



ADOPT-A-PARK PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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&



**AUSTIN
PARKS
FOUNDATION**

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WELCOME!

Thank you for becoming a park adopter through the City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department and Austin Parks Foundation's Adopt-A-Park program. The success of our park system depends on the support of the public as stewards of our parks. With your help we will continue to make Austin a great place to live, work and play!



ABOUT THE ADOPT-A-PARK PROGRAM

The Adopt-A-Park Program is an opportunity for neighborhood groups, regular park users and nearby residents to partner with each other, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) and Austin Parks Foundation (APF) to improve and maintain neighborhood parks.

Park adopters serve as a key community representative for the park by making an ongoing commitment, organizing a community-based volunteer group and by being inclusive, encouraging and welcoming to all park stakeholders.

Partners bring much-needed volunteers, technical expertise, in-kind donations and private resources to the parks. But we recognize that partnerships bring more than resources; they also build ownership, encourage the enthusiasm and passion that partners have for parks they treasure, and ultimately bring greater effectiveness, innovation and creativity to the park system.

MISSION

The goal of the Adopt-A-Park Program is to build a sense of community pride and ownership around every park or facility. PARD and APF believe that the success of the Austin parks system depends on the support, assistance, advocacy and enthusiasm of the public. Through the Adopt-A-Park Program, we seek to find the best practices and strategies to work together to enhance the park system.

SECTION 1: PROGRAM OVERVIEW

ROLES

Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD)

- Provide oversight
- Review and collaborate on volunteer and park improvement projects
- Communicate about plans for the park

Austin Parks Foundation (APF)

- Provide tools, materials and supplies
- Provide grant opportunities
- Provide technical assistance and education

Adopt-A-Park Partner

- Organize a community-based group
- Conduct outreach and encourage park users and neighbors to get involved
- Serve as a community stakeholder for the park
- Work to improve and maintain the park

COMMON QUESTIONS

1) Who can adopt a park?

Ideal park adopters are regular park users, neighborhood groups, and nearby residents who are interested in improving their park. Businesses are not currently eligible to adopt city parks.

2) What parks are available for adoption?

Most City of Austin neighborhood parks, pocket parks and district parks that do not have current adopters are available for adoption. City of Austin metropolitan parks and recreation centers are currently not available for adoption under this program. Please contact Ladye Anne Wofford to confirm the eligibility of your proposed park.

3) What are the benefits of becoming a park adopter?

Most importantly, park adopters enjoy a sense of pride in championing our parks! PARD considers park adopters a key stakeholder for the park and provides opportunities and support for volunteer maintenance and park improvement projects. Additionally, park adopters are eligible for certain resources provided by APF, such as tools, educational opportunities and grant opportunities.

4) What kind of projects can Park Adopters do in parks?

Adopt-A-Park Projects generally fall into two categories, Volunteer Projects and Park Development projects. See Section 3 on Volunteer Projects, and Section 7 on community-initiated improvement projects for more details.

LEARN MORE AT [AUSTINPARKS.ORG/ADOPT](https://austinparks.org/adopt)

SECTION 2: GETTING STARTED

APPLICATION PROCESS

Groups interested in adopting a park may apply online by visiting the City of Austin website at austintexas.gov/department/partnerships or the Austin Parks Foundation website at austinparks.org/adopt

Before completing the application, we strongly encourage applicants to review the entirety of this handbook.

After completing the application, please allow up to 5 business days for your application to be processed. If your application is approved, your group will be contacted to schedule an on-site meeting with representatives from the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department and Austin Parks Foundation to welcome you to the program, and give a brief orientation.

QUESTIONS?

A list of key contacts, including PARD and APF staff, is available at the back of this handbook should you have any questions about the application process or the program.

