

# CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY INSTITUTE FOR URBAN PARKS

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## MANAGING SPECIAL EVENTS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)



# Managing Special Events Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



More than 2,500 events take place in Central Park every year.

The Central Park Conservancy was founded in 1980 to restore one of New York City's greatest assets after periods of significant decline. By bringing long-term management and planning to a neglected system, the Conservancy established Central Park's first-ever public-private partnership: a unique relationship between the City of New York, NYC Parks, donors, and volunteers. Restoring, managing, and enhancing Central Park is our mission and the success of this collaboration has allowed for the longest period of sustained restoration in the history of the Park. We have developed effective strategies for every aspect of its care, based on over three decades of hard work and innovation.

Since 1980, the Conservancy has supported other parks by sharing these techniques. Each year we continue to receive hundreds of requests, from all over the world, for information surrounding the expertise gained while caring for New York City's iconic urban masterpiece. In 2013, the Central Park Conservancy launched the Institute for Urban Parks to provide new educational experiences for our 42 million visitors and to teach urban park managers our best practices.

## OVERVIEW

This *Managing Special Events Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)* is part of a series of useful resources for urban park managers. The answers provided within are intended to shed light on the Conservancy's special events management practices, which have evolved over time.

Although special events bring many benefits to Central Park visitors and the residents of New York City, they can also restrict public use of space, generate trash and litter, stress lawns, and damage Park infrastructure. With over 50 entrances and no gates or doors to close, Central Park is unlike other event spaces. This presents a host of unique challenges and unpredictable variables that require both careful planning and thorough implementation.

Through our partnership with NYC Parks – who sets all park-related policies throughout the five boroughs and issues permits for more than 2,500 special events that take place in Central Park every year – the Central Park Conservancy has developed management strategies that maximize public use and foster the quickest recovery of landscapes.

# Types of Special Events



The Naumburg Bandshell Orchestral Concerts.



Private events include hundreds of weddings annually.

## What is a special event?

A special event can be as small as a birthday party with 20 guests or as large as the annual New York City Marathon, with more than 50,000 participants crossing the finish line and thousands of spectators standing by. In 2015 alone, the Park hosted 600 weddings; 95 running, walking, and biking races; 360 film, television, and photo shoots; 60 corporate and school events; 10 parades; and 180 concerts and festivals. The remainder are small events such as picnics, birthday parties, and family gatherings.

## What kinds of special events are permitted in Central Park?

The Conservancy divides special events into three categories:

- **Private Events:** birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, corporate picnics, field days, etc.
- **Public Events:** concerts, athletic activities, cultural programs, etc.
- **Filming and Photography:** Although these do not fall under the NYC Parks permitting process, they are regulated by the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment. The Conservancy manages them under guidelines similar to those for other events through its Film and Special Events staff, part of the Operations department.

## Special events can restrict public use and park operations, damage landscapes and infrastructure, and generate extra trash. Are they worth it?

Special events are a wonderful way to bring together people of all cultures, backgrounds, and income levels – local residents, as well as visitors. Park gatherings attract new users, bring regular users back repeatedly, and, by increasing positive activity, reduce negative park uses. Events and film shoots offer opportunities to show off park improvements and promote a park to a broader national and international audience.

However, one potential benefit – revenue generated by charging to host events – can actually be counterproductive if it becomes an incentive for allowing inappropriate or damaging uses. This can end up increasing overall maintenance costs and unnecessarily restricting public access. A park's special events calendar should strike a balance between the benefits provided by special events and the long-term sustainability of the park.

# New York City Park Permitting and Regulations



The New York City Marathon, with more than 50,000 runners, finishes in Central Park.

## When is a permit required for a special event?

In city parks, a permit is required for any public or private event on parkland where more than 20 people are expected to attend, or to reserve a specific park location (even with fewer than 20 people). Separate permits are needed for event elements managed by other city agencies including amplified sound, built structures, and generators, to name a few. The NYC Parks permit prohibits vehicles on lawns and amplified sound (unless otherwise permitted), and requires event organizers to remove their garbage and comply with City-wide park regulations that prohibit smoking and alcohol. Event-related vending requires a separate permit. As noted, the rules for special events are established and enforced by NYC Parks ([nycgovparks.org/rules](http://nycgovparks.org/rules)).

## How does one obtain a permit?

An event organizer submits a permit application through the NYC Parks website ([nyceventpermits.nyc.gov/Parks](http://nyceventpermits.nyc.gov/Parks)) to request a date and location.

