



Volunteer Program Handbook



Policy

Westchester County Parks Department Volunteer Program Handbook

Parks Mission

The Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation & Conservation is committed to preserving the nearly 18,000 acres of parkland that has been entrusted to our care for future generations and procuring new properties as they become available. Equally important is our duty to provide programs and services designed and constantly updated, to meet the ever-changing recreation and leisure needs of the Westchester community, while practicing a sound conservation ethic. The mission of this department is to **provide life-enriching recreational, cultural and educational opportunities, and responsible stewardship of our resources.** Through the efforts of a dedicated professional staff, it is our goal to be the finest leisure services agency in the country by providing Westchester residents the best recreational programs and facilities available, in the most affordable, cost-effective and efficient manner possible.

Volunteer Program Mission

The mission of the Westchester County Parks Volunteer Program is to actively promote a mutually rewarding relationship between volunteers who offer their talents, skills and time; and staff who will support them in their efforts to cooperatively foster stewardship of our community's parks and recreation programs.

Role of Westchester Parks Foundation Volunteer Program Staff

There are two methods for volunteering, both of which benefit PRC. The Westchester Parks Foundation (WPF) has a roster of 2,000 volunteers who operate under the direction of the Volunteer Program staff.

This staff is comprised of one full-time Volunteer Manager and two full-time Volunteer Coordinators. The Volunteer Program staff is responsible for recruiting, training, monitoring, retaining, as well as rewarding the efforts of volunteers. When the WPF Volunteer Program is contacted by a group, they coordinate an appropriate project or assignment based on the interests of the volunteer and the needs of the parks. The volunteer assignments range from one-day group projects to longer-term internships, to years-long relationships with community organizations. The Volunteer Program Staff regularly report to the WPF Board and PRC with goals and achievements to ensure a continued and growing presence of volunteers in the parks.

The second way volunteers can participate is by working directly with Park Staff at a particular park to perform ongoing assistance. These PRC-supervised volunteers will coordinate their schedule with Park Staff.

Definition of a Volunteer

A "volunteer" is anyone, who without compensation, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the Westchester County PRC. A "volunteer" must be officially registered and/or enrolled with PRC or WPF prior to performance of the task. Volunteers shall not be considered as "employees" of Westchester County.

Purpose of Volunteer Policies

The purpose of these procedures is to provide overall guidance, structure and direction to staff and volunteers

throughout the volunteer process. These procedures do not constitute, either implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personnel agreement. The Westchester County Parks Volunteer Program reserves the right to change any of these procedures at any time and to expect adherence to the changed policy.

Utilization of Volunteers

Westchester Parks Foundation accepts and encourages the involvement of volunteers within all appropriate programs and activities. All staff members, as well as others in leadership roles, are encouraged to assist in the creation of meaningful and productive roles for volunteers. The WPF Volunteer Program works with a roster of 2,000 volunteers comprised of individual community members, scout groups, organizations, corporate teams, and school groups. The WPF Volunteer Program plans projects by working closely with the PRC staff to identify priority projects. The WPF staff coordinates over 300 volunteer projects annually and provides all tools, gloves, and instruction on site. Community members can register for any of the WPF's one-day volunteer projects on their Eventbrite page.

Examples of Volunteer Jobs:

- Litter removal
- Invasive plant management
- Trail maintenance
- Tree planting
- Raised garden bed installation
- Garden bed weeding
- Puncheon/boardwalk building
- River cleanup – floatable trash removal
- Mulching picnic areas and playgrounds
- Painting
- Planting site maintenance
- Beach cleanup
- Clean River Project on the Bronx River

WPF's Volunteer Program also coordinates and oversees several internship programs that focus on community leadership while improving the parks. These programs have had focuses including: - Aquatic invasive species removal

- Flyer design
- Clean River Project data input and analysis
- Outreach to local businesses to donate towards WPF's park-centered mission
- Surveying/cataloging memorial benches and plaques
- Leading community volunteers at one-day projects

WPF also facilitates scout projects in the parks including:

- Boot brush station construction and installation
- Trail surveys
- Tree planting

Another use of volunteers is through the Green Squad Program. The Green Squad Agreement allows an individual volunteer to work in a park without WPF staff on site to supervise. The Green Squad leader can work alone or with community volunteers and lead litter cleanups and invasive plant management.

