



# bloom

Cultivating Stewardship for Parks

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## **2023 Park Friends' Group Handbook**

This document is the Park Friends Manual created by Bloom Inc., a parks advocacy non-profit. It aims to guide individuals and/or groups through the process of creating a Park Friends Group and help sustain that new group by providing resources, support, and information. This manual is a living document in which it is expected to continually change in order to meet the needs of the park volunteers.

## **Section 1: Establishing your friends' group**

### **What is a Friends Group?**

Park Friends groups are community-based volunteer groups, made up of at least three people that are officially affiliated with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation. These recognized City volunteer groups are established to support and advocate for a specific park area in the Philadelphia Parks & Recreation system. They are public community groups, where membership is open and accessible to all park users. Friends' groups work in close partnership with staff at Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR) and the Fairmount Park Conservancy (FPC) to create welcoming community green spaces and positive experiences with nature at the neighborhood level and in watershed parks. Successful Friends groups also engage with residents, community organizations, and external partners to achieve these goals and serve as the "community voice" for the park.

Typical Friends group activities include:

- Park cleanup and beautification days
- Fundraising events
- Organizing recreational and educational programming
- Advocating for park improvements
- Publicizing important park issues

The city of Memphis has a rich tradition of engaged citizens and active park groups. There are more than 120 active Friends groups of varying capacity, ranging from large 501(c)(3) organizations with several hundred members to grassroots community entities consisting of a smaller number of committed neighbors. City Parks promotes all civic engagement and actively works with our partners at the Fairmount Park Conservancy to provide service, resources, and training.

Bloom is committed to preserving and enhancing public green space throughout Philadelphia, which we believe can only be achieved through sustained civic engagement and park stewardship.

### **The Value of Stewardship**

Park Experts - You and Your Neighbors

You and your neighbors are the best advocates for your local park. You understand the value and needs of your neighborhood park. Collectively, you know when and how it is most commonly used. Is it dog-walking in the morning, or basketball in the afternoon? You can identify maintenance items like broken playground equipment, or needed improvements like trash receptacles. Working together, neighbors can partner with P&N and other community members to identify needs, address problems, and prioritize improvements in our neighborhood parks. This guide will help you get started.

## **How do I start a group?**

The first step in forming new Friends groups or re-activating a dormant group is to contact the Bloom. We will readily assist you in forming a Park Friends group as well as discuss your ideas for the park.

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There are a few questions to keep in mind when considering if and how you'd like to form a Park Friends group:

- Are you already a park adopter for this park? If not, are you willing to be a park adopter for 6 months before starting the friends group process?
  - Is your group forming in response to a specific problem within the park or around a specific goal?
  - Are you going to address a wide range of issues, and if so, which ones take priority?
  - How are you going to involve the community and work together to care for your park?

Bloom staff will guide you through the formation process and how to sustain your group over time. Through this partnership, your Friends Group will be provided with resources, park information, community engagement tips and support.

## **Community Input**

Understanding the needs of the park in combination with the needs of your community is an essential element in creating a Park Friends group. Community members who already frequent the park are a good place to start building your initial “core” membership (i.e., the people who attend group meetings, and are responsible for planning and implementing projects).

It is also important to reach out to the broader community in order to have an inclusive perspective and ensure your group's goals are in line with other community development efforts. You can do this either through a community meeting, a neighborhood survey, or both. Once you've reached out to your community, be sure to share the feedback with the PPR Stewardship Office so that together, we can assess the information and establish next steps.

Quick tips for holding community meetings:

- Choose a central space within the community, such as a rec center, civic association, or church, and make sure the meeting is timed to fit people's work schedules.
- Use a variety of methods to spread the word about your meeting—post flyers in your neighborhood rec center, coffee shops, grocery stores, and of course, in the park! If possible, have it announced in the local newspaper. Online social media (such as

Facebook, Nextdoor and Twitter) are also effective. Always remember to include your contact information!

- Reach out to other community groups, such as Civic Associations, and CDCs, to let them know about your meeting and ask them to spread the word to their members.
- Invite a representative from Parks and Recreation's Office of Stewardship to help facilitate discussions and answer community questions.
- Create a clear list of the park issues or goals your group wants to address.
- Have a "solutions" brainstorming session for the group with guidelines to ensure that everyone is respectful, and encourage everyone to practice active listening when others are speaking.
- Take notes! It's the best way to remember all the great ideas that will come out of the meeting.
- Have a sign-up sheet with contact information so the meeting notes/minutes can be shared with all in attendance. This can also serve as a recruitment list for future members of the Friends group.
- Announce the date for the next Friends group meeting – letting people know future dates (for meetings, events, service days) allows them to fit it into their own schedule and let other folks know when they can be involved.

