

STARTING A FRIENDS GROUP

(Info provided by www.partnershipsforparks.org - Check out the website for more information)

MAKE FRIENDS

- ✓ **Create a Core Group:** In the early stages, most of the work of establishing a park group is done by a handful of dedicated people. These can be people you already know, or people you find through your first general interest meeting. This group should meet often and regularly to do the real organizing, then report on their progress to—and get feedback from—the general membership.
- ✓ **Hold a General Interest Meeting:** In order to find people who care about the park (either before or after creating a preliminary core group) schedule a meeting in a public place, invite everyone you know, post flyers all over your neighborhood, and announce the meeting any other way you can think of. Use the meeting as an open forum to discuss the park and what people want done there.
- ✓ **Keep on Recruiting:** Take every opportunity to bring more people into both the general and the core group. There is power in numbers.

SET YOUR GOALS

- ✓ **Decide as a Group:** Decide together what “helping the park” means. If you set the goals all by yourself, you might leave out something that is important to someone else, and you’ll lose their support in working to achieve them.
- ✓ **Be Realistic:** You can’t completely renovate your playground next week, but you can host a clean up as a first step. Start small and build, otherwise you’ll get frustrated and burn out.
- ✓ **Be Specific:** If you clearly define your mission it will be easier to convince others to help you because they’ll know exactly what you’re about.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF

- ✓ **Contact Important People:** Make sure to let everyone know about your group—your city councilmember, your block association, your local police precinct, the deli across the street. Before people can help you, they have to know who you are.
- ✓ **Meet the Parks Department:** From the very beginning, you should be in close contact with your Outreach Coordinator, and with the Supervisor and Manager responsible for your park. They are there to help you help the park.
- ✓ **Host a Visible Event:** As soon as you can, host an event in the park (a clean up, a family picnic, a nature walk, even just a sunset-viewing gathering). Advertise everywhere. Make sure to have a table at the event for recruiting new members and talking about the group. Holding a visible event gives you legitimacy and attention.
- ✓ **Network:** Everybody knows somebody who can help you, whether it’s a lawyer who will help you fill out IRS forms, an artist who will design posters for you, or an old friend of your City Councilmember. Different people have different skills and connections, and you need them all.

Adapted from “Tools & Tactics for Building Neighborhood Organizations,” Citizens for NYC, www.citizensnyc.org.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. DON'T DO IT ALONE

Involve as many people in your group as possible in order to...

- ✓ **Prevent Burnout:** The old saying holds true; many hands make light work.
- ✓ **Achieve Critical Mass:** If you're taking back your park from negative elements, you have to change its "feel." You can do that by bringing a lot of people into the park.
- ✓ **Have Political Clout:** The more people you have, the more attention you'll get from everyone—other groups in the neighborhood, government agencies, and elected officials.

2. DO SOMETHING DO-ABLE

Your long term goal may be to completely renovate your park or hire a full-time maintenance worker, but you should begin with more manageable projects. Small projects let you acquire the things you need to complete large projects, including:

- ✓ **Skills.** No one knows innately how to write a press release, or run a meeting, or lobby a City Councilmember. As with most skills, practice makes perfect. Use small projects to learn and you'll be a master by the time you tackle the big ones.
- ✓ **Relationships.** Every time you plan and run a small event, you make new connections and strengthen old ones. For instance, if you get to know your City Councilmember and his or her staff by hosting small clean-ups and fairs, they're more likely to be there for you when you tackle the big stuff. Remember, it takes years to build a network.
- ✓ **Members.** Every event you host, every meeting you hold, is a chance to recruit new members. If you keep active, your group will grow over the years. New core group members will allow you to do more effective organizing, and new general members will give you more people power. It's easier to accomplish the big things if you officially speak for a large number of people.
- ✓ **Legitimacy.** When you ask somebody for something big, they shouldn't have to ask "Who are you?" They should know. You've got it made if they already know you as "the group that's done a great job cleaning up the park and hosting the annual Halloween party." Also, in order to get a large grant from a foundation you must have a successful track record of smaller things.

