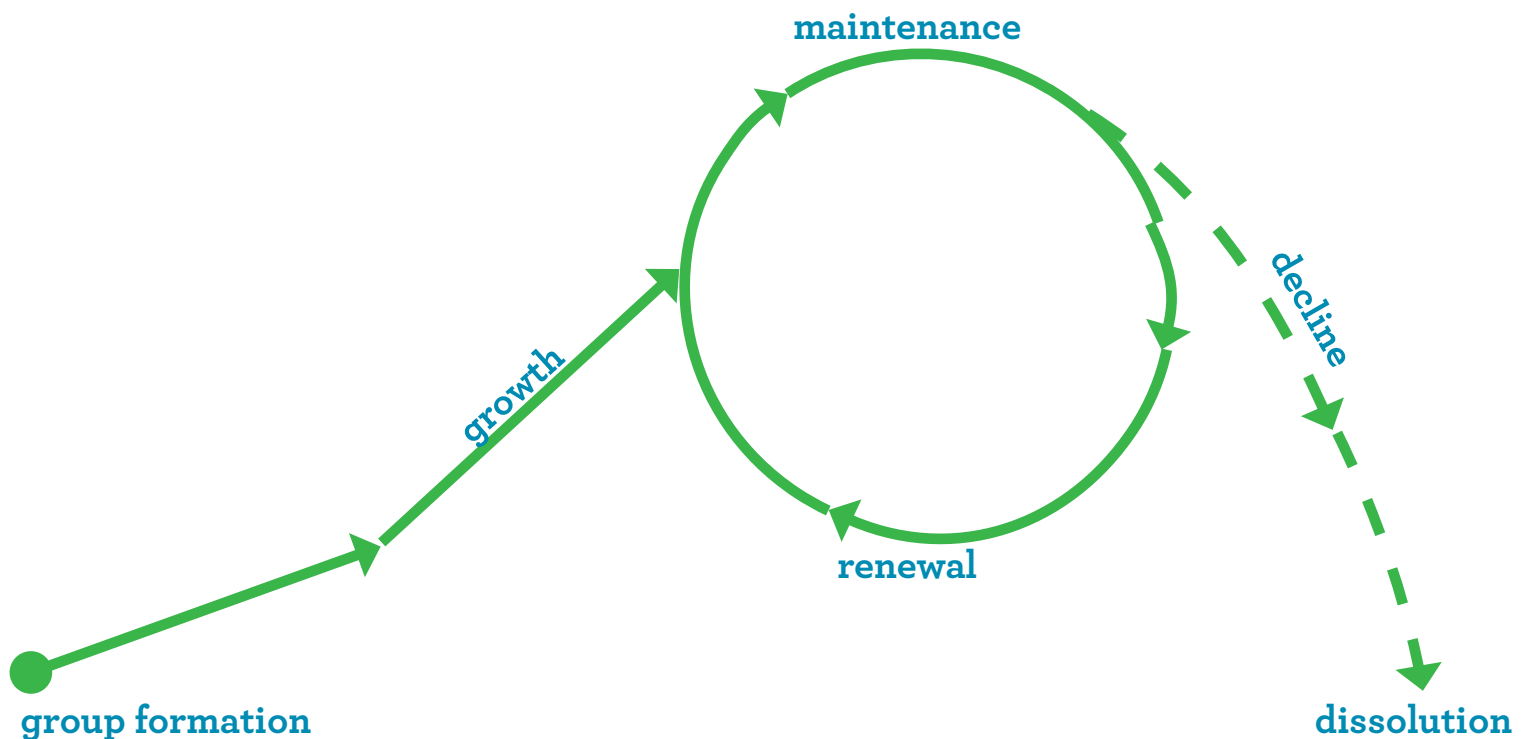
- **Meet regularly.** Set the date of your next meeting at the end of the previous one so people have advance notice of the meeting. Your group also might decide to hold meetings at the same time every month so people can plan months in advance.
- **Make your meetings and group events fun.** Adding a social aspect to your events and making them about more than park clean-ups brings more people into the group. Remember that your group is about *community building* as much as about taking care of the park. End meetings on a positive note that inspires members.
- **Stage small events.** Large event planning may take months. You can use that time to generate activity by planning some easy events with your active members.
- **Stay in Touch.** Email and social media are easy ways to keep the members of your group involved and connected.
- **Share the Load.** Allow people to help and take ownership of ideas. If someone has expertise or experience that they want to bring to the park, encourage it. For example, a group member with an interest in birding could host a free bird walk.
- **Be inclusive.** A community is comprised of many people from all walks of life. Include everyone in your group that wants to contribute positively to your park. Since different people have different perspectives, listen and allow people to contribute their experiences and expertise to park projects.