SECTION 3: VOLUNTEER WORKDAYS

Volunteer workdays are routine and basic maintenance-related projects. Projects are often completed on a single workday, but can also be done on a regular and recurring basis. Volunteer projects generally do not require permitting or involve the PARD Planning or Construction staff and are overseen by the PARD District Manager. For park development projects that go beyond basic maintenance see Section 10 - Community Projects. Examples of basic maintenance projects include:

- Mulching, Weeding, Watering
- Gardening/Landscaping
- Litter Cleanup
- Painting, graffiti removal, minor repairs
- Manual invasive removal and habitat restoration

COORDINATING YOUR VOLUNTEER WORKDAY

1) *Identify needs and challenges*

Consult with your District Manager to share your project idea and get guidance on what needs to be done in the park. Be sure to check in with Austin Parks Foundation to find out about their available resources including tools, materials and project supervisor support.

2) *Submit a project proposal on GivePulse*

3) Get project approval

Coordinate with your PARD District Manager for review and approval of the project. District Managers will arrange and finalize project details with you. Coordinate with the APF Volunteer Manager for tools, resources and other materials.

4) Finalize project details

Communicate with your District Manager and the APF Volunteer Manager to finalize details and share any changes to the project. Re-confirm the project details in advance of the project with both PARD and APF to make sure all details are finalized and everyone is on the same page.

CHOOSING A PROJECT

All projects done on park property require advance permission from PARD, as well as Watershed Protection when work is done in the riparian zone. Austin Parks Foundation supports Adopt-A-Park groups working on a wide range of projects. The following types of projects are common and generally allowed in most parks with PARD approval:

- Tree mulching
- Root-collar clearing
- Litter cleanups
- Painting of benches, tables, grills
- Graffiti removal

These types of projects require additional advance planning:

- Trail building, repair or maintenance
- Tree (seedling or sapling) plantings
- Invasive species removal
- Native plantings
- Wildflower seedings

These projects require additional permission from the Watershed Protection Department:

- Plantings/habitat restoration along creeks/within the riparian zone
- Invasive species removal within the riparian zone

When you begin planning your project, we encourage you to reach out to Austin Parks Foundation's Volunteer Manager, your District Manager and/or Urban Forestry or Watershed Protection for support. Contact information for these resources is included at the back of this handbook.

PROJECT RESTRICTIONS

Volunteers work under the oversight of PARD staff. Tasks typically fall into the category of basic maintenance, and most projects are very low risk. Risk is carefully managed and minimized. PARD **does not** allow volunteers to use power tools or chemicals, nor does PARD allow volunteers to do tree pruning or other tree work, including but not limited to, fertilizing, air spading, deep root fertilization etc., as this work requires a Public Tree Care Permit, and a certified arborist to implement the work. Mulching and root collar clearing may be done by volunteers with

coordination and oversight from Urban Forestry.

When Adopt-A-Park groups would like to accomplish projects that require power tools and/or chemicals, such as chain saws and herbicides, or tree pruning and care projects, we suggest the group raise money or apply for an APF grant or Urban Forestry grant, so a qualified contractor can be hired to conduct the work.

AUSTIN PARKS FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL WORKDAYS

Each year, APF and PARD partner to host volunteer workdays large and small. These workdays are a great opportunity for Adopt-A-Park groups to recruit volunteers from outside their immediate area, and connect with their surrounding communities.

It's My Park Day Spring and Fall

APF's biggest city-wide volunteer events are It's My Park Day Spring & Fall, held the first Saturday of March and November. Each year, thousands of volunteers work to improve parks and greenbelts throughout the city.

At the Spring 2016 event, there were 115 projects city-wide, 3500+ volunteers and 10,500 hours of volunteer labor. That's equivalent to 5 park maintenance employees working full-time for a whole year! All told, including labor, this one day represented an investment of over a quarter of a million dollars for Austin's parks.

The majority of Adopt-A-Park groups make It's My Park Day an annual tradition. As a park adopter, we hope you'll join us each year for this impactful day of service. Project registration begins 2 months before the event, and we offer a "First-Timers" training for new project leads, as well as a Project Leader training to prepare all groups for a successful workday.