3. DO IT AND DO IT AND DO IT

The biggest mistake groups make is organizing one big event and then waiting until next year to do it again. Regular projects will...

- ✓ **Add Up:** Your park won't be changed by a single project; it only changes when people see things happening over and over again.
- ✓ **Prove that You Mean Business:** Consistent action shows people that you're not going away.

SETTING YOUR GOALS

Setting the goals of your group is one of the first things you will do all together. As you determine your goals, it's important to make a distinction between your group's overarching mission and the steps that you will take to achieve that mission. Achieving a lofty mission requires taking small, tangible steps. These steps are your group's **goals**. Your **mission** is most likely one or more of these three things:

- ✓ **Physically Improving the Park:** from cleaning and planting to major renovations
- ✓ **Programming the Park:** hosting regular and special events, from concerts to a day camp
- ✓ **Increasing/Improving Park Usership:** Bringing children into a playground, or school groups into a natural area, or dog lovers into a dog run.

Your short-range goals should be simple and easily achievable; your long-range goals can be more complicated. For example, the first step to taking your park back from crime may be painting over graffiti and meeting your police officers, while it will take a lot more time, effort, and expertise to form a citizens' patrol.

What follows is a list of actions commonly taken by parks groups that should give you an idea of what is achievable right now, and what is achievable in the future. Of course every situation is unique, and you should take this guide as an approximation only.

Also notice that we've divided the lists into two sections—goals for your park and goals for your group. Remember that you're not just helping your park, you're growing a community group. As your group gains experience and sophistication, your effectiveness in the park will grow too.

SHORT-RANGE GOALS: EXAMPLES

For the Park

- ✓ Removing graffiti & trash
- ✓ Planting flowers
- ✓ Hosting a concert or other event
- ✓ Removing invasive species from a natural area

FOR YOUR GROUP

- ✓ Meeting with the park supervisor and manager
- ✓ Holding regular well-attended meetings
- ✓ Creating a membership mailing list
- ✓ Introducing your group to elected officials, other civics, schools, and churches
- ✓ Becoming a member of the community board committee that deals with parks
- ✓ Becoming a member of your precinct community council

MID-RANGE GOALS: EXAMPLES

FOR THE PARK

- ✓ Hosting regular clean ups
- ✓ Buying tools and supplies
- ✓ Buying and planting shrubs and trees
- ✓ Regularly weeding & watering planting areas
- ✓ Planting native species in natural areas
- ✓ Regular birding tours
- ✓ Increasing police presence
- ✓ Hosting a performance series, festival, sports tournament, or other larger event

FOR YOUR GROUP

- ✓ Expanding your membership
- ✓ Sending out a mailing
- ✓ Holding elections
- ✓ Developing strong working relationships with parks, the police, elected officials, merchants, other civics, schools, churches, etc.
- ✓ Finding a fiscal sponsor
- ✓ Writing your by-laws
- ✓ Opening a bank account
- ✓ Becoming incorporated
- ✓ Receiving a small grant
- ✓ Soliciting contributions from local neighborhood businesses
- ✓ Getting publicity in local media outlets

LONG-RANGE GOALS: EXAMPLES

For the Park

- ✓ Attracting regular programming by local or citywide organizations
- ✓ Hosting a regular summer program for kids (basketball league, arts and crafts)
- ✓ Hosting regular environmental education/restoration projects
- ✓ Creating a citizens safety patrol
- ✓ Raising money for a major renovation or redesign
- ✓ Acquiring funding for a playground associate or gardener

For Your Group

- ✓ Hosting a small fundraising event
- ✓ Recruiting a board of directors
- ✓ Building long-term relationships with funders and supporters
- ✓ Publishing a regular newsletter
- ✓ Getting 501(c)3 tax-exempt status
- ✓ Compiling an archive of your accomplishments (photographs, newspaper articles, old newsletters and flyers, etc.)

