



# Friends Group Handbook

## A Guide to Resources and Requirements



## Welcome Friends

Thank you for your interest in serving as a Friends Group for the Fairfax County Park Authority! We truly value all of our community partners. Each of our Friends Groups help to make our wide variety of parks and programs successful. The following pages offer Friends Groups the guidelines and support to successfully get underway and start making an impact at your chosen park or program. I encourage you to take the time to read through these materials as you grow your Friends Group with the Park Authority. Establishing an open line of communication and an effective working relationship between the Park Authority and your Friends Group will benefit both organizations and the park or program will benefit immensely.

This Friends Group Handbook is a collection of best practices, resources, and responsibilities. Specifically, it covers roles and expectations, program planning, recruiting, and legal requirements.

People contribute to the Park Authority for a variety of reasons. Often the group is interested in and committed to the preservation of our environmental resources or maybe their life was touched by the site that they want to serve. Whatever the reason, time is generously donated for the park or program's benefit and preservation. We appreciate your commitment to working to provide our community with safe and enjoyable experiences.

The Park Authority values our Friends Groups. We welcome you, and thank you for your service!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K.W. Kincannon". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by a long horizontal line.

Kirk W. Kincannon, CPRP  
Fairfax County Park Authority Executive Director



## **Table of Contents**

<b>Welcome Friends</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introducing Friends Groups and the Park Authority</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Setting Up a Friends Group: Where to Begin</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Initial Planning</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Legal Requirements</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Managing and Maintaining a Friends Group (So you've signed an MOU...now what?)</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Planning as a Friends Group</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>List of Appendices</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix A: Acknowledgments and Additional Resources</b>	<b>16</b>



# Introducing Friends Groups and the Park Authority

## What are Friends Groups?

For more than 50 years, the Park Authority's Friends Groups have supported, enhanced and advocated for Fairfax County's parks, facilities and services. Friends Groups are individuals who come together to provide ongoing operations, programmatic, maintenance and/or fundraising support at a park, facility or specified program, and who work closely with a Park Authority staff liaison to develop projects and plans.

## What guides Friends Groups?

Friends Groups establish missions, visions, goals and objectives as a part of their formation process that should guide their plans and projects. These central themes should determine what types of projects the Friends Groups should pursue. Each Friends Group works closely with its respective Site Liaison and other Park Authority staff to achieve the goals and objectives of both the Friends Group and the Park Authority.

## What is the Park Authority?

The Park Authority is proud to be the lead park and recreation provider and steward of Fairfax County's precious public trust. The Park Authority is a nationally recognized and accredited leader in the park and recreation industry. With more than 427 parks on approximately 24,000 acres of land, the Park Authority strives to inspire and sustain a passion for parks and leisure experiences that enhances our community's quality of life.

The Park Authority Board sets policies and direction for the agency in meeting its mission and has adopted several overarching, countywide plans to guide the agency's efforts. The Park Authority Executive Director leads a large and diverse workforce of full- and part-time staff and volunteers in implementing these policies and plans to render services, programs and facilities to meet the agency's mission. You can find more about the park system by visiting the [Park Authority website](#) or read more in [Appendix B, Park Authority Governance and Management](#).

## What guides the Park Authority?

The agency's mission, vision, and values guide the type of services provided to the community and Park Authority staff's management decisions.

### Mission:

The Park Authority mission is to enrich the quality of life for all members of the community through an enduring park system that provides a healthy environment, preserves natural and cultural heritage, offers inspiring recreational experiences and promotes healthy lifestyles.

### Vision:

The Park Authority strives to inspire a passion for parks, healthy lifestyles, and stewardship by providing a sustainable, dynamic, and inclusive park system to support a thriving community.

### Values:

- **Enhancing Stewardship:** We are stewards for a wonderfully rich community trust of natural and cultural resources. We will provide leadership to expand awareness, appreciation and protection of this heritage.
- **Fostering Diversity:** We embrace the diversity of our community and seek to provide every resident with a wide variety of park experiences and recreational opportunities.
- **Developing Partnerships:** We believe seeking and maintaining active partnerships with neighborhood and community organizations and individuals is essential to becoming a vital and treasured component of the communities we serve.
- **Providing Quality and Value:** We are committed to providing high quality facilities and services that offer superior value and prompt efficient service to our customers and the community.
- **Communicating Effectively:** We strive for productive two-way communication with residents and our staff to allow all to participate fully in creating quality parks and services.
- **Valuing Our Workforce:** We believe our paid and volunteer staff is the key ingredient to our success and commit to creating a participative, team-oriented organization including career development opportunities and meaningful recognition.

