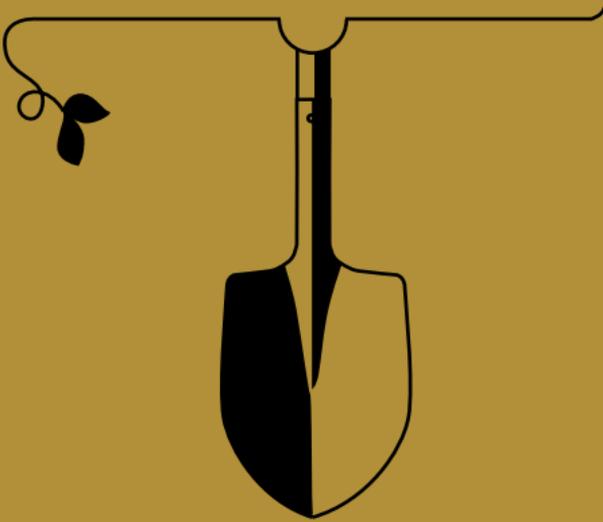


COMMUNITY
GUIDE TO
VOLUNTEER
WORKDAYS



About the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy:

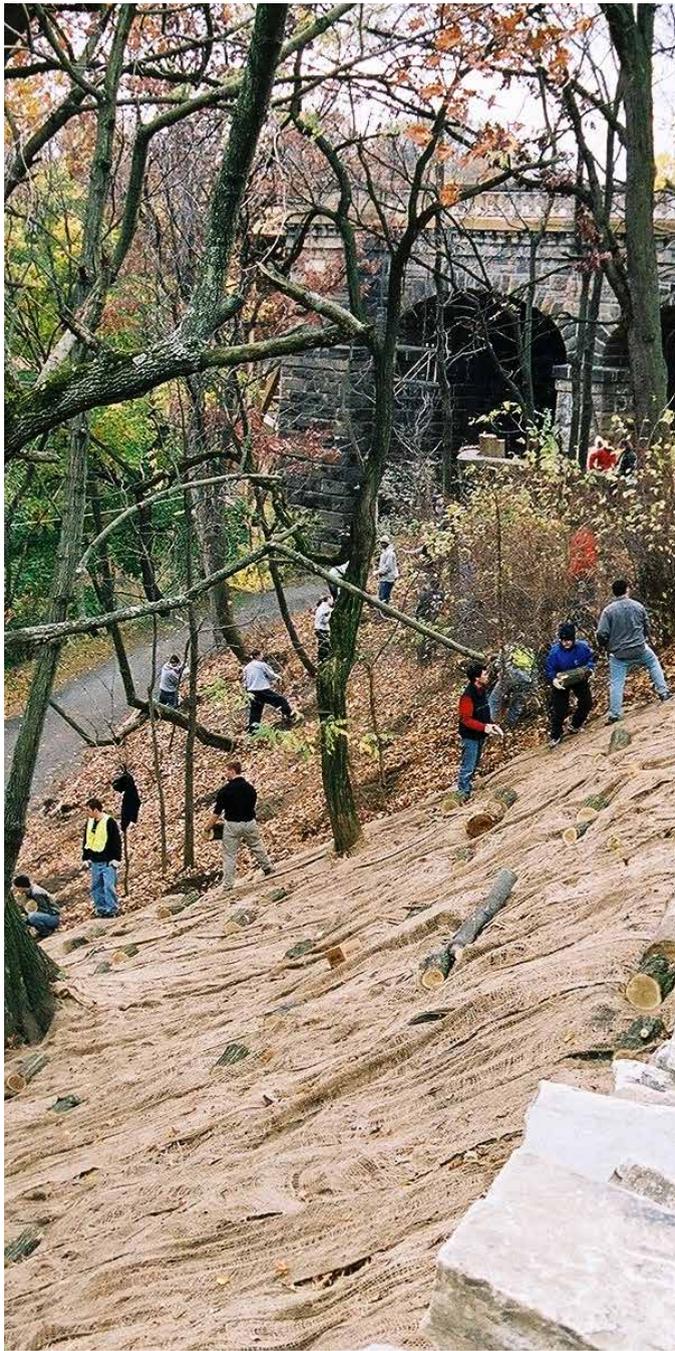
The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy is a national leader in park planning, management, maintenance, and restoration. As the fundraiser and non-profit advocate for Pittsburgh's parks, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy has raised more than \$63 million for parks improvements.

