



Fairfax County Park Authority

Park Volunteer Team (PVT) Program Handbook

1. Overview

Are you interested in forming or joining a team of volunteers to support a park site or program? The Park Volunteer Team (PVT) Program is a great opportunity for county residents and visitors to work with other volunteers who share their appreciation and passion for the parks. PVTs are volunteer-led teams who offer support for a site or program. The PVT volunteers are able to develop and implement their own services and work in coordination with site plans and programs. PVT volunteer services help advance the mission of the site and embody the Park Authority mission and vision to inspire a passion for parks amongst visitors and the community.

PVTs are part of FCPA's Volunteer Program. PVT groups are not incorporated legal entities. If the PVT so desires, the PVT Program may serve as a stepping stone to form a legal organization, such as a [Friends Group](#). Upon incorporation and acquisition of insurance, that organization may become a formal friends group and form a partnership with FCPA.

All individuals who volunteer in a PVT are covered by the County's Volunteer Insurance Policy while doing work that aligns with the scope of the PVT and the FCPA Standards of Conduct. The County's Volunteer Insurance Policy covers only individual volunteers, not legally established organizations (i.e., an association of individuals created by law or under authority of law.)

2. PVT and Service Development

A. Getting Started

- i. Let us know you're interested! Contact the park site or speak with a Division Volunteer Manager about the PVT Program.
 - a. Contact the site directly
 - b. Contact one of our Division Volunteer Managers
 - Resource Management (Natural and cultural sites): Tammy Schwab
Tammy.Schwab@fairfaxcounty.gov
 - Park Services (Lakefront parks and RECenters): Beth Gallagher
Elizabeth.Gallagher@fairfaxcounty.gov
 - Park Operations (Unstaffed park sites): Julie Tahan
Julie.Tahan@fairfaxcounty.gov
 - c. Contact our Park Volunteer Team Central Coordinator
 - Director's Office: Allison Rankin
Allison.Rankin@fairfaxcounty.gov
- ii. Staff will ask your interests and goals, explain the PVT Program, and explain the process to create a PVT.

- iii. Staff will send you a [PVT Opportunity form](#) to complete. This is where you define the scope and role of the PVT through an explanation of the PVT goals, objectives, and activities. It is important to include as much detail as possible because the PVT and FCPA can use this information to advertise and promote the PVT. You will be asked to designate a PVT Lead at this time.
- iv. FCPA staff reviews the PVT Opportunity form to confirm it aligns with park plans, including but not limited to the park's Master Plan, the [FCPA Master Plan](#), the [Natural Resource Management Plan](#) and the [Cultural Resource Management Plan](#). If staff has additional questions or comments about the form, they will contact you.
- v. Upon approval of the form, staff uses the PVT Opportunity form to add the PVT to the County's online Volunteer Management System (VMS). Staff will send the PVT Lead a link to the PVT Opportunity. The PVT Opportunity can be made public on VMS or kept private. If kept private, only those with the link will be able to access and register for the PVT Opportunity.
- vi. The PVT Lead and on-going volunteers can then apply for the PVT Opportunity in VMS and start safety and other trainings described in the Opportunity.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

A PVT Lead (or PVT Co-Leads) organizes and coordinates the PVT scope, plans, and PVT volunteers. The Lead serves as the primary point of contact. You will identify a PVT Lead or Co-Leads to the staff member and on the PVT Opportunity form.

C. Communications and Recruitment

- i. The [Communicator's Toolkit](#) includes outreach and promotional tools the Park Authority offers to PVTs and additional communication resources. Contact your site Staff Liaison if you are interested in any of the tools. The Communicator's Toolkit can help you recruit volunteers to join the PVT, participate in volunteer services, and attend programs/events.
- ii. Below are some additional ideas on how to get others involved.
 - Hold an interest meeting.
 - Contact local home owners associations, businesses, and organizations to spread the word about the PVT and recruit volunteers.
 - Talk to other park volunteers to gauge their interest in joining or helping lead a PVT.
 - Ask the site or program manager for suggestions on who to reach out to in the surrounding community.
 - Post approved fliers at locations where prospective volunteers may be recruited (ex: RECenter, kiosk in parks, Panera, other community bulletin boards, etc..)
 - Meetings or projects on regular intervals may help to retain your core volunteers and keep them engaged.

D. Planning Volunteer Opportunities

- i. Staff liaison, the PVT Lead, and other Park Authority staff as appropriate will meet at least twice a year to discuss site needs, plans, and the status of the PVT. The Staff liaison will coordinate regular meetings with the PVT lead.
 - Plans for the PVT should consider the status of other projects, align the proposed plans with the agency, program, and/or site's mission(s) and existing plans, and involve staff according to the scope of the project, service, etc.
 - Staff will provide PVTs with an optional [PVT Annual Planning Form](#) to plan for the upcoming year and also the [PVT Annual Accomplishments Form](#) to document the past accomplishments.
 - Staff and the PVT will work together to identify new or on-going volunteer opportunities.
 - Volunteer opportunities might include, but are not limited to, long-term projects, fundraising activities recurring events, and special events.
 - For new volunteer opportunities, the PVT Lead will complete the opportunity form and submit to Staff Liaison.
- ii. Propose project ideas and implementation plans to your Staff Liaison
 - Discuss with your Staff Liaison whether or not the resources are available to support the proposed volunteer opportunity.
 - Staff liaison will coordinate with other FCPA staff relevant to the type of project, program, or service (i.e. conservation, preservation, or educational programs) and connects the lead with staff as needed.
- iii. Approved volunteer opportunities will be posted on VMS by FCPA staff.