## Does the Conservancy have any input before a permit is issued?

NYC Parks consults with the Conservancy on all new and existing event proposals to review their potential impact on the Park. As the day-to-day managers of Central Park, the Conservancy knows the Park's uses and rhythms and can provide constructive feedback on how to implement or manage events in a way that ensures the long-term well-being of the Park's landscapes. NYC Parks also works with the Conservancy to provide better and more targeted feedback on a permit application to ensure that outcome. In this context, the Conservancy (via NYC Parks) may request permit changes to ensure events are appropriate in terms of size, location, equipment, timing, and public impact. For example, the Conservancy can offer insight on the capacity of a certain area of the Park, where amplified sound might prove challenging, or how the day-to-day management of the Park might be affected by an event. These interactions ensure permits are issued for events that are well planned and well suited to their Park location.

## When do permit requests have to be submitted?

Permit requests must be submitted a minimum of 21 days before the proposed event. This provides NYC Parks and the Conservancy time to review the request.

# New York City Park Permitting and Regulations



Annual parades take place along the park perimeter.



The annual New York Philharmonic Concert in the Park.

## Is there a fee to hold a special event in Central Park?

NYC Parks charges a permit fee of \$25, plus an additional assessment for larger events to compensate for the impact on the Park and the public. For more information regarding fees, please refer to the NYC Parks Rules and Regulations, Section 2-10 ([nycgovparks.org/rules/section-2-10](http://nycgovparks.org/rules/section-2-10)).

## What is the process for getting an event approved? How long does it take?

**ANNUAL EVENTS:** For annual events, such as the New York City Marathon, corporate field days, and the New York Philharmonic Concerts in the Parks, the calendar of events is relatively consistent from year to year. Applications for recurring events can be submitted between November 1 and November 30 of the year prior to the calendar year during which the event will occur. For all new permit requests, NYC Parks allows organizers to submit at the same time, but they are considered on a first-come, first-served basis after all recurring events have been reviewed.

**PRIVATE EVENTS:** NYC Parks reviews applications for small events such as birthday parties or school picnics, usually without further discussion with event organizers. Organizers can, however, request to meet with NYC Parks and the Conservancy's Director of Community Relations to review setup details if needed. The Director of Community Relations serves as the Conservancy's point of contact for small, private events in the Park.

**PUBLIC EVENTS:** Events that are open to the public and require additional setup (i.e., tenting, staging, amplified sound, and signage) are considered public and/or large events (i.e., events with an anticipated attendance of 5,000-plus). The Conservancy's Film and Special Events staff manage large Park events and film shoots. Applications for these events follow the process below:

- **Initial application review:** The NYC Parks Permits Office confirms the date and location availability. The Conservancy's Film and Special Events staff then reviews the application and may request changes before providing interim approval based on the location and nature of the event.
- **Site visit:** NYC Parks coordinates site visits with the event organizers and the Film and Special Events staff to review the proposed set up and details such as the schedule for load-in and load-out. This helps to ensure that the applicant is familiar with the space and determine, how people are going to use it. Conservancy staff checks where equipment, such as speakers, platforms, and cables, will be placed, whether paths will remain clear, where vehicles will travel, how people will circulate, and how on-site security, materials distribution, and trash will be managed. In some cases, NYC Parks will invite other agencies – such as the New York City Police Department (NYPD), the Fire Department (FDNY), and the Department of Buildings (DOB) – to attend these meetings.

# Guidelines and Practices



Staging events, equipment, and vehicles on paved surfaces helps mitigate potential damage to Park landscapes.

- **Review of event documents:** Once a site visit has been completed, the Film and Special Events staff review all documents submitted by the event organizer. These documents may include site plans, production schedules, signage layouts, trash management plans, potential or planned press and media coverage, on-site sponsor activations, vehicle needs, fencing and barricade layouts, event participant ingress and egress, and the public's access to the site throughout the event.
- **Final discussions and approval:** Once the Film and Special Events staff has reviewed the documents, they discuss the event with NYC Parks and the event organizer. If necessary, an additional site visit takes place.

## What are the guidelines for managing special events?

The major considerations in managing special events are assuring safety, maintaining public park access, and protecting the landscapes. Organizers must leave permitted areas completely litter- and damage-free.

Advance planning for events can preclude problems. During the permit approval process, the Conservancy reviews the event proposal to assess the possible impact on the Park. The Film and Special Events staff works with applicants to find alternative solutions for event elements with too large an impact, such as catering, amplified sound, generators, or staging.