The Conservancy's work includes the restoration of historic buildings, public artworks, cultural landscapes, and natural areas; operations management and programming of Schenley Plaza and Schenley Park Café and Visitor Center; and the education of students and involvement of citizen volunteers in hands-on ecological restoration.

Because of the efforts of volunteers in Pittsburgh, our parks are healthy, beautiful and safe places for exercise and recreation. Our volunteers deserve our thanks. We hope this handbook contributes to even more successful efforts.

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1 Introduction

The City of Pittsburgh has more than 3,000 acres of green space in the form of parks, greenways, and gardens. Each of these places offers residents a natural retreat, recreational space, cleaner air, cleaner rivers, and increased property value. The Parks Conservancy recognizes the value these places bring to our communities, and encourages residents to care for them.

Preserving a natural space can be a significant challenge for an individual, but with the helping hand of other volunteers, a large task can easily be tackled. This guide provides the tools you need to put together a successful volunteer event.

Placing jute netting on an unvegetated hillside can help minimize erosion. Setting logs perpendicular to the slope slows down water flow while holding the jute netting in place.

2 Selecting a Project

If you don't already have a space or project in mind this section of the guide will help you figure out where you can work and types of projects you can do. You may also want to use the "Types of Projects" section in the Appendix.

2.1 Do Your Homework

Before you can start planning a project, you need to learn about the background of the area where you would like to work. We wouldn't want you to plant a beautiful garden only to have it bulldozed the next day!

Start by finding out if there is already a plan for the space you would like to green. Often the best way to do this is simply by asking the neighbors. You may also want to check if the neighborhood has a community plan that addresses the area.

If you find there is already a plan for the area you hoped to work in, don't be discouraged. If it's another greening initiative, they may want to collaborate with you.

If it appears that there are no plans for your space, the next step is to find out who owns the land.

2.2 Permission

Parks

In order to obtain permission to hold a volunteer event in a City Park you should contact the streets program supervisor at the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works. You may be asked to fill out a basic Volunteer Project Registration form. Complete this paperwork and return it to the Department of Public Works as directed.

You may also want to inform the park foreman from the division that represents the area where the park is located. For a map of the divisions and to find the appropriate contact information, visit the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works website:

www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/maps/test/dpw_divisions.html Click on the area of the map where you would like to obtain contact information for that division.

Vacant Lots

Many vacant properties are owned by the City of Pittsburgh or the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and can be leased through the Pittsburgh Garden Program for \$5 a year. If the property is owned by an individual, you will need to request written permission to work on their land. To find out who owns a property you can go to the Allegheny County Property Assessment website:

www2.county.allegheny.pa.us

When you enter an address, it will give you a page full of information about the property. At the top of the page, you will see "Owner Name." If the Owner Name is not the City of Pittsburgh or the URA, you should send a letter to the owner using the address listed at the bottom of the page under "Owner Mailing." Hopefully the property owner will respond to your letter and offer you written permission to work on their lot, but if they do not respond, you may have to seek out another worksite.



2.3 Site Assessment

First, you will want to assess if your site is “Event Ready.”

- Is the site accessible?
- Is there room for volunteers to park?
- Are there public restrooms nearby?
- Is the site visible and easy to find?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” it doesn’t mean that you can’t hold an event at this worksite, but it does mean you will need to do some extra leg work ahead of time. You may have to post signs directing people to a hard-to-find work site, or ask local businesses if they would be willing to let volunteers use their restrooms or even parking spaces.

Next, you will want to address any site hazards. These are any spots or items you would regard as dangerous.

Consider such things as...

- Is there poison ivy on the site?
- Are there steep slopes where volunteers could slip?
- Is there sharp glass that could cut someone?

For large volunteer days you may want to stage your materials at the worksite a day in advance so you won’t be as overwhelmed on the morning of your event.

If any of these, or other hazards, exist you will need to decide how you can keep your volunteers safe when they are on the site. Brightly colored flagging can be a great way to draw attention to dangers. Communicate with your volunteers about these problem areas at the beginning of your workday. If the areas appear unsafe for children, set an age limit for your event.

2.4 Scope & Frequency

While a big project can make a big impact, it will also require more preparation. More volunteers will need to be recruited, more tools will need to be acquired, and you may even need additional leadership to manage the crowd.