Friends of the Park

Group Life Cycle Stages

Adapted from Sue Kenny Stevens and TCC Group

A Friends of the Park group with weak engagement due to a lack of inclusion, aspirational and attainable goals, regular meetings or awareness of the group, runs the risk of group decline and dissolution.



Don't let decline happen to your group! Keeping busy on new park projects, holding regular meetings, celebrating accomplishments, and letting others help will help your Friends of the Park group avoid dissolution.



Setting S.M.A.R.T. Goals

You undoubtedly formed a Friends of the Park (FOP) group because you had specific ideas of what you wanted to achieve in the park. You had goals. Maybe your goals were to bring more people into the park, or clean up the park's creek, or build a new trail. Those are all great and admirable goals! However, they represent a mere outline of what you'd like to accomplish and may not help you navigate the path to success.

By establishing S.M.A.R.T. goals, you'll bring structure to your objectives. S.M.A.R.T. goals adhere to the following criteria: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely.

When you registered your FOP group, you were asked to name three goals for your group in the first year. Use the criteria below to determine if your goals are S.M.A.R.T. and reach out to the Director of Community Building for further assistance in articulating your group's goals for maximum success!

s.m.a.r.t.

Specific. What exactly does the Friends group want to achieve? Where? How?

Measurable. Objectively successful projects are tied to metrics. How many more people use the playground after school? How much money did you raise? How many bags of trash did you pick up this month versus last? You must break down your goal into measureable elements.

Assignable. Who is actually going to be involved in moving the project forward and tracking the success? Think about specific tasks that will need to be achieved and who will work towards them. Which leads to the next question as to whether the goal is realistic . . .

Realistic. As volunteers, it is very important to reflect on your park goal and ensure it is attainable. Determining whether or not your goal is realistic requires you to weigh the effort, time and costs of achieving the goal with other priorities in your and other members of the group's lives. Failing to reach what you discover to be an unattainable goal can be disheartening for all involved in the project. There is nothing wrong with scaling back a project into more digestible, attainable components that can be taken on as time (and energy!) permits. Beware of Friends of the Park volunteer burnout but dare to dream big!

Time-related. Your goals should specify exactly when each of the individual components of the project will be completed, leading to a final end date.



Building Relationships

Great parks are not created in a vacuum. Many groups and individuals will play a role in making lasting change in your park, including, but not limited to: neighbors, Park Pride, park users, the parks departments, elected officials, neighborhood organizations, sports leagues, local businesses, religious institutions, boy/girl scout troops, and more. Having strong relationships and a reputation for making positive change within the community and with government officials will help your Friends of the Park group be successful as you work to improve your park and resolve park issues.

general best practices

Make your Friends group known in the community.

To raise your group's profile, hold well-publicized public events. Attend neighborhood association meetings or other established community events to share information during public comment. Even if you are not able to address the full group, you can still talk to people in one on one conversations. Wear a Friends of the Park shirt or button at community events.

Keep people informed.

Call, email, post in neighborhood newsletters, put out yard signs, share on social media, send a survey to park users. Do whatever it takes to keep your neighbors informed. People get upset when they feel they have been left out of the loop. Those involved from the beginning are more likely to be invested in something and want it to succeed.

Build personal relationships.

Remember that you are dealing with *people*, not just agencies or organizations. Tell everyone you meet about your park – invite them to visit the park and share how they can support the Friends of the Park group. Look for more *Friends* for your park within all kinds of neighborhood groups and other associations from schools to workplaces. The relationships you build will create allies that know and trust you.

Be a good listener.

Most people have a connection or interest in parks. Focus first on understanding other people's needs and priorities. They might be looking for a safe place to play with grandchildren or walk for better health. Listen carefully so you can understand what motivates the person or organization you want to enlist in helping to improve your park.

Look for win-win opportunities.

How can supporting the park help both you and your allies? For example, having a local restaurant owner provide food at your event is good for both the park and for the restaurant if you publicize their support. Or, help Eagle Scouts get permission to build items on your Friends of the Park group



Friends of Flat Shoals Park

wish list, share your park needs with elected officials to help prioritize budgets and discretionary funds, and welcome students to earn their community service hours by volunteering in your park. Be creative and ask for permission before making any physical changes to the park.