Days of Service

Austin Parks Foundation hosts volunteer events on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Earth Day, National Public Lands Day, and National Trails Day. APF also provides volunteer opportunities for corporate groups, students and service organizations throughout the year. Each of these work days are great opportunities to recruit volunteers for your park improvement projects. APF also hosts volunteer workdays throughout the year with business and service groups that can be great opportunities to finish larger projects in your park.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

IT'S MY PARK DAY SPRING
First Saturday in March

NATIONAL TRAILS DAY
First Saturday in June

IT'S MY PARK DAY FALL
First Saturday in November



All of the park adoption teams are encouraged to participate on APF's city-wide volunteer days. Adopt-A-Park Leaders may also serve as hosts and leaders for important sponsor organizations or other large groups on these work days.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

The Adopt-A-Park program uses the GivePulse online volunteer management system. All adopters have access to this system to promote workdays and to recruit and register volunteers. APF and PARD can also help promote your event through social media, our websites and APF's large network of business and service groups.

TOOLS FOR VOLUNTEER WORKDAYS

Austin Parks Foundation has a tool warehouse with hundreds of hand tools that may be borrowed free of charge for park improvement projects, year-round, by volunteer groups and park adopters. APF has an expanding collection of tools, mainly long-handled, that includes:

- Rounded point shovels
- Flat shovels
- Sharpshooter shovels (also called drain spades)
- Weed wrenches (small, medium, large) for removing invasive trees
- Metal rakes for mulching
- Pitch forks for mulching
- Wheelbarrows
- Mulch sleds (smaller than wheelbarrows, stackable)
- 5 gallon buckets (also good for moving mulch)
- Heavy duty rock bars
- Mattocks/pick axes
- Fire rakes (for spreading gravel)
- Rock cradles
- 5 gallon water jugs

Other specialty tools may be loaned for projects that have been pre-approved by PARD and APF.

To reserve tools for your upcoming workday, visit APF's website at austinparks.org/tool-warehouse and complete the online form at least **two weeks** in advance.



SECTION 4: STRUCTURING YOUR ADOPT-A-PARK GROUP

Building a structure for your group fosters commitment, accountability and sustainability. The Adopt-A-Park Program requires that each group maintain a minimum of a chair and a co-chair that serve for one year. However, some groups also choose to have a treasurer to look over funds and a secretary to keep track of meeting minutes and the group's future plans and goals.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Who will be the main point of contact for PARD, APF and other partners?
- Who will be in charge of communicating to your group and neighborhood?
- Who will be responsible for recruiting new members to your group?
- Who handles any money from fundraising?

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Continuously building your Adopt-A-Park group is critical to long-term sustainability of the group. It's important to continue reaching out to neighbors and informing the community of the work you're doing to improve your park. The more people involved, the more you can ensure that your group will continue to grow and be successful through the years. Most importantly, a growing group helps prevent burnout. Try some of these strategies:

- Creating a Facebook page, Twitter account or Instagram account for your group
- Block walking: going door to door (always use the buddy system) to talk to neighbors
- Hosting monthly meetings at the park or a house near the park
- Flyers in the park kiosk or at favorite neighborhood businesses (coffee shops, grocery)
- Participating in APF volunteer workdays and telling participants how they can get involved
- Hosting park beautification or cleanup days
- Working with your neighborhood association or contact team
- Reaching out to your neighborhood school PTA

CREATING BYLAWS

While not required, some Adopt-A-Park groups choose to adopt bylaws. Bylaws should be the guide or "rule book" by which your group runs its overall affairs. Bylaws may help answer several questions:

- How often does the group and group leadership meet and how is notice of meetings given?
- How and when is group leadership elected and how long do they serve?
- How is a meeting to be run?
- How would a vote be handled?
- How should record-keeping be handled?