If this is your first time organizing an event, it is probably best to start small. If your site could use a lot of work, consider breaking it down into smaller projects. You can often accomplish the same amount of work by having 10 people volunteering monthly as you can with 100 people volunteering for a day.





3 Planning an Event

3.1 Set a Date & Time

When selecting a date, make sure you select the right season for the type of project you are doing. You can find information on what seasons are best in the “Types of Projects” section in the Appendix.

Base your time selection around your volunteers’ availability.

- If you are only planning to have one or two people come out, you want to make sure they can make it.
- If you’re looking to attract a large group of volunteers, evenings and weekends tend to fit around the average work schedule.
- If you’re hoping to have college students out, keep in mind that a flexible schedule with later start times may be best.

The average volunteer event should run between two and four hours in length. Any less than two hours and you may struggle to make an impact that you and the volunteers will feel proud of; any more than four hours and people may become tired.

Try to pick a date and time at least one month before the event. This will give you time to spread the word, and make adjustments based on the feedback you receive.

3.2 Prepare Your Paperwork

Once you have a date and location you can finalize all of the paperwork for your event. Paperwork may sound boring, but it is one of the most important steps in planning an event. It protects you, your partners, and the volunteers, in the case that something goes wrong.

Sign-in Sheet

A basic sign-in sheet has spaces for your volunteers to provide their name, email, and mailing address. This will allow you to track the number of people who attend and

give you the ability to get in touch with volunteers after the event. The top of the page should include your group name, the date, and the title of the event.

A sign-in sheet also has the ability to solve nearly all of your paperwork woes in one page. If you include the wording of your liability waiver and media waiver on your sign-in sheet, volunteers will only need to fill out one page. If you select this method, you should add a space for volunteers to sign or initial so they realize they are agreeing to the terms of your waivers.

Liability Waiver

While a liability waiver may not fully protect you and your event, **you should strongly consider having a waiver document.**

Media Waiver

Taking photos during a volunteer event is a great way to capture the work you’re doing and the fun being had, but if your volunteers don’t sign a media waiver you won’t be able to share these images with the world. Ask your volunteers to sign a media waiver. Some organizations make this waiver optional, but without a waiver, you won’t have permission to use images of your volunteers.

Emergency Response Plan

Physical labor can occasionally result in physical injuries. While it is your job to do everything you can to prevent anyone from being hurt, accidents do happen and **you need to have plan for what to do in the case of an emergency.**

Your Emergency Response Plan (ERP) should contain:

- Directions to and from the nearest hospital
- Name of who will drive victim to hospital
- First Aid Kit location
- Safety concerns about the site (Discuss these with volunteers!)

3.3 Equipment

In order to take on a project you will need to provide your volunteers with the proper gear. Every volunteer event requires two types of equipment:

Personal Protective Equipment

All volunteer events involve working with your hands, so at a minimum you need to **provide your volunteers with a pair of gloves**. Depending on the nature of the work you are doing, you may also want to provide volunteers with eye protection or even hardhats. **There should be a first aid kit on site during your event.**

Note: Remind volunteers to wear closed toe shoes and pants. This will keep their legs and feet protected from scratches and will reduce their exposure to poison ivy.

Tools

If you plan to host regular volunteer days, you should consider purchasing tools, but if you only need tools for a day, you can simply ask around. Friends, neighbors, and family members tend to have tools lying around that they use only on occasion and would be happy to let you borrow. **If you need a substantial amount of tools, you should consider partnering with a non-profit** that can provide tools. No matter where they end up coming from, it is your responsibility to make sure they are returned to their rightful owner in as good of condition as you received them.

If you need assistance in selecting the appropriate tools for your project, reference the section on “Types of Projects” in the Appendix.

3.4 Refreshments

Water It is very important that your volunteers are able to stay hydrated during your volunteer event. **Bring a large water cooler** and cups for your volunteers in case they do not bring their own water.

Food While food is not necessary for a volunteer day, it does make volunteers happy. It also can encourage people

to come out to your event. If you want to boost your numbers, advertise that you will be supplying free food. Businesses are sometimes willing to donate food or offer you a discount on your purchase.

3.5 Leaders

If you are planning on having a large number of volunteers out on a single day then it is a good idea to recruit some leaders to help manage your group. Having a ratio of **1 leader for every 10 volunteers** can help ensure your volunteer day runs smoothly.

Plan to meet with your volunteer crew leaders before the event to discuss what projects they will be managing and what you expect of them.