Linking with other groups in your neighborhood to work together on larger projects

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF MEETINGS

What Makes a Good Meeting

- ✓ Meetings should have a purpose—the group should be trying to accomplish a specific, defined objective. Meeting for meeting's sake wastes time and drives people away.
- ✓ Agendas should be directly related to the meeting's purpose. For example, if the purpose of a group's monthly meeting is to reinforce people's ties to the group, the meeting should be more social and less administrative.
- ✓ The group should all be aware of, and agree to, the meeting's purpose. Circulate the agenda beforehand to make sure this is the case.
- ✓ Allow for social time before and/or after the meeting.
- ✓ Be realistic about the agenda; prioritize goals and seek to accomplish only what's feasible within **an hour or less**.
- ✓ Make sure everyone has a chance to participate and be heard. One way to do this is make time on the agenda for everyone at the meeting to share a piece of news or a highlight.

Running Good Meetings

- ✓ Set ground rules. It can be very helpful to agree on procedural rules before beginning any substantive conversation—e.g., no interruptions; share air time; all decisions by consensus; etc.
- ✓ Always start and end on time. Starting on time is very important; if people see that the meeting consistently starts late, they will start showing up late—and they will be frustrated at the outset that the meeting is not well-run.
- ✓ Read the group's body language. If people seem bored or tired, you may need to change the pace of the meeting.
- ✓ Stick to the agenda. People want to feel as if someone is in control of the meeting—so if the group is going over time on a topic, remind them of the agenda that the group agreed on. Ask the group if they want to alter the agenda or table the issue.
- ✓ Make sure that people can make a point without being interrupted; also, ask the opinions of people who don't volunteer to speak.

Dealing with Conflict

- ✓ When you are confronted with a difficult person or a conflict, don't get personal; remain in the framework of the meeting, the ground rules, and the agenda.
- ✓ Thank the person for his or her thoughts; refer back to the established ground rules and politely and firmly remind the person that he or she is moving away from the agenda or breaking one of the rules.
- ✓ If a discussion between two or more people gets very heated, step in and summarize each point of view. Ask the group if they want to continue discussing the question. Remind people of the ground rules. Try to take the emotion out of the air with a calm tone.

Making Decisions

- ✓ It's important to allow for ample discussion so that everyone feels their voice has been heard; at the same time, meetings need to have conclusions. Again, read the group's body language to get a sense of whether they are ready to move on.
- ✓ Help the group move to action/decision by summarizing the points that have been expressed and stating the decision that has to be made in clear terms. Ask if anyone has any last comments, then move to make a decision.
- ✓ If the group makes decisions by consensus, poll the members for their views, then summarize the group's decision.

Adapted from "Tools & Tactics for Building Neighborhood Organizations," Citizens for NYC, www.citizensnyc.org.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

These apply when dealing with any potential ally—civic organizations, your Community Board, elected officials, Parks & Recreation, the Police Department, and anyone else who could help you or your park.

1. Make yourself visible—both you and your group should be known in the community.

To raise your group's profile, hold public events and publicize them well. To raise your own profile, get involved with all kinds of groups and issues. The more you and your group do, the more contacts you'll have.

2. Keep people informed.

People get very upset when they feel they've been left out of the loop. Call, write, send out notices—whatever it takes to avoid surprising people. An added benefit is that when you let people get involved in something from the beginning, they are more likely to become personally invested in it and want it to succeed.

3. Build personal relationships.

Remember that you are dealing with people, not just agencies or organizations. People will be stronger allies if they know and like you as a person. And keep in mind that building a strong relationship takes time and energy; it won't happen overnight.

4. Be a good listener.

Focus first on understanding *other people's* needs and priorities. Listen carefully so that you can understand what drives the person or organization you want to enlist. Start with the individual—what personally motivates him or her? Likewise, what is the organization's focus?

5. Look for win-win opportunities.

Think of ways your needs mesh with others' needs. How can supporting the park help both you and your allies? For example, having a local bodega owner provide refreshments at your Summer Festival is good for both you and for him/her, if you publicize his/her support—through your newsletter and on a sign at the event itself.

6. Build a “bank account” of trust and goodwill—and don't make too many withdrawals!

Keep your word, and do favors for people when asked, if it's not too burdensome. People notice if you stick to your commitments. If you help someone out in some small way, especially if that person is in a pinch, they'll be likely to return the favor. But if you're unreliable or self-centered, you'll burn bridges quickly. Keep in mind how often you're asking for favors, as opposed to giving them. Finally, ask for little things before you ask for big things.