WPF Also participates in regional cleanup initiatives including:

- Riverkeeper Sweep
- New York State I Love My Park Day
- Volunteer New York's 9/11: Serve + Remember
- International Coastal Cleanup with The Ocean Conservancy

For these events WPF works with partner organizations to recruit and mobilize volunteers in several parks.

WPF also helps recruit volunteers in the case of urgent needs of the parks. PRC staff can alert the WPF Volunteer Program Staff to an urgent need such as storm cleanup or graffiti removal and WPF will disperse a blitz crew within a few days. All other programs are generally planned one to two months in advance.

Safety and Welfare of Volunteers

Of paramount importance is the safety and welfare of volunteers. Accepted common sense standards of behavior will be outlined prior to the performance of volunteer tasks/assignments. Supervisors are to be trained in basic First Aid and CPR. Access to telephone communication should be available at all events. All minors are to be directly supervised by an adult. No power tools or Westchester County vehicles are to be used when volunteering within the Westchester County Parks system.

Recruitment and Screening of Volunteers

Westchester Parks Foundation Volunteer Program conducts a variety of recruitment processes depending on the skills and experience needed for the position.

Community One-day Projects:

- Volunteers must register online, arrive in appropriate attire for the work, and be punctual.
- Volunteers are responsible for keeping track of their hours if verification is needed for school, court, etc.
- Volunteers must adhere to the guidelines in the WPF Volunteer Waiver. If guidelines are not followed, WPF will communicate with the volunteer and part ways if necessary

Green Squad Leaders:

- Green Squad Leaders attend an interview and orientation to be considered for this position. They are expected to report metrics after each outing and demonstrate consistent communication with the WPF Volunteer Program staff and Parks staff.

Interns and Eagle Scouts:

- For these positions, a letter of interest and interview is required. The individual must demonstrate an interest in the area of parks, recreation, and conservation and must demonstrate consistent communication.
- For certain multi-week internships, an application must be submitted

Volunteer Site Leaders:

- WPF Volunteer Program Staff will recruit volunteers from community projects who demonstrate values that align with WPF's mission to improve and preserve the parks
- Volunteers must demonstrate an interest in leading community members and ability to connect with others through conversation

Blitz Crew

- WPF Volunteer Program Staff will recruit volunteers from community projects who demonstrate values that align with WPF's mission to improve and preserve the parks
- Volunteers for the Blitz Crew are invited to more in-depth trainings with partner organizations, WPF staff, or PRC staff to learn and develop more advanced skills such as tree pruning, native plant identification, and invasive plant identification
- Blitz Crew members must be available for 3-6+ hours during the week

Avenues of recruitment:

- WPF website
- WPF social media pages – monthly calendar posting plus additional posts when needed
- VolunteerNewYork.org

- E-blasts
- Monthly calendar posting
- Outreach to existing contact list of schools, scout groups, organizations, and religious groups

Retention

WPF Volunteer Program Staff shall meet regularly to assess the use and effectiveness of regular volunteers. Volunteers should be a help to the parks and their staff, not a hindrance. WPF staff will regularly follow up with PRC staff to check on their satisfaction with volunteers. WPF staff shall foster relationships with volunteers and volunteer groups to maintain their active involvement in the volunteer program. For volunteers who demonstrate passion, interest, and leadership and who identify with the WPF mission, WPF staff will conduct follow ups and offer roles with more responsibility such as Volunteer Site Leader, Green Squad Leader, and Blitz Crew.

Orientation and Training

On-site training is provided at all one-day projects for volunteers led by WPF staff. For more advanced volunteer roles such as Volunteer Site Leader, Green Squad Leader, and Blitz Crew, additional training is offered including webinars, pruning workshops, and plant identification walks. For long-term assignments like internships, volunteers receive training and feedback from WPF staff for the duration as more advanced skills are developed.