Build a “bank account” of trust and goodwill.

Keep your word and help people navigate the park system when asked. If you help someone, they will likely return the favor.

Thank everyone.

Send thank-you letters, recognize supporters at public events and give certificates of appreciation. If someone helps you, send a commendation letter to his/her boss. If in doubt, give people more credit than they deserve.

when dealing with government agencies

Be polite, patient, and persistent.

Civility counts, and is essential for a good relationship.

Yelling and demanding what you want may work once, but does not help long term.

Know who has the power to solve the problem.

When people seem unresponsive, it may be because they cannot do anything about your issue. Be specific in your request so you can find the person best able to address your concern. Park Pride can aid you in connecting with the correct individuals to help you make positive change in your park!

Hold no grudges.

If an agency makes a decision you do not like, do not let that destroy the good relationship you have built. Sometimes people want to help but cannot because of limited resources. Take a long view and remember that change takes time.



when approaching elected officials

Invite them for a visit to the park or a community event.

Extend the invitation for a friendly site visit or event before presenting the elected official with a list of problems. If the issues are urgent, address those issues as soon as possible while still highlighting the positive aspects of the park. This can help to show that the Friends of the Park group is focused on citizen-driven positive change.

Listen.

There might be history or plans for the park of which you are not aware. If you monopolize the meeting, you might miss important opportunities for collaboration.

Represent your park group.

Wear your Friends of the Park or "I Heart Parks" t-shirt, or simply ask group representatives to wear green. You can also consider buttons or uniform name tags for all of your group members. Looking like a cohesive group communicates to officials that you're all in it together to get things done!

Be professional.

Register your Friends of the Park group with Park Pride and keep a membership roster. Make sure the official knows you represent a larger constituency, but do NOT bring your whole group to the meeting: that might make the official feel outnumbered and attacked.

Be prepared.

Research the official's voting record on the issues with which you have concern. Bring materials from your group to show that you are serious and committed to making a change. For example, you could bring a map of the park, pictures of the issue or flyers for upcoming events.

Be clear.

Communicate specifically what you want and why you think it is worth doing. If you are asked a question to which you do not have the answer, follow up with the information afterwards. Try to limit your request to items that are within the purview of the person you are addressing.

Meet with senior staff.

If the elected official is unavailable, meet with a senior staff member. Elected officials' staff often have a great deal of influence and may prove helpful for your cause.

Attend Atlanta City Council or DeKalb County Commissioners Meetings.

Showing up at public meetings sends the message to your councilmembers and commissioners that you're paying attention and are committed to making changes in your park. Additionally, not only does your presence at these meetings help your own cause, but it illustrates to elected officials support for the larger parks movement as well.

***NOTE:** These best practices hold true while corresponding over email as well. Keep in mind that a hostile tone is amplified over email, and even a civil email can be interpreted to have a negative or aggressive tone.





Planning a Project

Friends of the Park group members give their time, effort and money to improve parks. From installing benches to murals to flower gardens, they make their community a more beautiful, enjoyable place. If your group has a project in mind that would improve your park, here are some steps to make your journey from idea to implementation easier.

As a general rule, it is important to know that you need to get permission for 99.9% of activities you'd like to do in your park. Having goats clear kudzu, hosting an event, planting a new flower bed, installing a Little Free Library – all of these projects require permission from the City or County parks departments (the landowners). If in doubt as to whether or not your project of interest requires permission, contact the Director of Community Building.

steps for project planning

1. Develop a scope of work for your project.

Do you want to landscape an area of your park? Create a community garden? Write down your goals – and be specific (see the section in this packet on S.M.A.R.T. goals!). This will help you focus on what your project will require and highlight issues you may need to address.

Your project must be approved by the City or County parks department (see step 4), so developing a scope of work (SOW) with that in mind is important. A well-developed SOW is also vital when you present your idea to your neighbors, elected officials, and those you are approaching for project funding support.

The list below includes several factors to consider when developing your scope of work to encourage a positive reception from the community at large and the City or County parks department:

- If you're installing anything new in the park (benches, flower beds, informational kiosk, mural):
 - provide a visual representation of a clearly delineated project "footprint." For example, if installing a planting bed, show with lines on a map where the bed is located, including areas of lawn that would continue to be mowed and those that are not to be mowed.
 - provide photos / detailed information of the specific amenity you'd like permission to install (ie. the exact bench you'd like to purchase, or a representation of the exact mural you'd like to commission).
 - due to limited resources, the Parks Department can maintain few works of art or other additions to its park system. Keep in mind that if they are unable to maintain the work, your organization or a third party will need to commit to the upkeep of the artwork and improvements.