#### Quick Tips for Community Survey

- Clear and concise survey questions
- Create a clear system for collecting data
- Encourage people to attend future Friends Group meetings
- Provide results for the community

#### **Creating your Mission Statement**

The mission statement will help your Friends group effectively communicate the purpose of the group not only to the community, but also to other Friends Groups and city residents. The mission should be established by the group as a whole with the help of the community input and needs assessment. The mission statement is a group effort and an assurance that all your "Friends" are in agreement when it comes to the purpose and goals of the group.

Here are a few examples of some mission statements:

Friends of Audubon Park- We are a community-based group intent on promoting opportunities for exercise, fun, and education, in the peaceful wooded Audubon Park.

Friends of Memphis Midtown Parks is a group of representatives who want to beautify and provide safe, equitable, and accessible parks in the midtown area for all ages.

Friends of Mill Ridge Park (Nashville)- To enhance and advocate for Mill Ridge Park to strengthen the community in Southeast Davidson County.

Friends of Shelby Park (Nashville)- Friends of Shelby Park and Bottoms is working to create a world-class park, by restoring and preserving its historic importance, protecting its environmental resources and providing amenities for active and passive recreation for all the people who use the park. The parks are an oasis of green space in the heart of Nashville. In working to preserve and enhance the park, Friends of Shelby serves neighborhood and city residents, local businesses, schools, and other organizations, as well as all park visitors from both inside and outside the community

Friends of Green Hill Park (Nashville)- Friends of Green Hills Park is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to improving our neighborhood park, building community & increasing walk and bike connectivity to nearby green spaces where we love to walk and play.

Friends of Vernon Park: Keeping Vernon Park, “The Emerald of Germantown”, healthy, green, and engaged in the community.

Each of these statements expresses the purpose of the Park Friends group and helps keep it in line with its defined goals. There are 5 items to consider when deciding on a mission statement and these should help simplify your mission statement process:

1. Needs and Opportunities to Address
2. Ways to Address These Needs and Opportunities
3. Values to Guide Your Group’s Work
4. Short- and Long-Term Goals Included in the Mission
5. Group’s Actions Reflected in the Mission

When the Mission Statement is completed, it should be submitted to the Bloom office for feedback. If it meets the requirement, the statement will be accepted and added to all information regarding your friends’ group on Bloom outlets.

### **Group Structure**

The leadership structure is up to you, whatever will work best for your park and community. Once you establish a structure, it should be clearly defined in writing and all members should be made aware. You should also determine how often you will vote on leadership roles, what that process entails, and consider setting term limits.

Established leadership roles can benefit your Park Friends group and help you stay organized; however, it does not have to be your first priority. We recommend that newly organized volunteers work together first before they consider having elections or creating a formal structure. Keep your group focused on establishing a common vision, setting goals that are attainable, and working together to implement small projects during your first year. This will allow you to get to know each other better and to determine the skills, contacts and resources that each volunteer brings to the table.

Bloom requires for there to be a one person that will be responsible for communication back to the Bloom office and vice versa, so in your first initial meetings, the group should designate that person and have their name on the Bloom paperwork.

Once your group is ready for a formalized structure, Bloom does not require a “set format,” but we find that many of our Friends groups successfully use a basic leadership format such as:

- President or Chair
- Vice President or co-Chair
- Treasurer
- Secretary

### **Your First Project: What Should It Be and How Do You Plan?**

Although the work you do is informed by the community, project planning will fall to the Park Friends group working in coordination with the City Parks Department and Bloom. Your first project could be a service day, a community event, or a park improvement project. A successful project takes time and substantial planning, so the sooner you begin the better!

It may be a good idea to start with a small project, which can be easily handled, then move onto a larger project. When community members see how successful a small project can be rather than seeing work going undone, they may be more inclined to attend future projects and service days.

#### **Service Days:**

Service days are important for keeping up with park maintenance and engaging the neighbors in community service. These planned service days can help encourage neighbors to spend the day outside and to keep coming back to the park if they find it to be a safe, clean, and healthy environment for themselves and their family.

They are fairly easy to organize, and offer a great opportunity to connect with neighbors and engage them in your park. Everyone benefits from a clean, sustainable park, and everyone’s help is needed to keep your neighborhood park in that condition! The more frequent your group hosts service days, the more obvious your group’s impact will be to the community. Memphis City Beautiful is a great resource for service days.

Some things to remember when planning your service days:

- Conduct a walkthrough to identify needs and determine the priority of possible projects. Make a list of all the necessary tools and materials you will need, and decide how you will secure the supplies.
- Let Bloom know about the date, time and scope of your service day so that we can support your efforts as resources allow.
- Draw on community connections for in-kind donations, such as snacks and water for volunteers, tools, and any other items your group needs for the service day.