Vulnerable populations

- Volunteers that work alongside youth or other vulnerable populations are always supervised by paid WPF staff or PRC staff.
- WPF Volunteers under the age of 18 must have parental consent on their volunteer waiver
- Volunteers under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult

Adult volunteers with disabilities who attend volunteer projects as part of a day program or organization for people disabilities are supervised and accompanied by a staff person from said program or organization.

The Balance of Rights and Responsibilities Between Paid Staff and Volunteers

Paid staff has the right to:

1. Decline any volunteer thought to be unsuitable
2. Expect that a volunteer will complete assignments accepted
3. Give instruction as to how the work is to be done
4. Give the volunteer a trial or probationary period
5. Evaluate the volunteer's performance
6. Demand quality performance
7. Report problems and progress to the volunteer coordinator
8. Schedule volunteers when work space is available
9. Have an opinion on the merit of the volunteer's involvement
10. Be respected and trusted as a colleague

Paid staff has the responsibility to:

1. Make all necessary qualifications known ahead of time
2. Provide adequate time and training for each assignment
3. Make sure the volunteer understands the task
4. Set and maintain standards
5. Provide feedback in productive terms
6. Give recognition for work done
7. Keep good communications with the volunteer program coordinator
8. Provide adequate, pleasant work space
9. Not over generalize about volunteers
10. Respect and trust volunteers in return

Volunteers have the right to:

1. A job that is worthwhile and challenging
2. Be trusted with necessary information
3. Be kept informed about what is happening
4. Expect their tasks have been planned for
5. An assignment that will promote learning and growth
6. Orientation and training
7. Receive advice and support from a designated supervisor
8. Appropriate recognition
9. Reimbursement for authorized expenses in a timely fashion
10. Be treated with respect as a non-paid staff member

Volunteers have the responsibility to:

1. Know their limits
2. Respect confidences
3. Follow organizational guidelines
4. Prepare for each work assignment
5. Use time wisely, not interfere with another's performance
6. Acknowledge the need for training and participate fully
7. Consult with supervisor when unclear on policy or action
8. Give constructive feedback that will improve effectiveness
9. Refuse gifts or tips from recipients of service
10. Work as a team member

Maintenance of Records

A system of records will be maintained on each volunteer with the WPF Volunteer Program, including dates and hours of service, positions held, and awards received. Volunteers and appropriate staff shall be responsible for submitting all appropriate records and information to the Volunteer Program Staff in a timely and accurate manner. Volunteer personnel records shall be accorded the same confidentiality as Westchester County personnel records.

Volunteer Program Staff or the appropriate Parks Staff shall report project metrics to WPF after each project or set of projects in a series, for example, weekly metrics for a summer internship.

Service Hour Verification

Volunteers wishing to receive written proof or verification of their community service hours shall be responsible for making their attendance known to the Volunteer Coordinator on site, and make the request for a verification letter via email to the Volunteer Program Staff. Volunteer Program Staff shall in turn provide a letter verifying the hours in a timely manner.

Dress Code

As representatives of the Westchester County Parks system, volunteers, like staff, are responsible for presenting a good image to clients and to the community. Volunteers shall dress appropriately for the conditions and performance of their duties.

Absenteeism

Volunteers are expected to perform their duties on a regularly scheduled and timely basis. If expecting to be absent from a scheduled duty, volunteers shall inform the supervising staff member and/or

Volunteer Coordinator as far in advance as possible so that alternative arrangements may be made.

Right to Reject Services/Termination

The Volunteer Program reserves the right to limit the use of volunteers, adjust the hours of any volunteer or to reject services as it, in its sole discretion, deems fit, in order to best achieve its public purpose. Participation in any volunteer position of Westchester PRC shall be open to any individual and no individual shall be discriminated against based upon race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin or physical, mental or sensory handicap, or on the basis of any other characteristic protected by law. Grounds for rejecting services may include, but are not limited to: unsatisfactory background check, gross misconduct or insubordination, being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, theft of property, misuse of WPF or PRC equipment or materials, mistreatment of clients or co-workers, failure to abide by Westchester County policies and procedures, failure to meet the standards of performance relating to the essential functions of the volunteer position, and/or failure to satisfactorily perform assigned duties.