- If you're installing plants:
 - Clear and open sight lines in a park are an important public safety consideration. If you're planting near a walkway or parking area, consider shrubs that mature under 3' tall.
 - Over-planting and closer than normal spacing for shrub and ground covers will allow plants to fill in before weeds consume the bed. Keep this in mind when you are developing your budget for purchasing plants.
 - Avoid plants that are sharp or thorny, or that are considered invasive species.
 - Parks & Recreation maintenance is at a public park level, and not how you would maintain a private property. Plants will have to survive without supplemental water, weeding, or pruning. Think of bullet-proof plants, those so robust and hardy that they can take any abuse that nature, ill-mannered people, or a reckless mower can dish out.
 - You will need to communicate how the new planting will be cared for while it is being established. Will the contractor be responsible for the first year? A Friends of the Park group? A Conservancy's contractor?
- If your Friends group is enrolled in the Fiscal Partner Program, supporters can donate materials for your park through Park Pride.
 - This includes materials such as benches and plants, for example.
 - If you have a donor that wishes to make a material donation to your park, reach out to the Director of Community Building for the appropriate donation forms.

2. Draw up a list of needed tools and materials

This will act as a check list as you proceed and can help in your effort to obtain funding and other support. The Parks Department may provide mulch and materials for projects. Businesses may donate materials. Park Pride and the Atlanta Tool Bank can provide equipment.

3. Get documented community support for your project.

Talk to park users, neighborhood associations, local businesses and other community groups to gain support for your park project. Present the plan at community meetings, write about it on social media or neighborhood newsletters and post the plan in the park if there is a bulletin board. Be prepared to bring documentation of when / where you presented your plan, and any letters of community support, to the design review meeting with the parks department.



Volunteers build a bench at Chapel Hill Park

4. Attend a park design meeting with the City of Atlanta or DeKalb County to receive project approval.

Your park is a public space, so you will need their approval before moving forward. Present them with your scope of work and your documented community support. Email the Director of Community Building to secure a spot on the agenda to present your project at a regularly scheduled park design meeting.

park design meeting preparation

Being well-prepared for the meeting is vital to increase your chances of project approval.

A strong project proposal includes:

- your detailed scope of work
- a project budget
- detailed site map of where you want to complete your project
- photos of existing conditions at the site

There are two options for presenting your proposal to the parks department committee:

1. **Paperless.** Bring four (4) letter-sized copies of your proposal. Email all the proposal materials to the City or County representative at least 24-hours prior to meeting; the proposal will be ready to display on large screen during your presentation.
2. **Traditional.** Bring twelve (12) letter-sized copies of your proposal to the committee meeting, and it is suggested that you bring an oversized (minimum size 24" x 36") displays for an easel to be referenced during your presentation.

general principles for successful project

Do not "go it alone"

Involve as many people as possible in order to:

- **Prevent Burnout.** The old saying holds true; many hands make light work.
- **Achieve Critical Mass.** If you are taking back your park from negative elements, you have to change its "feel." Bringing more people and positive activities into the park helps do that.
- **Play Politics.** The more people you have, the more attention you'll get from everyone—other neighborhood groups, government agencies, and elected officials.

Start small

Your long term goal may be to completely renovate your park, but you should begin with more manageable projects. Small projects let you acquire what you need to complete large projects, including:

- **Skills.** Using small projects to learn skills (writing a press release, running a meeting, lobbying City Council) increases your ability to handle large projects.
- **Relationships.** Every time you plan and run an event, you build connections and relationships. For instance, if you get to know your City Council Member by hosting small clean-ups and fairs, they are more likely to help you when you tackle the big stuff. Remember, it takes years to build a network, so partner with existing community organizations, sports associations and other networks connected to your park users.
- **Members.** Every event you host is a chance to recruit members. It is easier to accomplish big things if you have lots of members to help and if you represent a large number of people.
- **Legitimacy.** People should know you as "the group that cleaned up the park and hosted the annual Halloween party." Also, in order to get a large grant from a foundation, you must have a successful record of smaller accomplishments.

Get started!