7. Thank anyone and everyone.

Send thank you letters, make phone calls, recognize contributors at public events, note supporter on your flyers and newsletters, give certificates of appreciation, and hold thank you parties. If someone helped you in an official capacity, send a letter of commendation to his or her boss. When in doubt, give people *more* credit than they deserve.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN DEALING WITH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES:

1. Be polite, patient, and persistent.

"You can catch a lot more flies with honey than with vinegar." Civility counts, and is essential for a good relationship. Screaming, insulting, and demanding may work once, but it rarely solves the problem in the long term. Sure, sometimes you've got a right to get angry. But it's risky, and should be a last resort.

2. Know who has the power to solve the problem.

When people seem to be unresponsive, it's often simply because they really can't do anything about the issue you are raising. Unfortunately, people don't always explain that. Know the chain of command in the agency you call, and move up the chain of command as appropriate. If you're uncertain who's in charge, be specific in your request, so you can find the person most able to deal with your problem.

3. Get to know different people at the agency, and distinguish among them.

Some people at public agencies can be unresponsive or indifferent, but many others aren't. Just because the agency makes a decision you don't like, don't let that destroy good relationships you have built. View someone's actions in the context of your history with him or her. And keep in mind that many times people would genuinely like to help but can't because of limited resources.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN APPROACHING ELECTED OFFICIALS:

1. Look Professional.

Give your organization a name, print official letterhead, type your letters, and keep a membership roster. Make sure the official knows that you represent a larger constituency. But don't bring your whole group to the meeting; you don't want to make the official feel he or she is being attacked.

2. Be prepared.

Research the official's voting record on the issues you are concerned with. Bring materials from your group to show that you are serious and committed.

3. Know the Details.

Know specifically what you want and specifically why you think it's worth doing. If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say you will get the information after the meeting.

4. If the official is unavailable, meet with a senior staff member.

Elected officials' staff can often have a great deal of influence.

PARTNERING WITH PARKS

Parks Employees: Important Allies

A park does best when the community and Parks & Recreation work together as a team. When asked about their most important relationships, parks volunteers will often tell you that it's crucial to know and work with Parks employees, especially their park's Supervisor or Manager. Managers and Supervisors create the schedules of the other Parks employees who maintain your park. They can provide you with supplies for clean-ups, painting and planting projects; and they can help you partner with other City agencies such as the Departments of Transportation and Sanitation when you need their support.

TIPS ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- ✓ **Introduce yourself** and your group members. Set up a meeting to discuss your shared goals and visions for the park.
- ✓ **Get to know other park workers.** Find out the district's regular cleaning schedule. This may help you plan your clean-ups for when the need is greatest.
- ✓ **Define shared goals.** The Park Managers and Supervisors know their parks. Work with them to develop realistic goals that work for both of you. Parks' staff performance is evaluated by the **Parks Inspection Program**, which rates parks on cleanliness (GLOW - Glass and graffiti, Lawns and litter, and Weeds) and structural quality (of safety surfaces, sidewalks, paved surfaces, play equipment, trees, benches and fences). As a result, these areas are priorities for Parks maintenance staff, and they will welcome your help in improving the park's rating.
- ✓ **Keep them in the loop.** District personnel need to know what's going on in their area. Send them your newsletter. Tell them far in advance when you're planning a clean up or event in the park, and where the event will take place.
- ✓ **Know their schedules.** Many Parks maintenance work from very early in the morning to mid-afternoon and are rarely in their offices because they have so much territory to cover, not just your park. Find out from them the best time to reach them.
- ✓ **Thank them, officially.** When Parks staff have been helpful, write them a thank you note. It's a good idea to send a copy to the Borough Commissioner to make sure that they get recognition for their efforts. Of course, if Parks people are rude or unhelpful, it's OK to let their supervisors know that, too.

WHY EVENTS ARE IMPORTANT

I. THEY'RE GOOD FOR THE PARK

"If you don't use it, you lose it."

