

# Working with Volunteers



PENNSYLVANIA  
**Parks & Forests**  
FOUNDATION

Working with volunteers can be an art or a science. Some of the park managers and district foresters who have experience in working with PPFF Chapter volunteers have shared their wisdom with us.

- 🌳 “They help us hold events that we could not sponsor with Commonwealth funds.”
- 🌳 “They can help us obtain grant funding and provide additional volunteer labor.”
- 🌳 “It helps to ‘connect’ people to their parks and forests and gives them an active role in its stewardship.”
- 🌳 “It is the highest form of true stewardship.”
- 🌳 “No way we could accomplish all we need to with staff alone.  
The support of volunteers and friends groups is a key element to our success.”

**Why do you think having friends groups or volunteers is important?**



**What have you found to be effective methods for working with volunteers and friends groups?**



- 🏠 “Stay involved. The manager needs to establish relationships with the friends and work with them.”
- 🏠 “Involving them [the volunteers] in a yearly planning meetings helps garner buy-in as they are involved in setting dates, getting projects on the work list, and being heard.”
- 🏠 “Making specific assignments for duties, following up with instructions and thank yous.”
- 🏠 “Being open to their ideas and suggestions and guiding them when they need ideas.”

- “Offer different types of volunteer work—trails, events. Not just fundraising and attending meetings.”
- “Very difficult in this area which has little diversity, but we try to provide ‘family oriented’ programming to engage youth.”
- “Use social media.”

## How can we diversify the volunteer work force?



## How do you thank volunteers?



- “Volunteer appreciation dinner each year.”
- “I personally thank volunteers at each work day—and let them know how much I appreciate [their presence].”
- “Written thank you cards, recognition in news and social media, and any kind of giveaways.”

## What advice would you give to someone new to working with volunteers or friends groups?

- “It’s not easy, but you never know who might walk into your park and have some extremely valuable skills that they are willing to donate.”
- “You will need to go well beyond your 8 to 4 workday to stay in touch with and work with your volunteers.”
- “Be patient, they are volunteers. Be prepared for times with low numbers of participants.”
- “Try and get your leadership positions in place right away and make sure they know what is expected. Start with an activity that will engage the majority of your group.”



## What should you avoid when working with friends groups or volunteers?



- “Overworking them or relying too heavily on volunteers and burning them out.”
- “Do not allow one, or a small fraction, to overrun the group.”
- “Letting them follow through with a crazy idea that doesn’t fit in the park’s mission.”
- “‘My way or the highway’ type attitudes within the group or during an activity.”
- “Doing their work for them.”