



**Friends of
Grand Rapids
Parks**

Volunteer Handbook

Updated May 2026

Table of Contents

WELCOME!	3
About Friends of Grand Rapids Parks	4
1.0 Volunteering	5
<i>Definition of a Volunteer</i>	5
<i>Engagement Philosophy</i>	5
<i>Benefits of Volunteering</i>	5
<i>Volunteer Stipends</i>	5
2.0 Volunteer Expectations	6
<i>Volunteers can expect Friends to:</i>	6
<i>Friends expects volunteers to:</i>	6
<i>Inclusion</i>	7
<i>Anti-Harassment Policy</i>	7
3.0 Safety	8
<i>Equipment</i>	8
<i>Pets</i>	8
<i>Tobacco, Alcohol, and Substances</i>	8
<i>Policy Against Violence and Weapons</i>	9
<i>Liability & Insurance</i>	9
Acknowledgement of Receipt and Review	10

WELCOME!

Welcome to Friends of Grand Rapids Parks! I'm so glad you have decided to volunteer with us! You are now part of an organization that is committed to growing community through nature.

We believe that each volunteer contributes directly to achieving our mission and we hope that you will take pride in being a member of our team. I hope that your experience here will be enjoyable and rewarding.

This handbook will introduce you to Friends of Grand Rapids Parks and provide a basic overview of the practices and procedures which provide us all—employees AND volunteers—with guidance and direction. It will also explain the culture, programs, and expectations for all volunteer activities. Although I encourage you to read this handbook in its entirety, I trust you'll know who we are not by the words in this document, but through your everyday experiences with Friends staff and fellow volunteers.

Whether you plan to be with us for one day or many on a regular basis, I encourage you to embrace our core values:

- Community Driven
- Open to Learn, Ready to Share
- Respect and Compassion for People
- Enthusiastic & Playful
- Follow Through

I'm excited to have your talents as a volunteer on our journey!

Stoked,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Stacy Bare
Executive Director
Friends of Grand Rapids Parks

About Friends of Grand Rapids Parks

During the recession of 2008, the City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department experienced budget cuts. A group of neighbors recognized that they had the ability to band together and address these needs, and Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (or Friends, as we often call it) was born. At this time, volunteers focused their efforts on basic maintenance to keep parks open and safe for kids throughout the city.

Today, the City of Grand Rapids has a strong and thriving parks department, and Friends' role has changed. Our work has shifted to prioritize growing our community through nature by engaging residents to volunteer and play outside.

Our Priority Program Areas

- Urban Forestry
- Conservation
- Park Activation
- Trail Building

Our Mission

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks is a 501(c)(3) Michigan nonprofit organization. We work with the community and city to plant, grow, and maintain parks, trees, and trails. Our mission directly supports the vision for the City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation in creating and supporting a healthy, vibrant community. When we are successful, the community is successful!

Our Values

- Community Driven
- Open to Learn, Ready to Share
- Respect & Compassion for People
- Enthusiastic & Playful
- Follow Through

1.0 Volunteering

Definition of a Volunteer

You are considered a volunteer if you, without compensation or expectation of compensation, perform a service at the direction of and on behalf of Friends of Grand Rapids Parks.

Engagement Philosophy

Volunteers are one of the greatest resources we have at Friends. People like you, who give their time, energy, and talents to help steward and activate community green spaces, are essential to our mission. We are committed to creating opportunities for the community to be involved in our work, and many of our initiatives would not be possible at all if volunteers were not involved. Our volunteers are priceless!

Benefits of Volunteering

As a volunteer at Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, you'll be helping us grow a thriving, nature-connected city where all can access the benefits of the outdoors. By working together to restore native plants and wildlife habitats, grow an urban forest, and build trails, we'll create opportunities to connect with nature now and into the future.

In addition, you will have the opportunity to use and enhance your skills and gain valuable experience that will help you in the future. You'll also meet and work alongside other folks who deeply care about the green spaces in our city. We strive to provide our volunteers with a positive work environment, along with all the necessary training and supervision to get the job done.

Volunteer Stipends

We recognize that volunteering can come at a personal cost: time off work, arranging for childcare and transportation, etc. To ensure that all residents can be involved with our work, Friends is periodically able to provide volunteer stipends to offset these personal costs. If you have questions about whether stipends are available for the volunteer activity you plan to engage in or whether you qualify for a stipend, please contact us.

2.0 Volunteer Expectations

Volunteers can expect Friends to:

- Treat you with respect, because YOU belong out here.
- Provide clear instructions and thoughtful leadership.
- Maintain safe and enjoyable working conditions.
- To listen carefully, answer questions completely, and provide feedback and guidance on performance.
- Ensure an experience free from discrimination, harassment, intimidation, bullying or coercion.
- Give you the tools and knowledge you need to make an impact you can see.

Friends expects volunteers to:

- Complete a volunteer waiver before participating in a workday or event. Waivers can be completed online or on the day of the event.
- Bring your enthusiasm and enjoy connecting with nature and community.
- Treat fellow volunteers, Friends staff, and community members with respect.
- Be ready to learn! Follow all instructions from leaders and seek assistance from experienced volunteers or staff whenever you need help.
- Be punctual. We rely on our volunteers to arrive on time for scheduled work and stay for the entire shift. This ensures that all volunteers are able to hear all instructions and fully participate in all safety briefings before beginning work.
- Never argue or act in a disrespectful manner. The use of disrespectful or foul language will not be tolerated.
- Help us maintain an environment free from harassment and discrimination. Our full harassment policy is detailed elsewhere in this handbook.
- Help us be responsive to community feedback. If a partner or neighbor makes a suggestion or expresses concern about our services, please inform your Team Lead.