Resignation

Volunteers may resign from volunteer service with the Department at any time. It is requested that volunteers who intend to resign provide advance notice of departure to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Notice of Departure or Re-Assignment of a Volunteer

In the event that the volunteer departs the WPF Volunteer Program, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, or is re-assigned to a new position, it shall be the responsibility of the Volunteer Program to inform the staff.

Placement

In placing a volunteer, consideration shall be paid to the interests and capabilities of the volunteer and to the requirements of the volunteer position. No placement shall be made unless the needs of both the volunteer and the supervising staff can be met. A volunteer will not be assigned to work with a staff person without the consent of that staff person. Volunteers should be provided with a description of general volunteer duties and when needed, a scope of work description so there is complete understanding of the expectations of their service. This should clearly identify the essential job functions the volunteer is authorized to perform. Since volunteers are considered a valuable resource in performing the Westchester PRC work, staff is encouraged to seriously consider creative ways in which volunteers can be of service and to consult with the Volunteer Coordinator if in need of assistance or additional training.

Acceptance and Appointment

Service as a volunteer with the Volunteer Program shall begin with an official notification of acceptance or appointment to a volunteer position by the Volunteer Program Staff. A volunteer shall not begin performance of any position until he or she has been accepted for volunteer work and has completed all the necessary screening and paperwork. At the time of acceptance, each volunteer shall complete all necessary enrollment paperwork and shall receive a copy of the volunteer manual.

A volunteer who is re-assigned to new responsibilities shall receive appropriate orientation and training for that position before he or she begins work. In addition, any screening procedures appropriate for the specific position must be completed, even if the volunteer has already been working with the WPF Volunteer Program.

Evaluation of Volunteer Program

The Volunteer Program shall be evaluated regularly to maintain its usefulness in achieving its mission.

The Volunteer Program Staff shall conduct regular check-ins with Parks staff by phone, email, or in person to understand the effectiveness and gain suggestions for the volunteer work performed from the perspective of the Parks Staff.

The Department may, from time to time, seek feedback from its volunteers in an effort to improve its volunteer programs.

WPF metrics are reported regularly into an internal database and are analyzed quarterly. Trends in volunteer performance and work in the parks are evaluated based on previous years and current circumstances. Adjustments shall be made to keep volunteer engagement at a satisfactory level and continuously making tangible improvements to the parks.

Key metrics reported:

- Number of volunteers

- Number of volunteer hours
- Value of volunteer hours according to NYS Department of Labor - Lbs. litter removed
- Square feet of invasive plants managed
- Number of trees planted
- Miles of trail maintained
- Number of flowers planted
- Number of events assisted

Supervision and Staff Evaluation of Volunteers

The site supervisor or WPF volunteer program staff is responsible for supervision and evaluation of volunteers. All volunteers are monitored throughout the project by WPF staff and/or park staff; staff is typically at the project site, and instances where volunteers have received permission to work independently involve check-ins by either PRC or WPF staff. PRC and/or WPF staff are available to provide additional instruction and/or assistance throughout the volunteer work, and when onsite, are directly overseeing the work. They direct the project from beginning to end.

WPF evaluates volunteers who are working independently or on specific projects based on their role, but volunteers are always evaluated based on how well they are meeting safety standards and following the direction of their onsite supervisor. These evaluations are informal, consisting mainly of weekly meetings within the Volunteer Department, and are based on experiences working with volunteers and information received from PRC staff. A volunteer evaluation form is also available for both WPF Staff

and PRC Staff to use as a guide (see Appendix). If a volunteer is not meeting expectations, WPF Volunteer Program staff meet with the volunteer either over the phone, in a video call, or in person to discuss concerns and how to address them, and check in regularly to make sure they are fulfilling the requirements of their role. Typically, this only needs to happen when volunteers have not filled out necessary paperwork or are not communicating effectively to coordinate work in the park with staff.

Lines of Communication

Volunteers are entitled to all information pertinent to the performance of their work assignments except that information which the Spartanburg County deems to be confidential. Lines of communication operate in both directions, and exist both formally and informally. Volunteers should be consulted regarding decisions that would substantially affect the performance of their duties. Volunteers and their supervisors are responsible for regular communication with the Volunteer Coordinator. The Volunteer Coordinator shall be informed of any substantial change in the work or status of a volunteer and shall be consulted in advance of any corrective action.

