

Toolkit: work days



Description

Getting people to take part in a day of action in the park is a great way to involve people in the park, future plans and the work of the Friends group. It is also a great way to generate interest in your group, recruiting new members and volunteers for future events. As long as the work tasks, which can range from litter picking to stream clearance, are fun, then people will be attracted back for more.

It is also a great opportunity to involve different sections of the local community, from local children to volunteers from the business community. As well as getting people into the park, it will result in the park being improved in some way - if volunteers are to feel valued, it is important that they see a tangible result to their efforts.

How to do it

Planning the work day

Pick your work task. This should be something relatively simple and achievable if it is your first work day and should relate to something that needs doing within the park or is part of a wider and ongoing regeneration scheme. Ensure the work task is suitable for all abilities and liaise with the park manager to obtain resources.

Obtain adequate insurance to cover your own group and all of the volunteers (see 'Must do's').

Leading up to the work day

Invite people from the local community to take part on the day. Promote and advertise the work day through local newspapers, radio, the local authority, friends and family and any other contacts within the sector you may have.

Assign one person within the Friends group to act as lead contact for all the volunteers.

Provide the date, time and meeting point, informing people what they should bring and wear on the day.

Send out any information that the volunteers will require before the event.

Ask people to confirm that they will be attending on the day so that you can work out numbers.

Liaise with specialist organisations (e.g. wildlife trusts or archaeological societies) if your work day is specialised. Ask them to provide support and advice and promote the work day.

On the work day

Take a register of people attending at the beginning and end of the day as well as an inventory of tools. Properly brief and instruct people as to what they will be doing on the day, why they are doing it and how long they will be working.

Assign group leaders to take responsibility for individual tasks.

Provide instruction if necessary on how to carry out the work task. If tools are to be used or more complex work undertaken, training will need to be done by a specialist organisation.

Provide a central information, meeting and refreshment point for volunteers. Consider how you will provide food (e.g. through a BBQ or packed lunches etc.).

Invite the local media along for the day to take photographs and arrange any photo shoots or interviews with the volunteers. Make sure there is one person within the group to coordinate liaison with the media and press.

After the work day

Thank everyone who took part and collect contact details if they are happy to provide this information

Work out a way to measure your success (e.g. the amount of rubbish collected, the number of new people signed up to the group's newsletter, or the number of new trees planted)

Review your work day as a group, assessing it for strengths and weaknesses.

Ideas for events

Stream, ditch, pond or footpath clearance.

Shrub and foliage clearance. You could clear invasive, non native species such as sycamore or rhododendron.

Litter picks and fly-tipping clearance. Volunteers should wear protective gloves. Chemicals, asbestos, medical waste and needles (sharps) should not be removed. This should be undertaken by the local authority.

Archaeological digs and work days. This is likely to require expert advice.

Bulb plantings. This is best done in the autumn (although summer bulbs can be planted in March). Seed plantings are also popular and can be donated by local or national gardening centres.

Tree plantings. Members of the public can be asked to donate or sponsor trees.

Wildlife and ecological surveys. It would be a good idea to work closely with a local wildlife group who would have expert knowledge.

Painting and decorating of benches, fences, pavilions or other buildings.

Must do's

Get insurance. This is absolutely necessary, whatever the type of work you are considering. You should find out from the local authority if the overall event insurance (which will be taken out by the local authority) covers this, or you need to obtain additional insurance. There are two types of insurance: public liability (to cover accidents to the public) and personal accident insurance (to cover accidents to volunteers).

Complete a risk assessment. These will be done before insurance is taken out. This is a document which identifies the potential risks of the work day and hazards and sets out how they will be minimised or reduced to an acceptable level. They are designed to help limit the chances of someone being injured or becoming ill as a result of your group's activities.

Health and safety considerations. A Health and Safety policy statement will highlight how your group manages health and safety. Everyone in the group should be made aware of the policy.