Bylaws may be very simple, but go a long way in setting expectations for the group. When disagreements or questions arise concerning certain matters of governance, it is often very helpful to be able to go to the group's bylaws for direction.

SECTION 5: SPONSORED FUND ACCOUNTS

APF offers Sponsored Fund Accounts for park adopter groups. Through this program, groups interested in improving a park, but not currently registered as a non-profit, can join in a contractual agreement to make APF their fiscal sponsor.

Through this agreement, Austin Parks Foundation becomes a “charitable umbrella” for Adopt-A-Park groups. Acting as the registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, APF receives charitable funds and assists the client in raising funds through individual donations. Austin Parks Foundation will:

- Provide a month-end report including all transactions and names of all your donors
- Complete IRS reporting on your behalf, including 990 tax returns and 1099 filing for independent contractors, as well as provide our W9 form upon request
- Provide you with the use of APF’s non-profit status when making purchases so that sales tax does not apply, allowing your money to go farther
- In special cases, provide you with the use of APF’s non-profit status so that you can apply for grants from foundations
- Provide oversight of your fund accounts and expenses to help ensure that your money is being spent appropriately
- Manage your online donations through APF’s web site
- Write and send out acknowledgment letters on your organization’s behalf for all donations.

FEES

There is a \$50 per year maintenance fee assessed in January, a 2% administrative fee assessed on each donation and a 4% fee assessed on each credit card donation to cover our credit card processing costs. Checks over \$5,000 are limited to a \$100 fee. Fees are subject to change each fiscal year, so refer to APF staff for the most current fee information.

ACCESSING FUNDS

Once received, donations are held by APF in an account restricted for your park. Funds are disbursed from a sponsored fund account on a reimbursement basis when expenses are incurred. Using APF’s online check request form, you must submit either an invoice or receipt, after which we will send a check to either the contractor or the purchaser. Should your group disband, funds will be used toward other park projects and the most pressing needs of Austin’s parks.

LEARN MORE

For more information visit austinparks.org/sponsored. To set up a Sponsored Fund Account for your group, please contact John Rooney at john@austinparks.org.

REPORTS & FUNDRAISING WITH SPONSORED FUND ACCOUNTS

It’s important to keep in contact with APF staff regarding your account status as you begin your fundraising efforts. APF provides regular updates on your transactions, as well as donor names, but APF is always available to answer any questions you might have about your accounts and reports.

For tips on fundraising, especially for those with a Sponsored Fund Account through APF, please see Section 6: Fundraising for Your Park.

SECTION 6: FUNDRAISING FOR YOUR PARK

ROLES OF THE FUNDRAISING TEAM

Once you've formed your Adopt-A-Park team and decided to start fundraising, it's important to build a team that has a good understanding of what is expected of them. From finding prospective donors to making the ask, defining roles and responsibilities among your fundraising team is a crucial step in finding supporters for your park projects. Here are some of the basic roles and functions of a fundraising committee:

- Compiling a list of prospective supporters and stakeholders
- Determining how donors will be thanked and recognized
- Communicating with PARD in advance to coordinate a donor recognition plan for the park
- Creating a communication plan that covers outreach to donors as well as recognition after a gift is made
- Writing and submitting grant applications, as well as any reports that are required from the funder
- Creating a website and keeping it up to date with park project news and action items
- Creating a buzz about your park and the fundraising campaign
- Making the ask
- Thanking and recognizing donors

BASIC FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES

1) Build the foundation

- Build a team
- Draft an overview
- Secure support from the city early on
- Involve your community – build support
- Develop a project plan, scope and budget
- Talk to APF's Programs Director to access APF resources

2) Make the plan

- Build a fundraising committee
- Develop a "Case for Support" (who, what, where, why, when)
- Make a fund management plan (APF, ioby.org, etc)
- Set a goal