- Compile a list of potential volunteers (from the contact information you've collected) and notify them about the upcoming service day two or three weeks ahead of time.
- Get the word out to the rest of the community using social media (e.g. Facebook, NextDoor, Instagram) and by putting up flyers in the park, nearby rec centers, local businesses, community centers, schools and religious institutions. Also send out a calendar listing for the event to your local newspaper.
- Send an email blast to potential volunteers the day before to remind them about the service day and to wear appropriate attire (clothes they don't mind getting dirty, closed-toe shoes, etc.).
- Plan to have a "Welcome Station" to greet folks as they arrive, register them with the sign-in sheet (Section 4) and distribute membership materials for your group.

#### Day of the Event Reminders:

- Arrive with enough time to prepare the site for the day's events – nothing worse than volunteers arriving with no one to greet them!
- Set up your "Welcome Station" with sign-in sheet and Friends Group information. Be sure to use the sign-in sheet attached in Section 4, which includes a liability waiver and space to record contact information of all volunteers.
- Once everyone has arrived, explain the details of your project and delegate tasks. Let volunteers know your approximate finish time and where to meet once they're done working.
- Inform volunteers of the location for restroom facilities and hydrations stations.
- Explain safety protocols and then direct volunteers toward the designated tool area.
- Take lots of pictures!! Post them on social media!
- Once the work is completed or it is time to stop for the day, round up all trash and equipment, and return all tools to the tool area.
- At the end of the day, remember to thank all your volunteers for their hard work. Let them know when your next service day or meeting will be, and encourage them to stay connected to the park.
- Congratulate yourselves on a successful workday!

### **Community Programs and Events**

Community programs and events are a great way to attract community members to your park and socialize with other neighbors. Community events can be a good opportunity for your Friends Group to do some fundraising, which could range from selling beverages and snacks to t-shirts and bags with your Friends Group logo.

While not everyone in the neighborhood may volunteer to pull weeds or rake leaves, few can say no to a festival, farmers market or concert. At every event, be sure to have a Welcome Table with information on your group, when you meet and your goals for the park. Certain events take more planning, and if this is your first time organizing a park event, it is a good idea to start small. A neighborhood potluck or picnic is a great way to get people into the park and collect their information with minimal planning on your part. Once introduced to your group, these community members will be connected to future park events

Considerations for Community Programs & Events:

- Demographics- What type of event would be most appropriate for your community?
- Timing- Is your event scheduled when the most people can attend?
- Permits- Does your event need a permit and if so, have you submitted it to the parks office?
- Frequency- Is this a one-time event, or do you want to have an ongoing series?
- Budget- What is needed and how will you secure funding?

### **Your First Project Was Such a Success! What Now?**

Successful service days and events are fantastic, and it is important to do everything possible to keep up the progress. Make your community aware of your success; advertise your accomplishments in the neighborhood newspaper, put it on your Facebook page and share the good news through an email to other organizations in your community.

To have a lasting impact on your park, you must think in the long-term. New projects will regularly arise, and you want to make sure you have a reliable base of volunteers. Schedule regular meetings for your Park Friends group. Most importantly, as you grow and expand your goals, the Stewardship Team will continue to be a resource for your group.

#### **Section 1 Summary:**

- If your group is not already a park adopter, contact Memphis City Beautiful and become a park adopter for your park.
- Initial Meeting where you will decide name and how to get community input (survey, more meetings, etc)
- After community input is received, decide goals, short term and long term, and mission statement.
- Decide group structure.
- Submit all of this information to Bloom for review.

#### **Requirements and Guidelines to be a Bloom Park Friends Group**

After you've been a park adopter for some time and your mission statement for your friends' group has been approved, here are a few more things that have to happen to get you off the ground: There are a few requirements and guidelines for any friends group that would like to be under the Bloom umbrella:

- Signed MOU with Bloom, that includes group name, groups official contact information (create a specific email address for your group), and the contact info for 2 individuals of the group.
- Mission Statement, Goals, and objectives should be on file with Bloom.
- There will be scheduled monthly calls between Groups leadership and Bloom for programming and news updates
- Hold at least one group meeting a month.
- Report volunteer hours, if applicable, every month to Bloom.



## **Section 2:**

### **Growing your Friends Group**

Growing your friends' group will allow for more opportunity within your park. There are several ways to increase the involvement in your friends' group, many of these methods have already been mentioned in previous sections; however, listed below are some methods to consider when growing your group.

How do I grow my Friends Group?

- Having regular meetings at central locations (advertising these meeting times)
- Posting flyers in the community
- Hosting events in the park
- Handing out informational material about your Friends Group
- Creating committees (can help people have responsibilities and take ownership)
- Social media (Facebook, blog, twitter, etc)
- Weekly email updates (have people sign up for the email list at events)

### **Promoting your Park**

The more community events and regular service days held at your park, the more familiar people will become with the park. Social Media is also another great way to create awareness about your park. These forms of social media range from creating a simple email address to creating your own Friends Group website. All of these options vary depending on how committed the core members of your Friends Group are and how often they are able to volunteer.