3.6 Develop Your Introduction

Once your volunteers have arrived, signed in, and been given their personal protective equipment, they will be ready to go and awaiting directions. It will be your job to inform them about the day.

Items you should be prepared to cover:

- Welcome and thank everyone
- Introduce yourself
- Inform everyone of your mission
- Acknowledge partners and sponsors
- Explain the task for the day
- Explain why the work needs done
- Point out safety concerns
- Go over tool use and safety
- Tell everyone the restroom location
- Set the boundaries of your worksite

REMEMBER:

Your attitude can set the mood for the day. Your positive outlook and smile can make the day a success, even if it is pouring rain!

4 Recruiting Volunteers

Now that you have your site picked out and your project in mind it's time to recruit some help. When communicating information about your event, be sure to tell your audience specific details including event date, time, and location. This is a good way to remind people to wear close toe shoes and long pants. Here are a number of ways you can market your event:

Word of Mouth This is the most effective way to get people out to your event. Simply tell all of your neighbors, friends, and family members about what you are trying to do and ask them to come out and help. Depending on how many volunteers you are looking for, this may be the only marketing you need to do.

Social Media Blogs, Facebook, and Twitter are an excellent way to promote your event to your entire network. Write a post, create an event, or tag a friend. Before you know it, your volunteer event will be trending.



Flyers Flyers are a great way to advertise in businesses and community spaces, but don't let your flyers become litter! It is common courtesy to go around and remove your flyers after the event.

Email If you have developed a contact list from previous events, email is a quick and easy way to invite volunteers out again. Try not to bombard people because your email could end up being labeled as spam.

Partnering Organizations Businesses, schools, and universities are often looking for service opportunities for their employees or students. Partnering with just one organization can easily bring out dozens or even hundreds of people.

Volunteer Websites There are a number of websites that are designed to match people who are looking to volunteer with events in their region. Here is a short list to help get you started:

www.pittsburghcares.org

www.allforgood.org

www.volunteermatch.org

www.idealists.org

Other Get creative! There are plenty of ways to spread the word about an event, just remember:

More Marketing = More Volunteers

If you plan on hosting a large event, you may want to have volunteers RSVP so you have a clearer idea of how many people to expect. This can also give you the option to cap registration.

These hardworking volunteers were each recruited using the strategies listed in this guide.

5 Sustainability and Growth

5.1 Keeping Volunteers

It is important to remember that people come out to volunteer of their own free will, and you want them to come back again and again. Here are the three most important aspects of a successful volunteer day.

Be sure to take note of their order!

1) Be Safe If someone is injured while volunteering there's a good chance they won't come back. Even other volunteers may shy away if they don't feel the site is a safe place to work. This can be avoided by following all of the safety recommendations outlined in this guide.

2) Have Fun The best way to keep volunteers is to make sure they have a positive experience. If everyone has a good time, it may not matter if you don't finish the project because they will come out again.

3) Do Work Volunteers come out to make an impact. Make sure you give them the opportunity to work and know that they accomplished something with the time they donated.

Here are a few additional tips to help ensure your volunteers continue to attend volunteer days regularly:

Set Realistic Expectations People tend to enjoy a good challenge. Give your volunteers something significant to shoot for such as a number of trees to plant or bags of trash to remove. Take time to reevaluate your expectations about halfway through the event to make sure the goals are reasonable.

Show Volunteer Appreciation Let your volunteers know that you appreciate what they're doing. This starts with verbally thanking everyone during the event. You can also send them a written thank you. If you can afford it, providing food and refreshments at the end of a workday is also a great way to thank everyone.

Share Success Let your volunteers know what they have accomplished. Give them numbers at the end of the day if you can. It's also great to tell them about the history of the space and how they've helped to improve it.

Be Consistent One of the best ways to promote sustainable maintenance of your site is to host Volunteer Days regularly. Steady engagement encourages volunteers to build stewardship into their schedule. People will start to set it aside on their calendars if you have a consistent schedule.

Promote Ownership Encourage your volunteers to take ownership of the workspace. Inspire volunteers to treat the space as if it is their own yard. This creates a sense of responsibility and respect that will attach them to the land.

Use the Skills of Every Volunteer Everyone has a skill they can contribute. If a volunteer doesn't feel up to doing physical labor, ask if they would like to take photos of the event, work the sign-in table, or even prepare food for the volunteers.

5.2 Volunteer Trainings

Volunteer training can enable volunteers to take on new, specialized roles at your worksite. Take advantage of the training offered in our region. There are a number of local training opportunities listed in the Regional Resources section of this guide.