- **Demonstrating Fiscal Responsibility:** We are committed to building and preserving a park system that meets the community's needs in a cost effective, fiscally responsible manner.

### **Roles and Relationships between Friends Groups and the Park Authority**

The Friends Groups and the Park Authority work hand in hand to improve the park system in Fairfax County. The partnership promotes a cooperative working relationship between the Friends Groups and Park Authority Board members and staff in order to represent the community's views. The partnership also promotes coordination and communication between the Friends Groups and Park Authority staff to offer services to the community and improve parks and services.

Each Friends Group has a site-specific Staff Liaison within the Park Authority who serves as their primary point of contact for working on projects and events. The Park Authority also has a Central Outreach Friends Group Coordinator to assist with new Friends Group formation among other things. We recognize the importance of the support the Park Authority receives from the Friends Groups and look forward to continuing our efforts to strengthen these relationships.

The Park Authority encourages Friends Groups to form, grow and support parks, facilities and programs. The Park Authority may grant Friends Groups permission to use park names, provide services and conduct business on parkland. The Park Authority is committed to providing resources to Friends Groups to help them advance their missions.



# Setting Up a Friends Group: Where to Begin

## Getting Started

### Get a core group or committee together

Get your group together and identify community support. These resources may include community members, community groups, neighbors, park patrons, corporate groups, existing stakeholder groups or local organizations who share an interest in parks or the services provided by the Park Authority.

### Consult your resources

Existing resources you may consider:

- Visit the [Park Authority Friends Group web page](#) to see which Friends Groups exist and what opportunities you may find. Reach out to existing Friends Groups to learn how they work and any information they can share with you.
- Contact the Park Authority's Central Outreach Friends Group Coordinator located in the Director's Office. Contact information can be found on the [Park Authority Friends Group web page](#).
- Contact the Park Authority staff member with knowledge of park needs related to your interest area. The Park Authority Staff Liaison will be extremely helpful as you start to brainstorm ways to best support your park or program.
- Consult your [Park Authority Board member](#).
- Consider input from the park neighbors.

### Hold interest meetings

There are really two basic ways to begin. You can either launch the group with the small starter committee and share the objectives and reasons for forming a friends group, get organized and then grow the group **OR** simply schedule a meeting in a local public place, invite everyone you know, and announce the meeting any way you can think of. Use the meeting as an open forum to discuss the park and what ideas people have on what they want to do or what they think needs to be done. Be sure to invite the appropriate Park Authority staff to provide information or background on the park(s) and needs, budget, etc. Establishing a good working relationship with the Park Authority Staff Liaison to your park or program will help to foster open communication going forward.

### First-meeting suggestions:

Appoint one person to moderate the meeting and keep it focused.

- Have an agenda and take notes.
- Ask attendees to sign in and provide their contact information and park interest areas.
- Foster engagement by having attendees introduce themselves at the beginning of the meeting.
- Introduce your concepts and ideas and get feedback; identify issues and have a brainstorming session on how they may be resolved.
- Review the [FCPA Friends Group Policy](#) and [MOU requirements](#). May want to consider becoming a Park Volunteer Team until the group is established and ready to apply for Friends Group status. The Park Authority Staff Liaison can assist with this discussion.
- Develop a list of tasks to be accomplished by the next meeting and identify who is to be responsible for accomplishing tasks.
- Set up your next meeting time and location.
- Expand potential membership by encouraging attendees to bring someone with them to the next meeting.
- Ensure you've included surrounding residents who may be affected by activities at the park/site.

### Second meeting suggestions:

Focus on some initial key priorities and getting down to business. Topics may include:

- Choosing a group name
- Establishing a mission and a vision
- Setting up a plan for first-year goals
- Setting up a Facebook page or simple website
- Organizing your first Friends Group program and/or event with the public
- Setting up a community outreach plan

### Coordinating with the Park Authority

Once your group has met and is ready to move forward in organizing, the PA has a [Friends Group Interest Application Form](#) that needs to be filled out and will be kept on file. It is located here.



# Initial Planning

## Defining a mission and vision statement

Effective groups have a clear understanding of their purpose and what they want to accomplish. The mission, vision, goals and objectives of the group should align with the Park Authority, a specific park or an area of interest. If you clearly define your mission, it may be easier to convince others to help you because they'll know exactly what you're about. Early efforts may determine the group's course of action for years to come. Specific items to work on include:

- The mission is a clear, concise sentence or two that voices the primary goals of the group. Your mission may be about physically improving the park, providing interpretive programming for the park or increasing awareness or usage of the park. Whatever your mission, it should complement the Park Authority's mission, vision and values.
- The vision is an image of your park in ideal circumstances. It creates the focus of what collaboration can accomplish. Vision is what motivates and requires partners to act. The vision guides decision making and evaluation, and it creates the boundaries for the partnership.
- Strategic objectives or goals are the methods for carrying out the mission to reach your vision. They should be small tangible steps and tasks that help you achieve the mission. Those steps and tasks will eventually become the annual plan. There are optional templates for [Park Authority Friends Group Annual Planning Form](#) and a [Friends Group Annual Reporting Form](#) to help keep it simple. It can be modified to fit your group's needs and is

designed to help you organize and report out your accomplishments. These forms are **optional**, but may prove helpful in your group's planning process and in communicating your plans with the Park Authority Staff Liaison, potential members and possible financial supporters.

