
FRIENDS OF MADISON PARKS

Formation, Rules and Support Guidelines



City of Madison Parks Division
Approved by the Board of Park Commissioners
October 2025

FRIENDS OF MADISON PARKS: FORMATION, RULES, AND SUPPORT GUIDELINES

This document serves as a comprehensive resource for establishing and maintaining Friends of Madison Parks groups, which play a vital role in enhancing our city's park system and fostering community engagement. It includes guidelines for formation and recognition, essential rules, and best practices to help interested individuals and organizations effectively form and operate Friends groups. By adhering to these varied guidelines and collaborating with the City of Madison Parks Division, Friends groups can make a meaningful impact on our community and contribute to the continued vitality of our park system.

How to Form a Friends of Madison Parks Group

1. **Identify Interested Individuals or Organizations:** Reach out to community members, local organizations, neighborhood associations, or park enthusiasts who share a common interest in supporting Madison's parks. Gauge interest and commitment levels among potential members.
2. **Articulate Mission and Goals:** Collaboratively develop a mission statement and set of goals that align with the vision and values of the City of Madison and Madison Parks. Define the primary objectives of the group, such as park improvement projects, community engagement initiatives, and environmental stewardship efforts.
3. **Establish Organizational Structure:** Determine the leadership structure and governance model for the Friends group. This may include electing officers (e.g., President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary) and establishing decision-making processes (e.g., voting procedures, meeting frequency). While electing officers is a best practice for improved organization, it is not a requirement.
4. **Engage with the Parks Volunteer Coordinator:** Initiate contact with the Madison Parks Volunteer Coordinator to express your interest in forming a Friends group and seek guidance on the process. The coordinator can provide valuable insights, resources, and support to help facilitate the formation of the group.
5. **Submit Application for Recognition:** Prepare and submit a formal application for the recognition of the Friends group to the Board of Park Commissioners. The application should include details about the group's mission, goals, organizational structure, proposed initiatives, and anticipated benefits to the community.
6. **Present Proposal to the Board:** Attend a scheduled meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners to present your proposal for the recognition of the Friends group. Be prepared to provide additional information and answer any questions from board members about the group's objectives and activities.
7. **Receive Approval from the Board:** Upon review and consideration of the application, the Board of Park Commissioners will vote on whether to approve the recognition of the Friends group. If

approved, the group will receive official recognition and endorsement from the board, formalizing its relationship with Madison Parks. If not approved, the group may still exist, although its relationship with Madison Parks will be informal. A group that is not approved for recognition may resubmit an application for consideration at later meetings.

8. **Commence Operations:** With Board of Park Commissioners recognition secured, the Friends group can begin its operations and activities. Regular communication and collaboration with Madison Parks are essential to ensure ongoing support and alignment with City guidelines.

Naming Conventions

To ensure clarity and consistency, all Friends group names must include the official name of the park, facility, neighborhood, or publicly recognized geographic landscape they support (e.g., “Friends of Hoyt Park”). This practice helps the public, partners, and City staff quickly identify the group’s focus area. Group names must remain respectful and inclusive.

Geographic Guidelines for Friends Groups

Friends groups should be formed with a clearly defined geographic focus, typically centering on a single park, facility, or natural area. In some cases, a group may represent a clearly defined cluster of adjacent parks or green spaces—especially when these spaces share a common identity or community (such as a trail, a lakefront, or a neighborhood). However, groups should not span large or disconnected geographic areas, as this can dilute focus, complicate coordination, and reduce the effectiveness of volunteer efforts.

Madison Parks encourages community members to join existing Friends groups whenever possible, rather than forming new groups with overlapping purposes. In general, Friends group areas should not overlap. In rare cases where they do, proactive communication and collaboration between the groups is essential to avoid confusion and duplication of effort.

When in doubt, prospective groups should consult with the Madison Parks Volunteer Coordinator to determine whether a proposed scope aligns with City guidelines and community needs.