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks retains the right to dismiss a volunteer, if they are failing to adhere with expectations, working in an unsafe manner, or being disrespectful to staff, other volunteers, or community members.

Inclusion

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks is committed to fostering, developing, enhancing, cultivating, and maintaining a culture and atmosphere of respect, inclusion, and belonging.

We work to ensure that all volunteers are made to feel welcomed, valued, respected, and heard. We believe that it is important that each volunteer's unique value is known and appreciated.

Accordingly, all Friends volunteers have a responsibility to treat others with dignity, empathy, kindness, courtesy, and respect at all times. You are expected to exhibit conduct that reflects inclusion during the course of your work and at all other organization-sponsored events. Friends of Grand Rapids Parks recognizes, embraces, and celebrates our volunteer's differences and will not tolerate any actions or behaviors to the contrary.

Anti-Harassment Policy

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks strictly prohibits all types of harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment and other forms of workplace harassment based on an individual's age, height, weight, familial status, marital status, race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (including transgender status), pregnancy (including childbirth, lactation, and related medical conditions), physical or mental disability, genetic information (including testing and characteristics), veteran status, uniformed service member status, hairstyle or any other status protected by federal, state, or local laws. All forms of harassment are strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated.

Any volunteer who feels they have witnessed or been subject to any form of discrimination or harassment must immediately notify their Team Lead or a member of Friends' leadership team. Friends of Grand Rapids Parks prohibits retaliation against any volunteer who provides information about or assists in the investigation of a harassment or discrimination complaint.

We will promptly and thoroughly investigate any claim, including any informal reports. Friends will take appropriate action where it's discovered that a claim has merit. If Friends determines that harassment or discrimination occurred, corrective action will be taken to effectively end the harassment. In all cases, Friends will follow up as necessary to ensure there is no retaliation for making a complaint or cooperating with an investigation.

3.0 Safety

Equipment

There is no need for you to bring any outdoor tools from home. You will be provided with tools and any other equipment to perform your worksite activities. At the end of your work day, all Friends-issued tools and materials must be returned.

It is imperative that equipment is always used in a safe and responsible way and in the manner in which the tool is intended. Friends of Grand Rapids Parks staff will provide

training on safe tool use, and our expectation is that volunteers will follow staff instructions. If you are uncertain on how to perform an activity, please ask your Team Lead. Everyone is responsible to maintain a healthy and safe work environment. Please report all safety hazards or injuries to your Team Lead immediately.

Pets

Pets (dogs, cats, reptiles, birds, and any other type of live animal), although beloved, are not allowed at the worksite. This rule does not apply to service animals. Please talk with the Volunteer Coordinator if you have any questions.

Tobacco, Alcohol and Substances

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks aspires to create and sustain a healthy, substance-free volunteer environment. Volunteers should only work when they're fit for the activity and free of any effects of illegal drugs, alcohol, or cannabis. Use of tobacco products, including but not limited to, cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vaping, cigars, pipes and smokeless tobacco is prohibited at any Friends' worksite or inside any of the Friends' facilities. Likewise, alcohol is not allowed at any Friends' worksite; the only exception is at ticketed and regulated events.

This policy does not prohibit you from the lawful use and possession of prescribed medications. We do ask that you talk with your doctor about the medications' effect on your ability to work safely and promptly disclose any work restrictions to your Team Lead. If any volunteer is displaying behavior indicating they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, they will be asked to leave the worksite for the day for their own and others' safety.

Policy Against Violence and Weapons

The safety and security of our volunteers, employees, vendors, contractors and park partners and neighbors is important. Therefore, the following are prohibited and will not be tolerated:

- Any act or threat of violence made by a volunteer against another person's life, health, well-being, family, or property.
- Any act or threat of violence or intimidation that endangers the safety of volunteers, employees, vendors, contractors, or park partners and neighbors.
- Any act or threat of violence or intimidation made directly or indirectly by words, gestures, or symbols.
- Use or possession of a firearm or weapon in the course of the volunteer project or gathering.

The terms used above are defined as follows:

- **Intimidation:** A physical or verbal act toward another person, the result of which causes that person to reasonably fear for their safety or the safety of others.
- **Threat of violence:** A physical or verbal act that threatens bodily harm to another person or damage to another's property.
- **Act of violence:** A physical act, whether or not it causes actual bodily harm to another person or damage to another's property.

Volunteers must report any behavior that compromises Friends of Grand Rapids Parks' ability to maintain a safe work environment. All reports will be investigated immediately and confidentially, unless there is a legitimate need to know. **Volunteers who violate this policy will be asked to leave immediately and may be subject to criminal charges.**

Liability and Insurance

If you are willfully negligent and do damage, cause injury or harm, you will likely not be covered by the organization's liability insurance.

Acknowledgement of Receipt and Review

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Volunteer Handbook and understand that it is my responsibility to read the entire Handbook. I agree to comply with the Handbook rules, policies, and guidelines as well as any revisions made to the Handbook in the future. I specifically understand the following:

- If I violate the Handbook's rules, policies, or guidelines, I may be asked to leave and not be allowed to volunteer at Friends of Grand Rapids Parks .
- This Handbook supersedes and replaces any and all prior Handbooks and any inconsistent verbal or written policy statements.
- No oral statements or representations can change this Handbook.
- Nothing in this Handbook is created to infringe on any available legal rights.
- If I have questions about the content or interpretation of this Handbook, I will contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

Volunteer's Signature

Volunteer's Printed Name