### Examples:

Short-Range Goals – (smaller simpler items to help get you started)

- Host a park cleanup day in the spring to remove the winter trash build up.
- Hold an open house at the park to let others know about the Friends Group (FG).

Mid-Range Goals – (as your group expands and develops)

- Buy tools and supplies you may need for upcoming projects.
- Solicit contributions from local neighborhood businesses.

Long Range Goals – (once your group has stabilized)

- Host regular environmental education and restoration projects.
- Start charging membership fees to provide a revenue source to your group.

Some additional considerations to keep in mind in establishing your goals and objectives:

- **First consult your resources.** Before you get too far into the planning effort, make sure you have consulted the site's Master Plan, operation plan and interpretive plan as well as with park staff to learn what the opportunities are, what's available, what's been done and what's needed.



- **Be realistic.** Don't expect to renovate an old rundown structure like an historic barn or restore a stream bank next week, but you could possibly host a cleanup or invasive plant removal as a public event to help the park and get the word out about your group, your goals and the project you are starting. Many groups break their goals into short-range, mid-range and long-range goals. It's whatever best works for your group as every situation is unique. Remember that you're not just helping your park, you're growing a community group. As your group gains experience and sophistication, your effectiveness in the park will grow too.
- **Start slow, be successful and build upon the group's successes and momentum.** If you become lost and start losing focus, remain positive and review where you are. Revisit your mission, vision and goals and objectives. Don't hesitate to reach out for park staff assistance or ask them what they feel the park needs. Keep in mind that groups go through the normal group dynamic phases of forming, storming and norming before becoming effective.
- **Friends Group Webpage** – <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/friends>

### Setting up the organizational structure

Here are some things to consider when establishing your friends group and its identity:

- **Establish a Name (and a Logo)** - A name makes your group official, while a logo looks great on flyers and in newspaper articles and on top of your letterhead. It's most typical to insert the word "Friends" in the title somewhere as it helps people to have a standardized understanding of the relationships among the group, the Park Authority and your community. Make sure to look on the [State Corporation Commission website Business Entity](#) to make sure the name you choose isn't already in use.
- **Set up Regular Meetings** - So that group leaders can report to the general membership and ask for their input. Meetings keep your organization from turning into a one-person show.
- **Make sure you have an Elected Leadership** – A well-functioning, well-organized and dynamic board is important for creating and sustaining a successful organization. While the overall success of

the Friends organization is a partnership effort, the Board of Directors holds "the principal responsibility for fulfillment of the organization's mission and the legal accountability for its operation." Though the general membership usually votes for the "natural leaders" anyway, elections ensure that your group is democratic, and that one person isn't calling all the shots. Regular elections also mean that a leader can pass on the torch before he or she burns out. Although the group's leadership can have as many members as the group wants, there are four essential positions to consider: chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary and treasurer.

- The **chairperson** helps the group to achieve its goals, sets agendas, conducts meetings and acts as the group leader, ensuring its smooth operation. The chairperson should act as a good facilitator, ensuring positive discussions and involve all members of the group.
- The **vice chairperson** assists with positions within the committee and provides cover when the secretary and chairperson cannot be available.
- The **secretary** ensures all group members are kept fully informed and that they feel involved and included. The secretary prepares the group's paperwork and agendas for group meetings, takes minutes of meetings, books meeting rooms, maintains the group's records and supports the chairperson.
- The **treasurer** looks after the group's financial activities, ensuring accounts and records are up to date and accurate. The treasurer is responsible for arranging to open the group's bank account, paying bills, filing appropriate paperwork with the state and IRS and for preparing financial reports to the group.

Other positions you might want to consider in setting up your Friends Group leadership include:

- **Event coordinator** manages event budget effectively, arranges to hire vendors, and seeks permission and booking of a venue. Coordinates event set up, technical specifications, site plans and health and safety requirements.
- **Marketing and communications** coordinator aims the objectives of the group to the wider



community, including the local press, radio and other media bodies, etc. Arranges a variety of public relations initiatives on behalf of the group to promote the group's most recent achievements in projects, funding and activities. May develop or coordinate the group's communication to include email blasts, newsletters and social media sites.