The faster you start improving your park, the quicker you'll build the momentum needed to engage others.

Keep doing it

A mistake groups often make is organizing one big event and then waiting a year to do it again. Your park will not be changed by a single project. People need to see things happening over and over again. Consistent action shows people that the *Friends* group is here to stay.



Friends of Four Corners Park

for the greener good

Being a Good Leader

A Friends of the Park group is as much about creating a strong community as it is about improving a park. Groups need to foster inclusion, discussion, consensus building and relationships to be successful. As a Friends of the Park group leader, you will set the tone for the group as a whole.

Consider the suggestions below for how to be a Friends of the Park group leader that nurtures the spirit of community building (adapted from American Community Gardening Association):

Assume Positive Intentions.

People get really passionate about community action plans. If someone is coming to you with an issue and they seem heated, keep in mind that whatever is driving them is important to them. They're not after you, personally, but they are trying to solve a problem that is important to them. If you assume positive intentions, these interactions won't seem as personal and you can collaborate faster and get an issue resolved.

Show Respect.

One of the fundamental principles of successful leadership is respect for the ideas, opinions and wishes of others. By respecting people's contributions, you build an environment of trust that is invaluable to a healthy and well-functioning Friends group.

Communicate.

Nobody likes surprises or feeling left out. When your Friends group is new, you can't over communicate. Make open and frequent interactions part of your organizational playbook. Cultivate a leadership team and let people know everything that is going on, in a timely manner, so that you can overcome obstacles together.

Listen.

There are two types of listening: 1.) listening in order to reply, and 2.) listening in order to understand. If a group member presents an issue and, as you listen, you're taking in information to form a rebuttal, you're not really listening. If you're listening to really understand, you may not have an answer. And that's ok. By really listening to what members' ideas and concerns are, you build an atmosphere of trust and respect and can find solutions together.

Practice What You Preach.

Whatever the group agrees to, you as a leader and community member, need to respect those wishes and comply with them. Being a leader does not give you special privileges. The rules, and group decisions, apply to everyone. Period.



***“Park Pride, a park advocate’s
best friend.***

**~ Amy Johnson, Friends of
Reverend James Orange Park**

Advocating for Your Park

By forming a Friends of the Park group, you're simultaneously forming a park advocacy group and serving as the "voice" for your park within the community and with government officials. Whether your group is hoping to acquire land to create a completely new park, or replace a rundown playground, or build a community garden, your group will have to advocate for that change within the community and to the city or county government (the landowners).

For some, this role of "park advocate" might be a new one! But by following the guidelines for local advocacy below (adapted from the American Community Gardening Association), you'll be prepared to take a stand *for the greener good!*



Friends of Ormond-Grant Park

Develop allies.

Introduce potential allies, including government officials, nearby business owners, schools, churches, etc., to the change your *Friends* group is working towards in the park or greenspace. Determine areas of commonality and find ways that your park proposal will benefit your allies. Be sure to ask your allies to take specific actions to help your cause.

Be prepared for opposition.

Acknowledge, in advance, that there will be objections to your efforts. Know both who is likely to be in opposition and what objections they will raise. Read opposition material, study the newspapers, check websites, attend meetings. Determine if there are any points of commonality between the goals of the opposition and the goals you have for your park / park improvement. Learn, if possible, if you have contacts with those to whom the opposition listens.

Become known.

Invite decision-makers and the media to your greenspace and explain to them the goals of the *Friends* group's efforts. Host activities and community service opportunities for neighbors in the space – a children's program, for example, or a volunteer day. Present to nearby neighborhood and tenant association meetings and answer questions about your park project.

Use the media.

Develop a compelling message which includes what you are asking for and why you should get it. Assign spokespersons from the *Friends* group and have them practice giving your message. Make a list of the human interest stories that have arisen in/from the space. Write up the stories (with photos!) for neighborhood weeklies. Invite newspaper and TV reporters to the park to hear the story from community members.

Meetings Meetings MEETINGS.

Be prepared to attend public meetings of the city council, planning department, parks commission, city planning and zoning hearings, and health department. Whenever possible, sign up to speak at these meetings and present your message. Host meetings of your own to inform and motivate other park advocates.

Attend Park Pride Park Meetings and workshops to build skills and network with other park enthusiasts. Find dates and details at <http://parkpride.org/events>.

Resolutions, plans and ordinances.