3) Make the ask

- Identify 5 best prospective donors
- Schedule a meeting with the donor
- At the meeting, tell them why they should give - share your goal and plan
- Ask! Be specific

BEING A RESPONSIBLE FUNDRAISER

As a fiduciary client of APF, we want you to be successful in your fundraising goals. We hope to make it easy for you to raise money, so we want to point out some important steps and precautions to take to avoid the following pitfalls:

- Money can be lost through mismanagement or poor record keeping
- Liability can be incurred if funds are misused
- Money in your possession can be lost or stolen
- Donors can be harmed by loss of privacy or loss of charitable donation status for their gift

- Donor confidence can be lost if funds are mismanaged or thank you notes are not sent

1) Be clear about who you are and how funds will be used.

Let donors know that you are operating under the charitable umbrella of Austin Parks Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit, and that all contributions will be used for park-related expenses.

2) Deposit funds promptly.

Checks, cash or credit card information in your home creates a liability issue for you and a privacy risk for donors. In addition, older information may become unusable: checking accounts may be closed or credit cards may expire.

3) Protect your donors' private information.

When possible, avoid collecting credit card information. Instead, have credit card donors give directly through the APF website. When you must collect credit card information on site (for example, at a silent auction), we recommend using an application such as Square. Destroy all documents with credit card data. APF shreds all credit card data that comes to our office once it has been processed.

4) Keep careful records.

For each donation, record a name, address, date and amount. Compare your records with APF statements on at least an annual basis. Please inform APF of the name and address of your donors so we may thank them in a timely manner.

5) Deposit all funds collected with APF.

Do not retain funds to reimburse expenses. Deposit all funds and request a reimbursement check from APF. Your donors believe they are making a charitable donation, but only funds that pass through the APF bank account can be considered non-profit donations.

6) Thank donors in writing.

APF will thank all donors, as required by the IRS, on our letterhead. A handwritten note from you not only makes the donor feel appreciated, it is helpful (although not required) for their tax records.

SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Once you've created an Adopt-A-Park team, and developed your fundraising committee and strategy you can brainstorm ways to build support for your park and projects. Below are a few ideas that have worked for others:

- Block Captains & "Front yard Fridays"
- Kick-off events like BBQ's, etc
- Yard Signs & Stickers
- Creating buzz through neighborhood newsletters, social media, email, etc.
- Hosting informational events like open houses, volunteer days, picnics in the park, etc.
- Secure a matching donation/grant from organizations like Public Works' Neighborhood Partnering Program
- Make personal asks from friends - knock on doors, organize a block-walk
- Apply for a grant from APF or other foundations
- Hold a neighborhood-wide garage or bake sale
- Ask for support from neighborhood businesses

ACL MUSIC FESTIVAL GRANTS PROGRAM

The ACL Music Festival Grants Program provides direct financial support to park improvement projects initiated by Park Adopters, and contributes hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding every year. This program provides

opportunities for local park adopters to take ownership of improving and caring for their neighborhood parks. Austin Parks Foundation's grants program leverages resources by asking community groups to provide a match through volunteer labor, cash and in-kind contributions. The City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department does its part by providing planning expertise, materials, heavy equipment and labor. Park projects have included tree planting, trail construction, invasive species removal, play equipment, park furnishings and dog park improvements, among others. Potential applicants should attend a Grants Information Class prior to applying. Visit austinparks.org/grants to view the class schedule. Austin Parks Foundation has three grant opportunities available:

Neighborhood Grants

Neighborhood Grants are awarded for small-scale community-initiated park improvement projects on a more regular basis than the Community Grants, and in smaller dollar amounts. Grants from \$500 to \$5,000 are awarded regularly throughout the year on a rolling basis with a grant period of six months. These awards are meant to enable Adopt-A-Park groups to make small but significant improvements to their parks quickly throughout the year. To be eligible, projects must be pre-approved through the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department and may include plants, seeds, signage, dog waste stations, trash bins and more.