E. Registering Volunteers and Recording Hours

- i. PVT Workday Volunteers may register in VMS or in person at the event for the Volunteer Opportunity.
- ii. The PVT Lead and Staff Liaison should coordinate who will record PVT hours before the event. Hours can be entered into VMS by PVT Leads, individuals, or appropriate FCPA staff.
- iii. PVT Leads are responsible for ensuring volunteers sign in at the event.
- iv. The [sign-in sheet](#) must be given to the Staff Liaison after the event.
- v. Volunteer hours must be entered into VMS by the person agreed upon prior to the event.

F. Training

- i. PVT Leads and core volunteers should complete all necessary volunteer training within 30 days of their registration date or before the PVT's first event. Leads and volunteers may need additional training, such as cash handling, Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program, etc., depending on the type of events or programs.
- ii. PVT Leads should work with their Staff Liaison to determine necessary trainings and the best methods to train additional PVT volunteers.

G. Finances: Fundraising

- i. PVTs must follow FCPA cash handling procedures.
- ii. If the PVT wants to fundraise for the Park Authority, then they can work with the Fairfax County Park Foundation (FCPF) to raise and donate funds.
 - PVT Leads will coordinate with the Staff Liaison and FCPF staff to identify fundraising opportunities and work with staff throughout the fundraising event or program. This is an essential step in the process to ensure the Park Authority and the PVT have a mutual understanding and agreement of the project specifications.
 - As a part of your event planning, work with your Staff Liaison to complete the [PVT Event/Program/Fundraising Activity Proposal Form](#). Staff Liaison will work with appropriate FCPA staff to coordinate resources. Proposals should be submitted with adequate time to allow for coordination of resources.
 - Funds are donated to the Park Authority through FCPF.
- iii. If the PVT conducts a fundraising activity or program that brings in donations (i.e. Easter Egg Hunt at Nottoway), the donations will go into a PVT donation account. At the time of the donation, the PVT can designate how the funds will be spent and then work with their Staff Liaison to spend the funds accordingly. Donated funds can only be spent in accordance with the designated use specified at the time of donation.
- iv. A PVT may not open a bank account in its name. A bank account implies that a group is a separate organization.

H. Programming

- i. PVT Leads works with the Staff Liaison to organize events by completing the [PVT Workday Opportunity Form](#) or the [PVT Event/Program/Fundraising Activity Proposal Form](#). Things to consider as events are being planned include:
 - a. ADA requirements
 - b. Necessary permits
 - c. Instructors (minimum of 2) - This is best practice to ensure adequate supervision and coverage of the event or program. Ensure instructors are qualified to lead the event that is being planned.
 - d. Plan for necessary volunteers to support the event or activity and ensure they are being registered through VMS.
 - e. Schedule for the activity or program
 - f. Required facility supplies, equipment and other resources
 - g. Safety and emergency plan

3. How to transition from a PVT to a Friends Group

A. Steps to becoming an official Friends Group – See [Friends Group Project Webpage](#) for more details and the Friends Group Handbook

- Where to Begin
 - Determine who the core volunteers are and get the group or committee together to discuss strategy of moving towards becoming a Friends Group.
 - There are many resources available to you during this process. The Friends Group Project website, the Park Authority Friends Group Central Coordinator, the Park Authority Staff Liaison for your chosen site or program, the appropriate Park Authority Board member, and other park-specific stakeholders.
 - Hold interest meetings to gauge the support of your volunteers.
 - Coordination and ongoing communication with the Park Authority staff throughout the process will help to build a solid working relationship going forward.
- Initial Planning Stages
 - Your new Friends Group will develop a mission and vision statement to clearly outline what your group intends to accomplish.
 - An organizational structure, with leadership, meeting schedules, budgets, etc. will help to define roles and expectations.
 - A new organization will need to create by-laws to document the agreed upon organizational structure, goals, and policies and procedures.
- Legal Requirements
 - All of our Friends Groups must attain 501(c)3 non-profit status through the Internal Revenue Service.
 - You will need to file with the Virginia State Corporation Commission to become incorporated as a new business in Virginia. There are many tools on their website to help you through this process.
 - As a formal Friends Group, you will no longer be covered under the County's volunteer insurance policy. Thus, the Friends Group must acquire their own insurance policies to include at a minimum general liability insurance and coverage for directors and officers. It is recommended that you consult with an insurance professional to determine the appropriate levels of coverage for your specific group.
- Once these steps have been completed, your Friends Group will be ready to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Park Authority. There is a customizable template available on the Friends Group project website to use to tailor the MOU to your Friends Group.
- Through all of these steps, it is highly recommended to work with your site Staff Liaison and the Friends Group Central Coordinator to ensure appropriate coordination between the Park Authority and your new Friends Group.