Have accident procedures in place. Consider what you will do if someone has an accident (including names of qualified first aiders, access routes for emergency vehicles etc). Key members of the groups should have mobile phones with them, and everyone should make sure they are turned on for the duration of the work task. Phone numbers should be exchanged at the start of the day.

Consider child protection if necessary. If children are involved, how will you protect them and how can you develop appropriate policy statements to guide members. If a child is to be left alone with a group member, they will need to have been police checked. If children are accompanied by parents or guardians, it will negate this.

Make sure everyone who volunteers knows why they are carrying out the task and how it will benefit the park. This will help to develop a sense of purpose and will also make sure that the work is co-ordinated and actually makes a positive improvement to the park.

Let people leave if they do not want to carry on the work or allow them to rest if necessary. Remember that they are giving up their free time, and even half an hour is a valuable contribution. Let people take plenty of rest and make sure they have breaks.

Thank everyone who takes part and give them lots of praise. Take their contact details so you can keep them informed of future work days and the work of the Friends group.

Issues to consider

Consider providing refreshments for volunteers. These can simply be water, tea and coffee and biscuits, but can encourage people who are volunteering to give their time and will make them feel more valued. This could be the responsibility of one of the Friends group, and is ideal for someone who may not be able to get physically involved in the work tasks. Access to toilets is also an important consideration.

Consider what tools you will use. Power tools can often only be used by a qualified member of staff or group, and will often mean that insurance costs will be higher. Some will actually require licences and even hand tools will require some training in order to be used safely and responsibly.

Consider getting a group member trained in first aid.

Will you need to do any consultation with the wider public and the local authority if your work day is going to make any significant changes to the park? You must have the authority to carry out the work and consider how the local authority can practically help you.

Whether you will require any vehicles or transport for the day.

Whether this work day will be a one off or part of a wider strategy of improvement works. particularly whether the work day will take place on the day of the event or there will be several lead-up days 'preparing' the site.

Whether you will let people bring their dogs on the work day. Some people may not want to attend without their dog, but others will feel uncomfortable in the presence of dogs.

Useful organisations to link to

Local authority parks department. All work days which are going to make a practical difference to the park should be authorised by the local authority, who may also be able to provide insurance and other forms of support

BTCV. This organisation can provide insurance and small grants for environmental groups working on environmental projects.

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens. They will provide tailored insurance to groups working on community gardens and city farms as well as specialist advice, guidance and support.

Groundwork.

Wildlife Trusts and local wildlife groups. They could provide valuable support, help and information regarding work days with an ecological bias.

St John's Ambulance. This group could provide medical support on the day, in case there are any accidents on the work day.

Tidy Britain Group. This group organise a National Spring Clean Week in April and provide kits of refuse bags and tabards to wear.

Other event ideas to link to

Tours of the park. A guided tour could feature the activities of the work day as part of its trip around the park which would provide a good example of work in progress.

Interpretation boards. These could provide details about the ongoing work in the park and what the volunteers are doing. It could also provide information about how to get involved.

Friends group stalls. The stall could provide details about how to join or take part in future work days, as well as details about the purpose of the work. It could act as a point for people to sign-up and express their interest.

What to do if it rains

Most work days will have to take place outdoors, whatever the weather. Rain may mean that not everyone turns up on the day and you should make sure that the tasks for the day can still take place with fewer volunteers.

Tell people to prepare for bad weather and bring boots and waterproofs.

Provide hot drinks if it does rain as volunteers may get cold and despondent. A small gazebo or room indoors could provide a good base to change clothes or leave bags and belongings.

What to do next

After the event, contact the volunteers who took part and thank them for their contribution. Tell them (and show them through photographs etc) what a difference they have made, and invite them back to attend another work day.

Run another volunteer work day. There is potential to recruit new volunteers at each work day and boost membership of the Friends group.

Where to get further information

Making a Difference (2004, GreenSpace) - www.green-space.org.uk

BTCV - www.green-space.org.uk

Health and Safety Executive - www.hse.gov.uk