Community Grants

Community Grants are intended for larger community-initiated physical park improvement projects that fall between \$5,000 to \$50,000. These grants are offered twice a year with a grant period of 12 months, and are awarded through a competitive process. Community Grants have been given by APF since 2006 with the goal of supporting projects like playground installations, trail building and restoration work.

Impact Grant

The Impact Grant is intended to support large community-initiated physical park improvement projects, master plan implementations, and place-making. One grant for \$100,000 is awarded annually through a highly competitive process with a grant period of 24 months. Potential applicants should attend a Grants Information Class prior to applying. **Visit austinparks.org/grants** to view the class schedule.

APPLYING FOR EXTERNAL GRANTS WITH APF'S NON-PROFIT STATUS

Park adopter groups holding Sponsored Fund Accounts with Austin Parks Foundation may be able to use APF's non-profit status and Tax ID when applying for grants. APF requires notification before any group applies for funding under our 501(c)(3). Before we can approve such requests we'll require the following information. Please send the following by email to APF's Programs Coordinator:

- The name of the Foundation or organization to which your group plans to apply
- The associated reporting deadlines and what process you have in place to meet them

If the funding organization requests additional information, please send this request to the Programs Coordinator no less than 10 days before it is needed. Please include the language directly from the application. If the funder requests a budget, please ask the funder the following questions before submitting your request to APF:

- Does the funder want a project or an organizational budget?
- If the latter, have you discussed with the funder that your volunteer group operates under Austin Parks Foundation's umbrella? It's important to clarify, given our relationship, which budget they require.

EXAMPLE TEXT

It may be helpful to relay the following information when communicating with your potential funder. Please feel free to use the text below.

(Name of Park Adopter Group) operates under the umbrella of the Austin Parks Foundation (APF), a 501c3 nonprofit that supports more than 100 Austin neighborhood volunteer groups seeking to make improvements in their local parks, trails, and public spaces. APF is funded by generous donations from individuals, foundations and corporations, and is the primary beneficiary of the Austin City Limits Music Festival.

(Name of Park Adopter Group) has recently begun raising funds for our neighborhood park by soliciting neighbors, local businesses, foundations and civic groups interested in supporting our work to revitalize and improve our neighborhood park.

The Austin Parks Foundation (APF) accepts and receipts all donations made for (Name of Park Adopter Group). This pass-through relationship provides (Name of Park Adopter Group) donors full tax deductibility as allowed by the law and the peace of mind that comes with giving through an established community nonprofit governed by a community board and audited by a third party annually. APF's IRS 990, annual report and audited financials can be found on their website at www.austinparks.org/about-us/. Should you like a list of (Name of Park Adopter Group)'s primary donors, we would be happy to provide this to you upon request.

SECTION 7: COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Community projects provide an opportunity for Adopt-A-Park groups to raise funds and in-kind contributions to implement park improvement projects that are in alignment with PARD goals and meet community priorities.

PARD collaborates with your group to initiate, resource and execute park improvements. APF has grants available to help fund park improvements. See Section 6, Fundraising for Your Park.

There are a wide range of community projects from low complexity projects such as installing park furnishings to medium complexity options like installing a picnic pavilion, up to highly complex projects like a playscape replacement or major park renovation. These projects typically involve design, permitting and construction. Community projects may also focus on tree planting, habitat restoration and nature trail installation.

For a full list of community project guidelines and processes please visit www.austintexas.gov/department/community-projects

In most cases (with the exception of when a professional landscape architect or project manager is hired to manage the project) PARD staff will manage the implementation of park improvement projects, including overseeing contractors working in the park. The Adopt-A-Park group or APF will often pay directly for equipment to be delivered, or for contractors to work in the park. However, the installation and work in the park will be managed by PARD staff. All of these details will be documented when a project management plan is developed at the initiation of the project.