- ✓ A buzz of sustained, positive activity is key to a safe and vibrant park.
- ✓ Especially if you're trying to "take back" a park, there's no substitute for a steady stream of events that brings in the good and drives out the bad.
- ✓ Events in a natural area, such as birdwatching or a hike, can help introduce people to the park as a community resource
- ✓ Don't forget to host events in the early evening (stargazing, music, sports), when the park is most often underused (or abused).

Good times in the park mean good feelings towards it. When people have a good time in the park because you've drawn them in with a good event, they'll feel better about the park and be more likely to respect it and support it in the future.

II. THEY'RE GOOD FOR YOUR GROUP

They can help increase your membership. Events bring new people into the park. Take advantage of this by having a table at *every* event where people can sign up for your mailing list and find out how to get involved or become a member.

They can be used to leverage resources. A successful track record putting on events can demonstrate to potential supporters that your group can make a difference in the park. This helps when seeking funds from everyone from elected officials to corporations and businesses.

They raise your group's profile. A successful, well-run event adds to your reputation, which will help you get more support and attendance at future events.

KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL, EASIER EVENT

Tap into other groups.

- ✓ Encourage everyone—Scout troops, schools, athletic leagues, day camps, block and tenant associations—to participate in relevant events.
- ✓ Better yet, get them to co-sponsor the event.
- ✓ Your group will benefit from another set of connections, multiply your resources, and (ideally) lighten your workload.

Don't bite off more than you can chew.

- ✓ The size and scale of events should be decided by the number of people willing to help organize them.
- ✓ Do something simple first, then build from there.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to scale back if you find you've been too ambitious; better to have a few strong successes.

Plan ahead. Allow two weeks of planning for regular clean-ups, at least a month for small events, and several months for large events.

Publicize, publicize, publicize.

- ✓ Notify your mailing list.
- ✓ Put fliers up everywhere: shop windows, bulletin boards, in churches, schools, apartment buildings.
- ✓ List your events in the community calendars of local papers, local access cable, and radio stations.
- ✓ Most important, get your friends to tell three friends who tell three friends (and so on). Nothing works like word of mouth and networking.

Expect the unexpected. A first-time event will take twice as much effort to plan as you think it's going to, and will go over budget by about 20%. There will be bureaucratic hurdles you never expected, egos that need to be soothed, last-minute emergencies, and unseasonable blizzards. Don't worry. Be happy.

Delegate responsibilities and develop expertise.

- ✓ Have one person in your group deal with Parks, another with publicity, a third with fundraising or membership.
- ✓ Having one person consistently responsible for something lets him or her build specific skills and useful relationships.

Say thank you. People will be happy to help you next time if you sincerely, publicly, and frequently thank them this time. When in doubt give people *more* credit than they deserve.

Build on your successes.

- ✓ Repeat annual events. It's easier the next time; people know to expect it; and you begin to build traditions that lead to larger participation each year.
- ✓ Try to do at least one event each season to maintain your profile and presence in the park.

DELEGATING RESPONSIBILITY

An effective parks group cannot be just one person; it should be a democratic institution that allows for an array of voices and talents. But many groups have difficulty expanding their membership beyond a core group of two or three (or one!) dedicated volunteers. What's the way around this?

Never Do What You Can Delegate

Delegating tasks to different members of the group allows the members to develop a sense of responsibility and ownership while taking the load off that core group. Delegating also builds leadership skills within the group's membership, cultivating that future president or treasurer.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE DELEGATING:

- ✓ **Generate tasks collectively.** People will have more ownership over tasks they help to identify. Before taking on a new project, brainstorm with the group the list of things that will need to be done. Then, have people volunteer for tasks.
- ✓ **Break down tasks into concrete, manageable parts.** Be realistic about deadlines and time commitments. Say, "This will require at least two evenings of phone calls this week," not "this shouldn't take much time."
- ✓ **Delegate tasks to people who will be able to carry them out.** As you get to know your group's membership better, you'll be able to identify who has what skills. Don't put people into a situation in which they are likely to fail.
- ✓ **Be realistic about what people are able to do.** No task is too small!
- ✓ **Use a positive approach when seeking help.** "I want you for this job; you have the skills we need to..." instead of, "I don't suppose you'd be interested..."
- ✓ **Let people do things differently than you might.** Once you have delegated a job, be available for help or questions but don't interfere.
- ✓ **Praise people's efforts in public;** offer constructive criticisms in private.
- ✓ **Be confident**—people like to be part of a winning team.
- ✓ **Be open to criticism; don't get defensive.** Take a mental step backwards when your leadership is challenged or criticized (see "Managing Conflict," attached).