Volunteer Performance and Support

Standards of performance may be established for on-going volunteer positions. These standards may list the work to be done in that position, measurable indicators of whether the work was accomplished and appropriate timelines for accomplishment of the work.

As appropriate, volunteers shall have access to Westchester County PRC property and materials necessary to fulfill their duties, and shall receive training in the operation of any hand tools needed. Under no circumstances shall a volunteer operate any power tools or Westchester County vehicles.

Insurance

For Volunteers working with WPF Volunteer Program Staff on site:

- Volunteer must complete the WPF Volunteer Waiver and submit to Volunteer Program Staff before work begins (see Appendix)

For Volunteers working directly with Westchester County PRC staff:

- The manager of the facility or the volunteer coordinator must have volunteers who are doing work fill out a Volunteer Insurance Form (see Appendix). The form is sent to the Volunteer Program Director at PRC

Headquarters who forwards it to the Department of Risk Management. Volunteers are covered for any liability should they get hurt performing their duties or cause harm to those in their charge.

Volunteer Recognition

Informal Recognition

Thank you letters, e-mails and/or verbal thanks are to be given to all volunteers as appropriate. All staff and volunteers responsible for volunteer supervision are encouraged to undertake on-going methods of recognition of volunteer service on a regular basis throughout the year. These methods of informal recognition should range from a simple "Thank You" to a concerted effort to include volunteers as full participants in program decision-making and implementation.

Volunteer Recognition within Westchester Parks Foundation

Because we value our volunteers, recognition shall be given in many ways throughout the year:

- Social media posts: spotlight projects using photos of volunteers and acknowledging their accomplishments.
- Volunteer enrichment events shall be coordinated at least four times throughout the year for volunteers to get a deeper understanding of the parks in which they work as well as to provide further training.
- WPF shall provide letters for volunteers recognizing the work they did and their hours and act as references when volunteers are applying to jobs.
- WPF shall coordinate an annual press day to kick off Pitch in for Parks, the largest volunteer day of the year.
- Regular volunteers are given unique opportunities to work in and learn about the parks that are not offered to the general public. They are also invited to staff events such as the annual staff picnic and are occasionally given complimentary tickets to WPF events or free admission to our driving ranges.
- Corporate volunteer groups are offered specific benefits for their contributions, including: their name/logo on the WPF website, complimentary tickets to events, acknowledgment in our email newsletter, dedicated press release, logo recognition on signage or WPF website, or on-site sponsorship of one of the larger events of the year.
- Each year, WPF hosts a Volunteer Recognition Breakfast to celebrate the achievements of the year and the hard work of volunteers, at which all volunteers are welcome.
- At the end of the year, a Volunteer Thank You email blast sent to 20,000+ subscribers and social media post highlight the volunteer metrics from the past year.
- Occasionally WPF may choose to honor a volunteer (or group of volunteers) with an award at their annual gala.
- The WPF Volunteer Program also nominates one volunteer each year for the Volunteer New York Spirit Awards.

Volunteer Recognition Within Westchester PRC

For PRC, the way in which volunteers are appreciated is at the discretion of the facility. Some facilities honor their volunteers with pizza luncheons and/or special programs, while others allow complimentary entry to special events held during the year. Volunteers should also be considered for nominations for local community-focused awards.

As an example, at Lasdon Park, volunteers are given free tickets to events such as the annual Holidays on the Hill train show. Also, volunteers are always invited when the Friends of Lasdon host quarterly special brunches to thank all park staff.

Volunteer Career Paths

Volunteers are encouraged to develop their skills while serving with the Parks and are to be assisted through promotion to new volunteer jobs to assume additional and greater responsibilities. If so desired by the volunteer, PRC and/or the WPF shall assist the volunteer in maintaining appropriate records of volunteer experience that would assist the volunteer in future career opportunities, both paid and volunteer. Letters of recommendation for college and/or employment fall in this category.