When considering your Social Media options, it is best to only start a form of Social Media when you know your group is able to commit to that form. The reason for this commitment is because it could create confusion about where to access your Friends Group information and you always want to have updated information available to the public.

Primary Internet Communication Forms:

- Email: A general email account is a great choice for any Friends Group and will allow for people to easily communicate with your group. It would be in the best interest of your group to designate one member to monitoring and managing your email account. Creating a Gmail account is free and easy to use! Gmail accounts allow for people to share documents, calendar events, and more.
- Facebook: Facebook is an effective way to communication with a large number of people. You are able to create a Facebook page and/or a Facebook group. A Facebook

page is very easy to manage and monitor, especially if you are planning on posting about a lot of community events and service days. Creating a page also allows for you to see how many people “like” your Friends Group and those people will receive updates about your group in their “news feed”.

- Blogging: A blog is a great way to inform people about events and display pictures for people to view as well as sharing stories for people to read. There are plenty of free blogs available online, such as wordpress.org and Tumblr.
- Creating a website: If you have the resources and time commitment, creating a website may be a good option for your group. Websites can range from simple and free to complex and a monthly fee. For an example, Friends of Patterson Park is well established group and in result has created a great website, [pattersonpark.com](http://pattersonpark.com)

### **Creating successful partnerships**

Outside of your partnership with Bloom, there are numerous opportunities for your Park Friends group to collaborate with other organizations. Start with local businesses, schools, religious institutions, civic associations and community development corporations who are already part of your community. Whether the local grocery store donates candy for your Halloween bash or the dog-walking group brings folks out to the next service day, every potential partner has something to contribute.

Learning about your partner’s interests, concerns and limitations is a first step towards understanding how you can work together. A successful partnership requires a large upfront investment of both time and effort. Each group or organization has its own perspectives, interests, and methods of accomplishing its goals, and it is important to keep them all in mind. Beneficial collaboration creates its own energy and produces its own rewards.

Quick tips for effective partnerships:

- Remain committed, patient, and flexible
- Focus on shared goals and how to best accomplish them
- Keep communication channels open and dialogue honest
- Never underestimate the value of “Thank you!”
- Hard work deserves celebration – always make time to publicly acknowledge all your partners

## **Building Relationships with local government**

Memphis City Parks Department

Nick Walker- Director

Marsha Allen- Deputy Director

Adrianna Moore- Community Engagement Administrator

Online: Visit [www.memphisparks.com](http://www.memphisparks.com)

Phone: 901-636-4200

## **Who Is My City Councilperson?**

Chairwoman Martavius Jones- Super District 8-3- Executive Assistant Britney Wright

Vice Chair J.B. Smiley- Super District 8-1- Executive Assistant Britney Wright

Councilwoman Rhoda Logan- District 1- Executive Assistant Jose Valentin

Councilman Frank Colvett, Jr. – District 2 Executive Assistant Nina Wilkins-Hitchings

Councilwoman Patrice J. Robinson- District 3- Executive Assistant Charity Cole

Councilwoman Jana Swearengen-Washington- District 4- Executive Assistant Ivy Johnson

Councilman Worth Morgan- District 5- Executive Assistant Jose Valentin

Councilman Edmund Ford Sr.- District 6- Executive Assistant Nina Wilkins-Hitchings

Councilwoman Michalyn Easter-Thomas -District 7- Executive Assistant Ivy Johnson

Councilwoman Cheyenne Johnson District 8-2- Executive Assistant Nina Wilkins-Hitchings

Councilman Chase Carlisle- Super District 9-1 Executive Assistant Charity Cole

Councilman J. Ford Canale- Super District 9-2- Executive Assistant Jose Valentin

Councilman Dr. Jeff Warren- Super District 9-3 Executive Assistant Ivy Johnson

Online: visit [www.memphistn.gov/government/city-council/](http://www.memphistn.gov/government/city-council/)

Phone: 901-636-6786

## **Why Should My Friends Group Be Involved with Our District Councilperson?**

Developing a relationship with your District Councilperson can be very beneficial to a Friends Group with advantages such as:

**Resources:** Your Councilperson determines how Philadelphia Activity Fund grants are allocated in their district. Your park group is eligible for this grant! Additionally, your Councilperson can connect you to other community groups active in your district to expand your group's local network.

**City Support Services:** Your Councilperson can assist with park issues and provide support for special projects.

**Capital Funding:** Your Councilperson can help with funding for park improvements and building enhancements.