PUBLICIZING YOUR EVENT

Publicity helps you attract new volunteers and raises your profile as a group. There are a number of approaches you can take to publicize your group and events in the park.

1. FLYERS

After word-of-mouth, one of the most effective ways to publicize an event is to post flyers all over your neighborhood. You don't need to be an artist or a desktop publishing expert to make great flyers—see enclosed samples.

What to do:

- ✓ Make flyers on a computer or by hand
- ✓ Remember to include a date, time, and specific location
- ✓ Provide a contact number so that people can call to get more information or volunteer to help out
- ✓ Make copies—try to use connections to get free copies from a school or church, your City Councilmember, or your office
- ✓ How many copies you make depends on how many people you want at the event—50 is plenty for a small story-reading event in a playground, while you might need 500 for a large festival.
- ✓ Consider making larger (8.5x11 or larger) flyers for posting, smaller ones (5.5x8.5) to display in stacks.

Good places to distribute flyers:

- ▶ **Post flyers:**
 - ✓ in the park, especially at the entrances and other high-use spots
 - ✓ in the windows of local stores, especially those near the park (ask for permission)
 - ✓ on community bulletin boards in supermarkets, churches and synagogues, building lobbies, gyms, the YMCA, and recreation centers
 - ✓ in elementary schools, high schools, and colleges
 - ✓ at bus stops, theaters, and other high-traffic spots
- ▶ **Ask to display a stack of flyers:**
 - ✓ inside local stores & restaurants
 - ✓ in the display areas of libraries, churches, and recreation centers
 - ✓ at Community Board and Councilmember district offices

2. MEDIA COVERAGE

Local media—newspapers, local access cable, radio, etc.—can help your group in two ways:

1. **Free advertising** By including your event in their calendar sections prior to the event, they can help you reach a wider audience.
2. **Good publicity:** By writing longer articles about the event after the fact, they can help enhance the image of your group.

Be sure to clip and save any press coverage. The articles make great back-up for requests for funds or other support.

For information about writing press releases & getting coverage, see “Getting Noticed,” enclosed.

SPREADING THE WORD:

Getting Help From the Community

There's often no need to reinvent the wheel in publicizing your projects in the park. Other, well-established groups in your community probably have effective ways of communicating with your neighbors. Since they share with you the goal of improving the quality of life in your neighborhood, they will often be happy to help you publicize events.

Your Community Board

Though different boards work in different ways, many will:

- ✓ List your event in monthly calendars that they mail out. To be listed, call your District Manager at least a month in advance.
- ✓ Let you announce your event at meetings of the Board and its committees. Show up at least 15 minutes ahead of time and put your name on a speakers list. Always bring something (flyers, newsletters) to hand out. To get a meeting schedule, call your District Manager.
- ✓ Post flyers on the Board's bulletin board.
- ✓ Share a list of other community-based groups working in the neighborhood.

Civic and Religious Groups

Ask the presidents of these groups for help publicizing your event. Particularly if you offer to do the same for them, they may be willing to let you:

- ✓ Make an announcement at the beginning of one of the group's meetings.
- ✓ Hand out flyers at a meeting or send them to the group's mailing list.
- ✓ Post flyers on the group's bulletin board.
- ✓ List your event in the group's newsletter.

Local Schools

Schools can be a great resource for event publicity—after all, when children come to an event, their parents usually come with them! Ask the principals and administrators of elementary schools, high schools, and colleges for help publicizing your event to students. They may:

- ✓ Put you in touch with interested teachers or the PTA.
- ✓ Help you distribute flyers to students and parents.
- ✓ Let you post flyers on the school's bulletin board.
- ✓ Put you in touch with student groups that may be interested in helping you, such as the student government or an environmental club. (Approach these student groups as you would other civic groups, by asking to make an announcement at one of their meetings.)