- **Membership coordinator** works to keep information updated on existing members, works to solicit new members, provides welcome information or specifics a new member may need to know.
- **Webmaster** designs and maintains the group's website and social media efforts, inserts information, content and images. Modifies the site by updating new content and links web address to other programs and other web directories.

These core members are critical and need to work hard together to help establish the credibility of the group and inspire the other members in the group. If there are stakeholders with something to contribute who do not easily fit a board role, consider setting up Advisory Groups to allow those to contribute their specialties. When recruiting board members, people with the ability to raise funds, or who can comfortably approach others for donations, is a very important trait to look for. The sustainability and success of a Leadership Committee or Board of Directors is closely tied to the culture it creates. Nurturing relationships is as important to board functioning as it is for the collaboration overall. Board members who don't know each other may have difficulty working together. Set aside time for board members to learn about each other. Some key areas leaders can work on to move towards a well-functioning unit include:

- Give everyone a job
- Nurture relationships
- Expect accountability
- Honor diversity
- Become well educated (be familiar with the group's governance and goals, be familiar and understand the Park Authority, come to meetings prepared and ask questions.)

## Bylaws

Once the leadership and record-keeping structures are established, it may be a good time to draft your bylaws. Bylaws are the internal, written rules that govern your group, and define how the organization will be managed and run. Bylaws can be readily revised to deal with specific issues. For example, they may identify which board members have authority and decision-making responsibilities and how those responsibilities should be carried out, they may establish the dates and times for set meetings, etc.

Bylaws should address:

- Name and purpose of organization
- Membership
- Board of Directors
- Board - role, size, terms, meeting and notices, elections, election procedures, quorum, officers and their duties, dealing with vacancies, resignation, termination and absences, standards of conduct and dues
- Committees – defines and outlines what is established i.e. Executive, Finance and Budget
- Fiscal Policy/definition of the annual accounting year
- Liability and Limitations
- Amendments
- Dissolution statement
- Miscellaneous

Your bylaws can be amended simply by a vote of your board or you can spell out more specific guidance for board governance and activities and readily update them as needed. They should fit your organization and ensure members are aware and knowledgeable of them. It is a good idea to review them annually and have them on hand for your meetings for reference as well. Copies of updated Bylaws should be provided to the IRS, the SCC and the Park Authority. Your bylaws can also help you later in drafting your Articles of Incorporation for the Virginia State Corporation Commission. [This](#) is a resource from the IRS regarding establishing bylaws for a nonprofit you may want to review.

## Legal Requirements

### Non-profit status

All Friends Groups must register with the IRS as a non-profit organization. The IRS website has detailed instructions to guide you through the steps to file as a [501\(c\)3 non-profit organization](#).

[This page](#) on the IRS website also has a lot of useful information as you work through becoming (and staying) a charitable organization.

### Incorporation

You will need to file with the [Virginia State Corporation Commission](#) to create a new Virginia business. There is detailed information available on its website about exactly how to complete those steps. The Commission also has a Non-Profit Toolkit available [here](#).

### Insurance

The Friends Group will consult with an insurance professional to acquire the appropriate insurance coverage based on your group's structure and activities. Insurance policies should include general liability insurance and coverage for directors and officers at a minimum. Once your Friends Group is incorporated, you will no longer be covered under the county's volunteer liability insurance. Thus, each Friends Group is required to maintain its own insurance policy to protect its members and board officers.

### Memorandum of Understanding

On the [Friends Group webpage](#), you will find the [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) template](#).

This template should be used by the Friends Group to create the customized MOU specific to your group. This document serves to formalize the relationship between the Friends Group and the Park Authority. Once signed by the Park Authority Executive Director, a Friends Group representative, and the Site/Program Liaison, the MOU will be in effect for 5 years, with an option to extend for another 3 years.

### Additional Suggestions

Registering as a charitable organization – If your Friends Group intends to solicit donations, you must register with the state and local governments as a charitable organization.

- At the state level – contact Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs in the Division of Consumer Protection, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. For more information, visit this [website](#) or call (804) 786-5005.
- At the Fairfax County level – Once you have registered with VDACS, you will not need to register with Fairfax County. You WILL be asked to submit a copy of the VDACS letter to Fairfax County Regulation and Licensing Branch for verification. See their [website](#) here for more information.