Termination of Recognition

While Madison Parks deeply values the contributions of officially recognized Friends groups, ongoing recognition is contingent upon alignment with City values, the Madison Parks Behavior Policy, and the expectations outlined in this document. The Superintendent of Parks may revoke a Friends group’s official status at any time if there are significant or repeated violations, including but not limited to: failure to follow safety or conduct guidelines, misuse of funds or park resources, discriminatory or harmful behavior, or actions that undermine the operations or reputation of Madison Parks. Prior to revocation, the group will be notified in writing and may be offered an opportunity to address the concerns. Final decisions regarding termination rest with the Superintendent, with the option to appeal to the Board of Park Commissioners (BPC).

Friends groups that become inactive—defined as having no representative contact, event activity, or annual reporting for a full calendar year—may be designated as “inactive” and no longer listed as an

active partner. Groups in this category may still have volunteer hours tracked under their name, and reporting may be reactivated if a representative resumes communication and submits required documentation.

Process for Existing Friends Groups Approval (April 2025 Onward)

Beginning in **April 2025**, all existing Friends Groups must go through a brief approval process to ensure alignment with Madison Parks' mission and operational guidelines. This process will involve submitting a short **application form**, which will include:

1. **Mission and Goals** – A concise statement articulating the group's mission and primary objectives.
2. **Organizational Overview** – A brief summary of the group's structure, including leadership roles (if applicable).
3. **Formal Identification** – The official name of the group, along with its website or other public-facing information.

The application process will help Madison Parks maintain an updated record of active Friends Groups while ensuring consistency in engagement and communication.

Rules for Friends of Madison Parks Groups

1. Code of Conduct:

- Adhere to a strict code prohibiting harassment, discrimination, safety violations, and unethical behavior.
- Adherence to the Madison Parks [Behavior Policy](#).
- Reference City of Madison Volunteer Handbook for detailed conduct expectations.

2. Reporting:

- Log volunteer hours and report activities. (Use online form beginning 2025).
- Submit annual service report to the Volunteer Coordinator at Madison Parks by the end of each calendar year.

3. Safety:

- Before each volunteer work event, prioritize safety by conducting training sessions for all volunteers. These sessions should cover emergency procedures, first aid, and the proper use of equipment.
- Emergency Contact List: Ensure that an emergency contact list is provided to all volunteers. This list should include key contacts and resources to be utilized in case of an emergency during events.

Best Practices for Friends Groups

The following best practices are intended to serve as helpful guidelines for Friends Groups of Madison Parks. While not mandatory, these practices can support growth, enhance community engagement, and align with the values of the City of Madison. We recognize that not all groups may be able to meet every standard, but these recommendations are designed to foster positive development and collaboration.

1. Mission and Goals:

- Develop a mission statement aligning with the vision and values of the City of Madison and Parks.
- Goals must reflect City [vision and values](#), focusing on park improvement, community awareness, and sustainable practices.

2. Diversity and Inclusion:

- Actively promote diversity and inclusion through community outreach.
- Strategies include reaching out to local community centers, schools, and implementing diversity training.

3. Communication Channels:

- Maintain communication through regular meetings, email newsletters, and online platforms.

4. Roles and Responsibilities:

- Hold regular meetings with a frequency that should balance communication needs with availability of members. Monthly or quarterly meetings are most common.
- Establish a leadership structure with defined roles (President, Vice President, Treasurer (if donation or funds are collected), and Secretary).
- Major decisions should be made through democratic processes during recurring meetings.

5. Conflict Resolution:

- In the event of conflicts, appoint a neutral mediator for resolution.
- Encourage open communication and implement an anonymous reporting system.

6. Recognition and Appreciation:

- Implement volunteer recognition and appreciation events.
- Recognize outstanding contributors and report to Parks Volunteer Coordinator.

7. Evaluation and Feedback:

- Assist in distribution of annual volunteer satisfaction survey provided by Madison Parks.
- Seek feedback to assess the effectiveness of the group's activities.

8. Reporting and Documentation:

- Complete annual work plan which includes listing all events or work projects.
- Distribute reports, at least on an annual basis, showcasing the impact of volunteer efforts to members, funders, and other stakeholders.