Elected Officials

Speak with your Councilmember's chief of staff or community liaison for help with publicity. Elected officials and their staff can help you publicize an event by:

- ✓ Including your flyers in one of their regular mailings.
- ✓ Announcing your event at the many community meetings they attend.

STRUCTURING YOUR ORGANIZATION

HOW FORMAL SHOULD YOU BE?

Informal groups that pick up garbage and plant flowers on an occasional basis can do a very good job of beautifying the park without ever even giving themselves a name. However, if your group has larger goals, like renovating the playground or combating crime, you're going to need more structure. Structure is also important for raising money.

WHAT IS STRUCTURE?

- ✓ **A Name (and a Logo):** A name makes your group official, while a logo looks great on flyers and in newspaper articles and on top of your letterhead.
- ✓ **Regular Meetings:** So that group leaders can report to the general membership and ask for their input. Meetings keep your organization from turning into a one-person show.
- ✓ **Elected Leadership:** Though the general membership usually vote for the "natural leaders" anyway, elections ensure that your group is democratic, that one person isn't calling all the shots. Regular elections also mean that a leader can pass on the torch before he or she burns out.
- ✓ **Committees:** A great way to delegate responsibility and find new leaders. By spreading out the work, responsibility, and credit among many people, committees let you get a lot more done.
- ✓ **Regular Communications:** As your group gets bigger, you'll need a way to make the general membership feel like they're in the loop. Even if they are only published once or twice a year, newsletters and bulletins are an important tool for holding on to your membership. (They're also good for sending promotional material to people you want to impress.)
- ✓ **Official Memberships:** By officially recognizing members and letting them know that they are members, you create a support group—people you can ask to volunteer, people you can send mailings to, people you can ask for money, people you can call "members" when you're asking someone else for money and trying to look big and well-organized.
- ✓ **Records:** Files filled with letters you've written and received, newspaper articles, old flyers, photographs, legal documents, membership lists, and business cards. If your group is to continue to exist through the years as leadership changes you must have a way of passing on important information.

Leadership and Committees

INTERIM LEADERSHIP—YOUR CORE GROUP

Newly-formed groups are often organized by several dedicated people who come together to create the group. These people aren't elected and don't need to be. (Sometimes this early planning stage is done by just one person, but then you don't really have a group yet.) Though the group usually has a chairperson who leads meetings, everyone should be equally involved in decision making. The core group should report back to and get feedback from the general membership (people who want to help the park but don't want to lead the organization).

INTERIM COMMITTEES

The members of your core group should each be responsible for different tasks, for example: working with Parks, recruiting members, writing by-laws, planning your first event, and contacting important people. (If your core group is big enough, you can assign more than one person to each task, creating interim committees.)

ELECTED LEADERSHIP

Hold an election when the group feels stable and established, when you've got members who regularly attend meetings, and when you've found out who you can count on and who has strong leadership skills. While all groups should have a President and a Treasurer, the rest is up to you. You may elect members to a general steering committee or to specific positions.

STANDING COMMITTEES

When your group as a whole decides on its goals, you may find that some things are so central to your mission that it makes sense to form **standing committees**. Standing committees are part of an organization's permanent structure. Each committee should be led by a chairperson. Some examples of standing committees:

- ✓ Beautification (gardening and cleaning)
- ✓ Membership (recruitment and management)
- ✓ Fundraising/Finance
- ✓ Publicity and Public Relations (deals with press, advertises events)
- ✓ Safety (locks the park at night, works with police)
- ✓ Ecology (concerned with restoration and education in natural parks)
- ✓ Newsletter
- ✓ Event Planning

Ad Hoc Committees

Some projects come and go, so the committees that deal with them should come and go too. These **ad hoc committees** can be formed by the steering committee whenever they're needed, and dissolved when they stop being useful. They are also led by a chairperson.