# Managing and Maintaining a Friends Group (So you've signed an MOU...now what?)

## Working together

Just as every park is unique, every park group is unique, and you must find the structure that works best for the members of your group. Here is a general list of tips to keep in mind:

- **Be Inclusive.** Parks are shared, public spaces and park groups should include people with different interests and perspectives. Remember, don't do it alone.
- **Engage Your Community.** Present your ideas to your community at public meetings, gatherings, online or in print. Work transparently and document and share community response.
- **Partner with Your Staff Liaison.** The Park Authority staff is a resource for your group. The Staff Liaison will help support your initiatives, help you to navigate within the larger Park Authority and help your group to develop goals and plans that align with the Park Authority's overall goals and plans for your site or program. Working together is a win for all involved.
- **Focus on Important Needs.** You can't do it all. Select those things that can be successfully accomplished to make the biggest difference. Work to maintain that shared vision.
- **Expect to Negotiate.** In any healthy park group, there may be competing interests. Advocate for something that the group feels passionate about but expect to compromise.
- **Get Together.** Shared dinners, events and lively meetings are the lifeblood of park groups. People need to see each other to provide meaningful support. Maintain momentum by getting together regularly. Have fun and make new friends!
- **Share Responsibility.** Don't burn out. Invite those extra-energy members to help and participate in the responsibilities of the group.
- **Keep Recruiting.** The more people you have, the more you'll get done and the more attention you'll get from everyone!

- **Pursue the "Yes" Initiatives.** Some park groups get bogged down in keeping things out of their park. Over time, rallying around the "No" can be tiring. Use "Yes" initiatives to spread the word around your group's goals and passion.
- **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.** Don't think everyone knows or sees things the same way. Keep your working team, your membership and the Park Authority apprised of happenings. Use the network of other Friends Groups across the Park Authority to share success stories and collaborate on events or programs.

## Record Keeping

You should set up files to preserve your important documents, reports and other official records. If your group is to continue to exist through the years as leadership changes you must have a way of passing on important information. There should be files filled with letters you've written and received, meeting minutes and agendas, budgets, annual plans and reports to the Park Authority, newspaper articles, old flyers, photographs, legal documents, membership lists and business cards. After the MOU is signed, the Park Authority requires copies of any incorporation changes, nonprofit determination changes, annual proof of insurance and Annual Planning and Reporting documents. The Virginia State Corporation Commission and [IRS](#) have guidelines on what is specifically required. The IRS even has a training video to [help](#).

You may want to consider setting up generic Friends Group email accounts for officers in your group that can be easily transferred as your volunteers' roles change in the future. This might look like [presidentFGpark@gmail.com](mailto:presidentFGpark@gmail.com), [treasurerFGpark@gmail.com](mailto:treasurerFGpark@gmail.com), etc. This should also help with document retention and sharing knowledge as your leadership changes.





# Planning as a Friends Group

## Program/Project Planning

Start with looking at your annual goals and objectives. Begin small to do it well. Having one small successful project is better than multiple half completed projects. Be sure to include your Staff Liaison in your discussions and plan development. They can provide ideas and information about needs for the park or program. They often can also help with resources for your group. Consider forming a committee to organize each event. That may work to get more of your membership involved and to coordinate with park staff.

Set up a simple programming/activity or events calendar (like the example below) that coincides with your goals to keep everyone on track.

## Types of events/programs to consider

### Service days/Open Houses

Are good to start out and provide exposure to your group while helping your park. You might consider having a table at a local community or neighborhood event to help inform people about your group and attract prospective members. Always talk to the park staff and see what assistance they need and what assistance they may be able to provide that day. Help staff conduct an inventory of the site, if one hasn't been done, to come up with ideas

## Sample Events Calendar

Activity	When	Resources	Who	Comments
Board Meetings	Quarterly	Secure venue and coffee	Board of Directors	Dates to be agreed on at first meeting
Annual Meeting	February	Ask park staff for room space; Buy beverages/cookies	Board and all Membership	January send newsletter on info and soliciting dues payments
Spring Watershed Clean up	April 5	Park staff will take away debris		
Sign in for all volunteers	Event Committee, membership and public	See if timing fits with County Wide Clean ups		
Summer Fun Community Event	June	Whole Foods Sponsor	Event Committee	Coincide with Park and Rec Month
Fall Open House	October 1	Sell baked goods for the Capital Campaign project	Event Committee	

of what can be accomplished. Everyone benefits from a clean and safe park.

Basic day of event reminders:

- Arrive in enough time to prepare the site for the day's event.
- Set up a Welcome Station for the members/volunteers that are helping, but also for the public that may be interested in learning or joining your group.
- Once everyone arrives who is helping with the event, make sure they have signed in and provide details of your project, expectations and delegate tasks. Let everyone know approximate finish times and where to meet once everyone is done.
- Make sure your volunteers know where the restrooms are and where they can get water.
- At the end of the day always thank your helpers and contributors.