REMEMBER:

You will be too busy during your event to take photos. Designate someone to be the photographer for the day so you don't miss the best photo opportunities.

5.3 Funding

While volunteers can achieve significant progress through hard work and dedication, sometimes you need to secure funding to take your project to the next level. If you are trying to obtain funding it is important to document your work so you can report it to funders.

Here is a list of key items you should track:

Numbers

- Volunteers Engaged
- Hours Worked
- Bags of Trash Removed
- Trees Planted
- Flowers Planted
- Invasive Plants Removed
- Length of Trail Built

Photos

- Before & After
- Volunteers
- Different Seasons
- Community Members Using the Space

Support

- Partners
- Sponsors
- Other Funders

Stories

- About Successes
- From Volunteers
- About the Site's History

Volunteers completed this trail during a work day. With the right planning, volunteer efforts can go a long way to contributing to success.





6 Regional Resources

6.1 Programs

Urban EcoStewards The Urban EcoStewards program is a partnership between Allegheny Cleanways, Allegheny Land Trust, Frick Environmental Center, Mount Washington CDC, Nine Mile Run Watershed Association, and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. This program offers free trainings on Invasive Plant Removal, Erosion Control, Planting Techniques, and Crew Leading.

www.pittsburghparks.org/ues

Bidwell Training Center Horticulture Technology

Bidwell Training Center offers a diploma in Horticulture Technology. The program covers a wide range of horticultural skills and related Plant Science.

www.bidwell-training.org/majors/horticulture-technology/

Green Up The city's Green Up program supports the greening of city-owned vacant lots.

www.pittsburghpa.gov/neighborhoodinitiatives/greenup/

Penn State Center Master Gardener Among other services, the Penn State Center Pittsburgh offers environmental technical assistance that includes green infrastructure, consumer and commercial horticulture including Mater Gardeners, urban forestry and urban agriculture and entrepreneurship. For further information on all of the services available, please visit

www.pennstatecenter.com

Phipps Master Gardener Accepted applicants participate in a 6 month training program, and help build a strong horticultural community through on-going volunteerism at Phipps and in the community.

www.phipps.conservatory.org/volunteer-at-hipps.aspx

Redd Up Zone The city's Redd Up Zone program engages volunteers in street beautification by providing support in the form of materials and city resources.

www.pittsburghpa.gov/servepgh/reddupzone/

Tree Tenders Tree Tenders is a program of Tree Pittsburgh that teaches about Urban Forestry practices, tree biology and health, proper planting, pruning, and basic tree care. Tree Tenders are qualified to apply for trees in their community and help organize tree plantings and tree care. They participate in ongoing pruning workshops, tree care days, and more.

www.treepittsburgh.org/become-tree-tender

6.2 Additional Guides

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy Volunteer Crew Leader Guide

This guide discusses the responsibilities of a crew leader, how to approach a variety of projects, and how to keep volunteers motivated during an event. Contact the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy for a copy of this guide.

www.pittsburghparks.org

Invasive Plants of Pittsburgh

This guide explains how to identify and remove invasive species that are threatening the biodiversity of the region. Contact the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy for a copy of this guide.

www.pittsburghparks.org

Grow Pittsburgh's Community Garden Guide

This guide was created to help aspiring community gardeners prepare to launch a new growing project.

www.growpittsburgh.org/start-a-garden/community-garden-guide/

Vacant to Vibrant Guide This guide walks the reader through the process of choosing a vacant lot, determining how to acquire it, and selecting an appropriate greening project to place on it.

www.growpittsburgh.org/wp-content/uploads/Vacant-to-Vibrant-Toolkit-guide-to-greening-vacant-lotsreduced.pdf

7 Appendix

Types of Projects



Litter Pick Up

Picking up trash is one of the most common ways to perform stewardship. It requires very little equipment and can transform a site in a matter of hours.

Season: Year-Round

Tools Needed: Trash Cans, trash bags, buckets, trash grabber.

Challenges: Dumpsites can be full of hazardous materials. Make sure volunteers put glass into buckets, NOT bags. If a volunteer finds a hypodermic needle, have a leader carefully place the object into a plastic container with a lid. Do not empty liquid-filled containers; leave the lid on and dispose of the item properly. If you find a firearm, call the police.