Westchester Parks Foundation
104 Smith Avenue
Mount Kisco, NY 10549
theWPF.org

VOLUNTEER REGISTRATION

As a volunteer, some of the activities you perform may expose you to risks such as poison ivy, insect or other bites, injuries, or falls. It is your responsibility to know your own limitations and to only engage in activities suited to your abilities and physical conditions. Volunteers shall only engage in authorized activities. By signing below, you acknowledge the contagious nature of COVID-19 and that Westchester Parks Foundation cannot guarantee that you will not become infected with Covid-19. You understand that the risk of becoming exposed to and/or infected by COVID-19 may result from the actions, omissions, or negligence of yourself and others, including, but not limited to, staff and other volunteers. By signing this form, you give consent to authorize the use of any photos taken during the event for promotional purposes. You can opt out at any time by contacting info@thewpf.org. You will be added to our email list and be given the opportunity to unsubscribe if you wish.

Safety Checklist:

- ☐ Yield right of way to park users.
- ☐ No motor vehicles shall be driven outside designated areas unless required for medical emergency.
- ☐ Do not pick up anything that could be hazardous to your health or safety. This includes needles, jagged glass, animal carcasses or heavy objects.
- ☐ Wear appropriate gloves and long pants. Learn to recognize and avoid poison ivy or other irritants.
- ☐ Leather shoes or boots are recommended.
- ☐ Volunteers may not operate power equipment.
- ☐ Wear safety glasses when using sheers, clippers or loppers.
- ☐ Keep a safe distance between volunteers to avoid being whipped by branches or injury from tools.
- ☐ Minors (ages 12-17) must have a guardian present.
- ☐ Do not engage in any activity that will compromise your safety or the safety of others.
- ☐ Avoid overexertion and dehydration. Drink plenty of fluids.
- ☐ Stay off the bridge structures and seawalls. Do not lean over railings, water embankments, or barriers and railings. Do not enter the water.
- ☐ No horseplay.

As a condition of participation in the Volunteer Program, each volunteer must read the above Safety Checklist and complete and sign the following:

By my signature below, I certify that I have read and understand the above Safety Checklist and will participate in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Volunteer Program.

Name (please print) _____ Phone No. (_____) _____ - _____

Address _____ City, State, Zip _____ Date of Birth _____

Signature _____ Date _____

E-mail Address _____

Signature of Parent or guardian, if participant is a minor (ages 12-17):

Name (please print) _____ Relationship _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Return this completed form to Volunteer@thewpf.org



George Latimer
County Executive

John Nonna
County Attorney

Office of Risk Management
Anthony DiBuono, Jr.
Director

VOLUNTEER INSURANCE FORM

Name: _____
(Last) (First) (M.I.)

Address: _____

City/State/Zip _____

Telephone #: _____

E-mail address (optional): _____

Date of Birth: _____

Program Start Date: _____ Program End Date: _____

Work Location: _____

Description of duties: _____

Supervisor of Volunteer: _____
(Name, Title and Dept.)

Supervisor Telephone No.: _____

Forward to: Volunteer Coordinator
Volunteer@thewpf.org
104 Smith Avenue, Mount Kisco, NY 10549

Michaelian Office Building, Room 241
148 Martine Avenue
White Plains, New York 10601

Telephone: (914)995-2740 Website: westchestergov.com





VOLUNTEER EVALUATION FORM

Volunteer Name:

Date:

How long has this volunteer been involved with WPF?

How many hours has this volunteer contributed in their time with WPF?

What are this volunteer's strengths?

What are this volunteer's areas for improvement?

Would you recommend this volunteer for future volunteer assignments? Why or Why not?

Would you recommend this volunteer for a paid position in a related field? Why or why not?

When thinking about this volunteer's performance, please rate the following areas 1-5.
(1 - very unsatisfactory, 2 - unsatisfactory/needs improvement, 3 - neutral, 4 - generally positive, 5 – outstanding)

Communication		Collaboration/Initiative:	
Safety Awareness		Adhering to the tasks outlined by supervisor:	
Knowing their limits:		Attitude towards the work:	

WPF Staff Name/Signature: _____