## Community Programs and Fun Events-

Are proven to attract the community to your park. Neighborhood pot lucks, picnics or dances are a great way to get people out to meet others and learn about your group. Music and food typically always bring people together. Take advantage of the holidays to bring the community together. Get your ideas together and talk to park staff for help on what they have scheduled or what they've tried in the past.



#### Considerations for events:

- Have you looked at what's already been offered or happening at the park?
- Demographics – what type of event would be most appropriate for your community?
- Timing – is it scheduled when most people can attend?
- Permits – have you coordinated with the site liaison and obtained necessary permissions and/or support?
- Frequency – is this a one-time event or do you want an ongoing series of events such as a summer concert series etc.?
- Budget – what is needed and how will the funding be secured to cover expenses?

#### Physical Improvement Project

These are great projects and can fulfill tremendous need for the parks and provide great tangible satisfaction for your group. These are larger projects that need to be planned with and approved by the Park Authority. (Gardens, landscape, signage, trail heads, communication boards, water sources, etc.) Working with the park manager and reviewing the park's Master Plan is imperative to ensure your project can be accommodated within the overall vision for the park/site. If you've had the opportunity to raise funds, make sure you look at the Park Authority Mastenbrook Volunteer Matching Grant Program as it can potentially double your dollars up to \$20k. Learn more about the Mastenbrook Grant Program [here](#).

Larger capital projects take more planning time. Capital projects vary, but most have a defined process where your group will work closely with staff who oversee your park, Park Authority Planning and Development staff, often the Park Authority Director's office and possibly the Park Authority Board and/or Park Authority Foundation. Below are some general steps and considerations when embarking on a larger project with the Park Authority and/or another partner.

- Identify the project team and its various roles.
- Establish the partnership, sometimes there are agreements.
- Identify, consult and involve people – gain input and community support.
- Understand the site location.
- Secure the funding.
- Appoint the design consultant or gain permission to use Park Authority staff.
- Develop a vision for the site.
- Develop a scope of work/and the formal proposal (may include drawings).
- Work with Park Authority Planning and Development Division staff to develop a detailed proposal.
- Acquire appropriate approvals and permits following the Virginia procurement processes
- The contract is awarded or sometimes, depending on the project, Park Authority staff may be used.
- Start construction (ground breaking - press opportunity) - federal, state and county building codes, storm water, fire and ADA are all adhered to.

- Final completion/punch out.
- Turn over to operations and secure maintenance plan.
- Grand opening to the public (another press opportunity).
- Evaluate the process – lessons learned and celebrate successes.
- Keep the momentum going and look towards what's next!

### Federation of Friends

The Federation of Friends is an umbrella coalition group made up of Park Authority Friends Group representatives from individual parks and areas across the county. Meetings provide an opportunity for all Friends Groups to come together and share experiences, suggestions, and success stories. This group meets at least once annually to hear from Park Authority staff and others on issues important to Friends Groups. Be sure to contact the Park Authority's Central Friends Group Coordinator to make sure your new Friends Group is added to any distribution lists for pertinent information and updates pertaining to Friends Groups, including notices for future Federation of Friends meetings.

### Funding Assistance

#### Mastenbrook Grants

- The [Mastenbrook Grants](#) program provides limited matching funds for projects in Fairfax County parks. Since 1999, more than 120 Mastenbrook Grant projects have been completed, including dog parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, shade gardens and tree plantings. This flexible program allows volunteers to match funds or provide in-kind services. The target maximum amount of grant funding is \$20,000 per project, and matching funds cannot exceed 50% of the total project cost. Individuals or groups can apply for capital development funds for a local park project. Each individual or group may be approved for more than one project per fiscal year, as long as the combined amounts of the approved grant funding does not exceed \$20,000.

Each application is reviewed by park staff, which then makes a recommendation to the Park Authority Board. The board makes the final decision on funding. The

proposed projects must address Park Authority needs and must serve the public. Project designs must meet all Park Authority standards and code requirements.

### Capacity Building Funds

- The Capacity Building Fund (CBF) is an annual grant opportunity developed by the Park Authority and the Park Foundation to support Friends Groups' endeavors to enhance Fairfax County Park Authority Sites/Programs. Friends Groups that have a signed MOU with the Park Authority may apply for funding to cover or partially cover the costs of projects, programs, equipment, or park supplies. Upon approval, the Park Authority will grant Friends Groups funding of up to \$1,000. The approved Capacity Building Fund is donated by the Park Foundation to the Park Authority, and park staff and Friends Groups coordinate purchases using the Capacity Building Funding. Friends Groups should click [here](#) for an application for CBF.

