Creating A Friends Group

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Outline

- Why Friends?
- Roles and Responsibilities
- First meeting
- Organizing your Friends group
- Logistics
- Pitfalls
- Examples
Why have a friends group?

- Advocate
- Increase public awareness
- Raise funds
- Sponsor programming
- Provide support for programs or special events
- Establish a good volunteer base
- Enable you to achieve goals that might not otherwise be achieved.
- Bridge between park/forest and community
Things to Consider:

- How can you develop goals jointly?
- What is the purpose of the group?
- How will you work toward common goals?
- What can a friends group do that you can’t do on your own?
- Where will the group be housed? What can you offer?
- Liability
- Who has final say? Who from agency sits on board?
Role of the Friends/Friends Board

- Be informed and be an informer
- Work with a diverse set of user groups
- Leave behind personal or other organization agendas
- Seek win-win solutions
- Remember that you are the face of the public lands.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Govern the friends group
- Raise funds
First Meeting

Promotion—invite wide array of user groups—reach out to diverse audience

Planning

Agenda

Potential project ideas

History of park/forest

Time for open discussion
**Promotion**

- Advertise the meeting to attract interested people who are regular users.
- Personally invite volunteers and user groups.
- Reach out to civic organizations, tpa’s, business owners, and others who benefit from your work.
- Encourage attendees to help spread the word.
- Use social media, flyers, traditional media, and word of mouth.

- **Activity**: Who would you invite?
Planning the First Meeting

- Work cooperatively to develop agenda, plan location, and brainstorm projects.
- Location of meeting
- Refreshments.
- Assign someone to welcome guests as they arrive and have a sign in sheet to capture name, address, email, phone
- Have a rough idea of the purpose/mission of the group.
Sample agenda for first meeting:
Welcome and Introductions
Background on park/forest
What is a friends group
Sample projects
Ideas from audience
Discussion
Pulse of interest for group
Next steps
Follow Up To First Meeting

- Utilize on line communication to discuss goals/issues.
- Get a feel for leadership
- Build support for the group
- Begin baseline action plan
- Begin discussion of mission statement—participatory
- Discuss goals
- Organize second meeting
Steering Committee

- Serves as a transition body to a Friends group.
- Responsible for drafting the Friends’ Constitution and By Laws, as well as board structure.
- Board should represent the user groups.
- Keep board size minimal! Can always add committees.

- Activity: Potential board members and what to look for in a board member
Constitution and Bylaws

- Governing documents – Constitution and Bylaws - are a necessity to outline the purpose of your group, the executive positions and a job description for each position, what happens to the funds you raise and defines the friends relationship.

- If you are planning to apply for Charitable Status, governing documents are required as part of your application. You must also incorporate. Resource: PANO.org
Charitable Status

- PPFF Groups function under our charitable status.
- Benefits of charitable tax status.
  - the organization may issue tax receipts;
  - Exempt from taxation
  - May more readily qualify for other benefits;
  - More appealing to donors
  - Necessary to register with the BCO
- Takes time to receive approval at state and federal level.
- Yearly filing requirements must be met. Yearly conflict of interest statements now required.
- In Pennsylvania, also recommend that you register with BOC even if you do not meet the minimum average budget.
- Best to work with attorney for filing.
- Articles of incorporation, IRS filing, local/state requirements/bookkeeping
Organizational Questions

- Will it be a membership based organization?
- How will revenue be raised?
- Project priorities?
- How often with the group meet?
- Will there be committees of the board, and if so, what will they be?
- What are some easy projects that can be tackled in the beginning to bring success to the group, that are relevant to need and meet skill levels?
Keeping Things Moving

- It's easier to get people involved/keep people if they know what is expected of them and are given guidance but not micro-managed.
- Limit meetings—go quickly to actions.
- Stick to agenda at meetings—no meeting should last more than 90 minutes!
- Thank often.
- Have a plan
  - Activity: Discuss goals for your friends.
Early Success

- Pick a project that is guaranteed success, and do it.
- Promote the project and its success.
- Build relationships.
- Develop an identity—logo, brochure, etc.
As part of the action plan, identify key volunteers required. Develop position descriptions for these volunteers.

Develop committees based on the action plan and interests of the group.

Promote the friends group at every opportunity.

Remember: A member is not necessarily a volunteer and a volunteer is not necessarily a member.

For DCNR, all volunteers must be registered Conservation Volunteers.

- Activity: Develop a position description
Avoiding Pitfalls

- Communicate, communicate, communicate.
- Friends may either be an independent 501c3 or part of an umbrella organization, and must abide by the roles and responsibilities of this designation.
- Don’t assume.
- Prepare to spend time—especially in the early days of a group’s existence.
- Be aware of union concerns/constraints.
- Train, train, train; thank thank thank.
Success

- Visibility in the community
- Excellent media contacts
- A good volunteer base
- Being willing to learn from what other Friends groups have done
- A good recruitment plan for additional volunteers and Friends members
- Open communication with hosting entity.
- Flexibility and a sense of humor.
- Ability to answer question, “Why are we here.”

  - Activity: Why a friends group? Can your goal be met other ways?
Social Media

- Enewsletters
- Facebook/Twitter
- Pinterest
- Web pages (free)
  - Grassroots.org
  - Weebly
  - google