9. Partnerships and Collaboration:

- Collaborate with local businesses, schools, and community groups, as much as possible.
- Strengthen community engagement through sponsored events and educational programs, as appropriate.

10. Financial Guidelines for Madison Parks Friends Groups:

- **Budget Planning:** Develop and approve an annual budget at the start of each fiscal year.
- **Fundraising and Income:** Diversify fundraising efforts and document all funds received.
- **Expense Management:** Keep clear records of expenses and require pre-approval for spending.
- **Financial Reporting:** Prepare monthly or quarterly financial reports and an annual report.
- **Banking and Accounts:** Use a dedicated bank account with two signatures required for significant transactions.
- **Audit and Review:** Conduct annual internal audits and periodic external audits.
- **Record Keeping:** Maintain detailed financial records for at least seven years.
- **Compliance:** Ensure compliance with local, state, and federal financial regulations.
- **Financial Oversight:** Establish a finance committee for regular review and oversight.
- **Transparency:** Share financial information with members and encourage input.

By adhering to these best practices, Friends of Madison Parks groups can contribute positively to the community while aligning with the values and expectations set forth by the City of Madison.

Madison Parks Support

Following recognition by the Board of Park Commissioners, Madison Parks will provide support to the Friends of Madison Parks groups as noted in this section. By providing these resources and support, the City of Madison can strengthen the impact of Friends of Madison Parks groups and foster a collaborative relationship that benefits both the community and the city's park system.

1. Official Recognition and Endorsement:

- Provide an official recognition status for the Friends group, endorsing their efforts and commitment to enhancing Madison Parks.

2. Access to Park Resources:

- Friends of Madison Parks Groups qualify for our Neighborhood and Community Group Park Permit for Friends of events, meetings, and gatherings in a Madison Park. This

permit may allow for waived and reduced fees for reserving Park shelters and/or open spaces for events specific to the Friends Group activities.

3. Training and Workshops:

- Organize training sessions and workshops on relevant topics, such as volunteer management, event planning, and park preservation, to enhance the group's skills.

4. Collaboration Opportunities:

- Facilitate introductions and collaboration opportunities with other City departments, businesses, schools, and community groups to amplify the impact of the Friends group's initiatives.

5. Promotional Support:

- Review promotional materials, share social posts and information on request and as needed, to increase community awareness of the Friends group's events and activities.

6. Communication Platforms:

- Collaborate to elevate Friends group's messages and events through various communication channels, that may include Madison Parks' social media platforms, website calendar posting and/or e-news.

7. Community Outreach Support:

- Collaborate on community outreach initiatives, leveraging the City's networks to encourage diverse participation and engagement with the Friends group.

8. Collaborative Events and Programs:

- Co-host events or programs that align with the goals of the Friends group, fostering a sense of community and environmental stewardship.

9. Recognition Programs:

- Establish a citywide recognition program that highlights and celebrates the contributions of Friends groups, including features on Madison Parks website.

10. Regular Updates and Information Sharing:

- Provide regular updates on City initiatives, park policies, and relevant information to keep the Friends group well-informed and aligned with City guidelines.

11. Access to City Expertise:

- Facilitate access to City staff, such as environmental specialists or landscape architects, who can provide guidance on sustainable practices and park improvement projects.

12. Publications and Educational Materials:

- Share educational materials and publications related to parks, conservation, and community engagement to enhance the knowledge base of Friends group members.

13. City Liaison and Support:

- Designate a City liaison (the Volunteer Coordinator) to serve as a point of contact for the Friends group, offering guidance, support, and assistance as needed.

Affiliated Organization Status

If the Friends group is a non-governmental tax-exempt organization designed to raise funds and contribute to functions carried on by the City, the group is an affiliated organization subject to the requirements of MGO [Sec. 4.29](#), including registering annually with the City Clerk.

Disclaimer

A Friends group that is recognized and endorsed by the Board of Parks Commissioners will remain an independent and separate entity from the City. Representatives and agents of the Friends group are not representatives or agents of the City. Members and volunteers shall be required to complete waivers before performing any volunteer work on City property.