### Other Grant Opportunities

- There are many grant opportunities available to non-profit organizations. One way to learn more about these opportunities is to go to the Fairfax County Office of Public Private Partnerships (OP3), which has a [Grants Research and Training Center](#). They offer workshops, grant review assistance, tools for non-profits, and much more.

You should coordinate any grant application efforts with the [Park Foundation](#). Foundation representatives can offer assistance and guidance through the grant application process. They may also have suggestions on potential grant opportunities that your Friends Group may be interested in soliciting.

### Ways to Support the Park Authority

There are many opportunities for the Friends Groups to support the Park Authority.

Advocacy efforts on behalf of your park/site and on behalf of the entire Park Authority will prove very effective. These efforts may include attending hearings, speaking to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, distributing information and supporting Park Authority



initiatives. Your support in the bond process, which happens on a four-year cycle, is critical. There will be public hearings, meetings with the Park Authority Board and the County Board of Supervisors. Gathering support for the bond effort with your Friends Group members to make sure they come out on election day and vote for the bond project is also important.

Holding events or fundraisers that raise money for the park site or program is also a great way to support the Park Authority. Your Friends Group can donate collected monies to the Park Authority through the Park Foundation. The Friends Group should verify with the Staff Liaison and the Park Foundation that their fundraising project aligns with the Park Authority

mission, goals, and plans. Any donation given to the Foundation can be designated for a certain park site, program or project and restrict what that money can be used for. The Foundation will then transfer the money to the appropriate Park Authority fund with the specific donor or donating organization restrictions. The Staff Liaison will then work with the Friends Group to use the funding to support the park or program as required. In the past, Friends Groups have raised and donated money to purchase equipment, send staff to training events, to fund interns to run programs at their park site, or other things that supported the Park Authority's ability to better serve the community. There are many ways fundraising money can be used in this fashion.



## List of Appendices

A. Acknowledgements and Additional Resources Page

B. [Park Authority Governance and Management](#)

## Appendix A: Acknowledgments and Additional Resources

[Board Source](#) – Starting a Non-Profit Organization

[City of Portland Maine](#) – Friends and Community Partners Handbook

[Fairfax County Park Foundation](#)

[Internal Revenue Service](#)

National Parks Conservation Association -  
[Best Practices in Friends Groups and National Parks](#)

Park People, Toronto Alliance for Better Parks -  
[Park Friends Group Guidebook](#)

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation –  
[Philadelphia Park Friends Group Toolkit](#)

[Virginia State Corporation Commission](#)

Virginia State Parks – DCR - [Volunteer Citizen Support Organizational Manual](#)



# Appendix B: PA Governance and Management

## What are the legal relationships that guide the Park Authority?

The Park Authority derives authority from both the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Fairfax County Government. The Virginia State Code known as “[The Park Authorities Act](#)”, allowed for the establishment of a park authority with the power to acquire, purchase, lease as lessee, construct, reconstruct, improve, extend and maintain parks within the geographical jurisdiction of the authority’s participating locality as well as conduct all business associated with those actions.

At the county level, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (BOS) passed the Park Authority Ordinance in 1950. The Ordinance established the Park Authority for the purpose of:

- Surveying the need for park facilities in the County of Fairfax,
- Acquiring and developing park facilities and
- Maintaining and operating park facilities.

[The Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) Appendix 5 between the Park Authority Board (PAB) and the BOS describes the fundamental guidelines by which the Park Authority functions within Fairfax County. The MOU addresses budget, finance, purchasing and personnel, and it outlines the responsibilities of the Director who is appointed by the PAB. The [Park Authority Policy Manual](#) guides the PAB to arrive at decisions in accordance with the mission, objectives, and associated laws, but which allows discretion and latitude contingent on different circumstances, situations, or conditions. [The Fairfax County Organizational Chart](#) provides a picture of the chain of command among more than 50 agencies throughout the county and where the Park Authority fits in. The County Executive serves as the official administrative liaison between the Board of Supervisors and the PAB. The Park Authority falls under Deputy County Executive – Infrastructure.

## What is the Park Authority Board (PAB) and what is its governance role?

The PAB is a 12-member semi-independent authority appointed by the BOS that is authorized and responsible for policy making and establishing priorities for the organization. The primary functions of the PAB are: Policy Development, Long Range Planning, Capital Planning and Bond Development, Fiscal Management of the Park Revenue & Operating Fund & Park Improvement Funds, Advocacy and Community Relations and the Director’s Performance Evaluation. Information about the PAB’s agendas, calendars and members can be found on the [Park Authority Board webpage](#). The PAB members are a resource and liaison to our Friends Groups.