Tree Planting

Trees do so much for us. They clean our air, hold our soil, give us shade, and help capture and treat rainwater.

Season: It is generally best to plant trees when they are dormant in either late fall or early spring.

Tools Needed: Shovels, picks, buckets, stakes, post driver, rakes, water

Challenges: Planting a tree takes foresight. You don't want it to destroy a sidewalk or crowd out another tree. You also need to make sure you select a tree that will be successful at your worksite. Make sure that the tree you select will fare well with the amount of sunlight and water in the area.



Gardening

Flower gardens are a wonderful way to beautify an area. They can also give organization to a vacant lot and show people the space is being cared for.

Season: Plantings can start in the spring. May is generally frost free, but watch the weather. Gardening can continue through late fall.

Tools Needed: Shovels, trowels, buckets, plants, soil, water

Challenges: Gardens require regular attention. Plants need to be watered, beds need to be weeded, and many flowers need to be replanted annually. Make sure that you, and the community supporting the garden, are ready for these responsibilities.



Invasive Plant Removal

Plants that are not native to Pittsburgh can take over a natural space, crowding out the plants that are supposed to be growing here. By removing invasive plants you encourage a more diverse and successful ecosystem.

Season: The season for invasive removal varies from plant to plant, but it is generally best to remove the plants before they go to seed.

Tools Needed: Pruners, loppers, hand saws, trash bags, weed wrench, girdling tool

Challenges: Invasive plants are persistent! In order to see lasting results you will have to perform numerous removals.



Trail Building

Trails give people the ability to explore nature without damaging the landscape. They can connect people to new places and provide a place to exercise.

Season: Early spring to late fall. Any time the ground is not frozen.

Tools Needed: Grub hoes, pick mattock, mcleods, loppers, hand saws, shovels

Challenges: Trail building can be a strenuous activity and it requires a variety of hand tools. Trails must be carefully planned so they are not too steep and so they take people where they want to go.



Erosion Control

Our region is covered with steep hillsides and there are a number of natural and unnatural elements causing them to erode away. By fighting erosion, you can prevent landslides and slumps that can damage trees and waterways as well as buildings and roads.

Season: Early spring to late fall. Any time the ground is not frozen.

Tools Needed: Buckets, shovels, grub hoes, logs, erosion control materials

Challenges: Erosion generally happens on steep hills, which means the volunteer work will take place on hillsides. Make sure volunteers have good shoes and step cautiously so they don't slip. Also, keep volunteers from working above people to prevent them from dropping items on anyone downslope.

Event Checklist



Date: _____ Time: _____

Worksite: _____

Site Owner: _____

Permission Obtained: Yes No

DPW Informed (if necessary): Yes No

Type of Project(s): _____

Site Assessment

Is the site accessible? Yes No

Is there room for volunteers to park? Yes No

Are there public bathrooms nearby? Yes No

Is the site visible and easy to find? Yes No

List solutions for any "No" answers circled:

List any potential site hazards:

How will you address these hazards?

Paperwork

Sign-in Sheet

Liability Waiver

Media Waiver

ERP

Equipment

Gloves

First Aid Kit

Eye Protection

Helmets

Name of Emergency Driver: _____

Form continued on back ▶

Tool List	Quantity

Refreshments

Water

Food: _____

Number of Volunteers: _____

Number of Leaders: _____

Recruiting Strategies

<input type="checkbox"/> Word of Mouth	<input type="checkbox"/> Flyers
<input type="checkbox"/> Social Media	<input type="checkbox"/> Email
<input type="checkbox"/> Partnering Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Websites	

Other Notes

Helpful Links

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy
www.pittsburghparks.org

Allegheny CleanWays
www.alleghenycleanways.org

Allegheny Land Trust
www.alleghenylandtrust.org

Bidwell Training Center
www.bidwell-training.org

City of Pittsburgh
www.pittsburghpa.gov

Friends of the Riverfront
www.friendsoftheriverfront.org

Grow Pittsburgh
www.growpittsburgh.org

GTECH Strategies
www.gtechstrategies.org

Nine Mile Run Watershed Association
www.ninemilerun.org

Penn State Center
www.pennstatecenter.com

Phipps Conservatory
www.phipps.conservatory.org

Tree Pittsburgh
www.treepittsburgh.org

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
www.paconserve.org

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About the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy improves the quality of life for the people of Pittsburgh by restoring the park system to excellence in partnership with government and community partners.

For more information, visit

www.pittsburghparks.org



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