Get friendly local legislators to sponsor and champion resolutions and ordinances supporting your efforts on behalf of the park. Be alert for opportunities to have your goals promoted and sanctioned within neighborhood and citywide planning and re-zoning efforts.

Celebrate successes.

Depending on what you're trying to accomplish in your park, your efforts may take many years to achieve success. However, there is always something to celebrate (alliances with new organizations, new member recognition, a positive meeting with a local official). To keep up spirits, demonstrate progress, become known, use the media, and involve allies, host press conference, parties, and congratulatory award events!

Be persistent.

The opposition party to your park efforts will hope that you will just go away. Don't let them wear you down! This is why having parties is so important to relieve tension and have the spirit to continue.

Be flexible.

Be open to changing your campaign to reflect the needs of allies or what you realize is more realistic long-term success. For example, you may not get a new playground this year, but if you've gained a commitment to the building of a larger playground next year, that's great progress!

Spread the love.

Consider the hundreds of other parks and communities within our greenspace system. They face many of the same challenges you might encounter with your own park. You can help Park Pride advocate for the bigger picture—world class, well-maintained, and accessible parks all over the region—and benefit other parks as well as your own! When communicating with elected officials and political candidates, voice your support for policies that bring more resources to parks maintenance, acquisition of land for new parks, and equitable access to quality greenspaces.

If you wish to receive park advocacy news and events, please reach out to the Marketing & Communications Manager to be added to the email list.

Hosting an Event

why host park events?

Events are good for the park.

Sustained, positive activity is essential to a safe and vibrant park. Especially if you're trying to "take back" a park, you need a steady stream of activities to bring in the good and drive out the bad. Events in a natural area, such as bird watching or a hike, can help introduce people to the park as a community resource. Host some evening events (music, sports), when the park is most often underused (or abused). When people have a good experience in the park, they are more likely to respect and support it in the future.

Events are good for your Friends of the Park group.

Events bring new people into the park and provide an opportunity to publicize your group. Take advantage by having a table at all events to sign people up for your mailing list and find out how to get involved or become a member. A successful, well-run event enhances your reputation, which helps you get more support and attendance at future events.

Hosting successful events also demonstrates to potential supporters that your group can make a difference in the park. This helps when seeking funds from everyone from elected officials to businesses.



Event at Little Nancy Creek Park

keys to planning a successful event

If your event requires a festival permit, you must apply to the City of Atlanta or DeKalb County for that permit at least 90 days in advance of the event!

Most other permits (pavilion or greenspace reservation, or amplified sound) must be submitted at least 30 days in advance.

Plan ahead.

Allow four weeks of planning for regular park volunteer clean-ups (to arrange for tools, mulch, etc.), at least six weeks for small events, and several months for large events. *Reach out to the Director of Community Building to get started on planning your event.*

Tap into other groups.

Encourage everyone—Scout troops, schools, athletic leagues, neighborhood associations—to participate in events. Better yet, get them to co-sponsor the event. Your group will benefit from another set of connections, multiplied resources and a lightened workload. Attend monthly Park Meetings to meet potential partners.

Dates and locations for Park Meetings can be found on Park Pride's Website.

<http://parkpride.org/events/>

Don't take on more than you can handle.

The number of people willing to help organize an event should determine its size and scale. Do something simple first, then build from there. Don't be afraid to scale back if you find you have been too ambitious.

Publicize!

Notify your mailing list. Put fliers up everywhere: shop windows, bulletin boards, in churches, schools, apartment buildings. List your events in the community calendars of local papers, social media and radio stations. Get your friends to tell their friends; nothing is more effective than word of mouth!

Expect the unexpected.

A first-time event will take more effort to plan than you think, and may go over budget. There might be bureaucratic hurdles you never expected, last-minute emergencies or torrential rain. Be prepared with a plan B! Plan well in advance so you have time to address any issues that arise.

Delegate responsibilities and develop expertise.

For example, have one person in your group work with the parks department to obtain the necessary permits and permission, another with publicity, a third with fundraising or membership. Having one person consistently responsible for something lets him or her build specific skills and useful relationships.

Say "thank you".

People will be happy to help you next time if you sincerely, publicly, and frequently thank them this time. When in doubt give people more credit than they deserve.

Build on successes.

Repeat annual events. People know to expect it and you begin to build traditions that lead to larger participation each year. Try to do at least one event each season to maintain your profile and presence in the park.



Park enthusiasts at Park Pride's Pints for Parks.





Connect with Us!



@parkpride #forthegreenergood

parkpride.org