## What are the Park Authority’s key strategies and guiding documents and where can I find them?

The Park Authority has adopted several overarching, countywide plans to guide the agency’s efforts in different thematic areas. These documents are available on the Park Authority website and many are driven by PAB policies. These various plans should be considered tools for your group in better understanding the Park Authority and its strategic direction. Being familiar with them may assist your group with resources and help to align your group’s mission and goals with the Park Authority’s.

### Strategic Plan

The [2019-2023 Strategic Plan](#) connects individuals and communities with the many park benefits by creating greater understanding of how parks positively impact our quality of life in Fairfax County. The Park Authority has established seven guiding principles: inspire a passion for parks, meet changing recreation needs, advance park system excellence, strengthen and foster partnerships, be equitable and inclusive, be great stewards and promote healthy lifestyles. By utilizing a balanced scorecard approach of key measures, the Park Authority can gauge its progress towards a set of stated objectives over a five-year period.

### Agency Master Plan

The [Great Parks, Great Communities Plan](#) (master plan) is a 10-year master plan for the entire parks & recreation system that guides the agency in meeting community



needs for today and the future. The master plan builds on the findings from the [Parks Count Needs Assessment](#) that was completed in spring 2016. The 2017 Great Parks, Great Communities Parks & Recreation System Master Plan is the first agency-wide plan to encompass all Park Authority plans, programs and initiatives. PAB approved the Master Plan in December 2017.

### **Capital Improvement Program (CIP)**

Guides the development of public facilities over a five-year period. It shows the arrangement of projects in a sequential order based on a schedule of priorities and assigns an estimated cost and anticipated method of funding each project. For the latest details on the Park Authority CIP go [here](#).

### **Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP)**

Provides information, policies and practices needed to preserve and protect remaining cultural resources in Fairfax County; engage and educate staff and the public in resource stewardship; and integrate resource protection into all planning, development and management activities. It can be found [here](#). The PAB receives an annual update each summer.

### **Energy Management Plan**

Guides and coordinates agency-wide efforts to make all its facilities as energy efficient as possible. The PAB receives an annual update each fall.

### **Financial Management Update (FMU)**

Provides financial projections and principles for managing the Park Authority's two Revenue Funds. (Park Revenue and Operating Fund 80000 and Park Improvement Fund 80300). The Plan is updated and brought to the PAB for approval annually, concurrent with the budget planning cycle. The latest plan can be found [here](#). The Park Authority's [Comprehensive Annual Financial Report](#) is also another valuable document describing the agency's financial status.

### **Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP)**

Provides information, policies and practices needed to preserve and protect remaining natural resources in Fairfax County; engages and educates staff and residents in resource stewardship; and integrates resource protection into all planning, development and

management activities. The plan is located [here](#). The PAB receives an annual update each summer.

### **The PA Needs Assessment**

Is an essential planning study conducted to determine the county's park and recreational needs, establish service level standards and align long term capital investment plans. It also provides integral information to all the agency's plans. Studies are conducted every five to ten years, the last being in 2016. The study can be found [here](#).

In addition, most parks have their own **Site Master Plans**. A **Park Master Plan (MP)** is a general guide for appropriate park uses and their approximate location within a specific park site. The plan serves as a long-range vision (10 to 20-year timeframe) for future development and programming. Issues typically addressed include planned park elements, natural and cultural resource management and general design concerns. The plan is conceptual in nature and not intended to address detailed issues related to engineered site design or park operations. The plan is just one of many steps in the process that leads to a public park's development. Please visit the Master Plan Archives for an index to existing master plan documents to see if the park you support has a plan developed. For more information on park planning go [here](#).

### **Other guiding documents that direct or influence Park Authority strategy and operations - Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan**

The purpose of the County's Comprehensive Plan is to achieve "a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants." The plan serves as a 20-year vision and general guide for the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, county staff, and the residents of Fairfax County with respect to development and redevelopment in the county.

Parks are integrated throughout the plan; however, the Parks and Recreation Section of the plan outlines the four related Board of Supervisors goals, the Park

Classification system, the Urban Park Framework and standards and criteria for the establishment of park and recreation facilities based upon the latest Park Authority Needs Assessment information. The internet version of the [Comprehensive Plan](#) is always the most updated.

### **Agency Accreditation**

The Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) provides quality assurance and quality improvement of accredited park and recreation agencies throughout the United States. This program has been endorsed by the PAB, and the first, five-year Park Authority accreditation was acquired in 2008. The Park Authority was reaccredited in 2013 and 2018 and will be reviewed again in 2023. Friends Groups and Affiliate Organizations are extensions of our staff and key resources in the delivery of services. These standards include how the Park Authority works with partner groups and may also assist your group in better understanding some of the background of the agency.