## What are best practices to effectively manage special events?

The following strategies have been effective in preventing or reducing the repercussions of special events on the Park and the public:

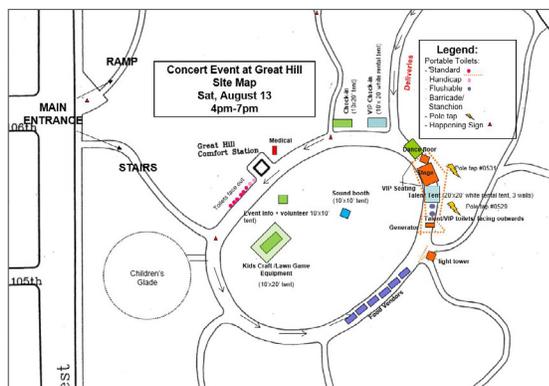
- ❑ **Locate events appropriately:** Through the NYC Parks permit process, the Conservancy recommends event locations based on considerations such as which Park areas are undergoing renovation, public access to a permitted area, duration, and nature of the event. The Conservancy recommends almost all large public events be set up on asphalt or hard surfaces rather than lawns in an effort to prevent unnecessary damage. Private events such as birthday parties and picnics, because of their size and nature, are recommended for woodchipped areas, or in some cases lawns, provided their size and setup would not result in significant damage.
- ❑ **Assess locations based on crowd capacity and space:** In order to determine the best location for an event, it is important to have an understanding of the size of the event setup, the anticipated size of the crowd, and the size of each permissible area in the Park.

# Guidelines and Practices



Strategic barricade placement helps manage event crowds.

- ❑ **Create and follow landscape management plans:** To keep Park lawns lush and healthy over the long term, the Conservancy has a management plan for each major turf space that, among other things, specifies how many and what type of events can be held. For example, the 55-acre Great Lawn area can support seven large events of no more than 60,000 people each, from June through September, spaced with time to allow the turf to recover.
- ❑ **Integrate an internal discussion:** The Film and Special Events staff meets with Conservancy Operations staff to determine if there are any concerns with an event. Discussions may include the event setup, location, duration, other permitted events in the area, and upcoming construction projects.
- ❑ **Conduct a weekly Special Events/Operations meeting:** The Conservancy Operations staff meets weekly with representatives from NYC Parks, Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP), and NYPD, as well as other departments within the Conservancy, to review upcoming events and other operational activities. These meetings allow the different agencies and departments to provide updates and discuss potential issues or conflicts.
- ❑ **Draft an event “physical:”** For large events, a detailed overview (called a “physical”) gathers all the essential logistical information into a single document. Depending on the type of event, the Conservancy or the NYC Parks Permits Office creates this document. The Film and Special Events staff must approve it, which usually happens after several rounds of review. Once finalized, the “physical” is distributed to appropriate individuals (Operations staff, City agencies, et. al.), approximately 10 days before the event.



A site map illustrates the physical layout of the event.

The event “physical” includes:

- Time frame for load-in, the event itself, load-out, and cleanup.
- Site map – the physical layout of the event.
- Information on all the contractors used.
- Contact information for the main people involved from the Conservancy, NYC Parks, and the organization holding the event.
- Anything unusual that would cause the closure of a large area or affect operations, such as blocked paths or temporary installations.
- Assistance needed from Conservancy departments, such as installing temporary fencing, providing irrigation sources, or adding garbage receptacles.
- Special requests to other NYC Parks divisions or City agencies, such as barricade delivery or on-site security support.

# Guidelines and Practices



The Great Lawn supports up to seven large events each year, including the Global Citizen Festival.

- ❑ **Notify staff:** The Film and Special Events staff sends all Conservancy staff a weekly list of the coming week's events, dates, times, and locations. This includes a spreadsheet of all film, television, and photography shoots, including the size, location, and producers' names. In addition, each day Operations staff announces via two-way radio the events taking place each day, locations that will be affected, and any other necessary details for staff working that day.
- ❑ **Keep the public informed:** When an event requires closing landscapes or paths, the event organizer is required to display signs notifying the public of the upcoming event that may impact their use of the Park. NYC Parks and the Conservancy review and approve all signage prior to installation. If necessary, the Conservancy positions barricades on which signs can be displayed. Signs are typically placed at least one full weekend prior to the event in order to inform weekend Park users of events during the coming week. The Conservancy also notifies the public about upcoming events via its website, social media, and newsletters.
- ❑ **Monitor events from start to finish:** Conservancy staff monitors all events from load-in through load-out.
- ❑ **Hold organizers responsible for damages and liability:** The permit holds organizers accountable for leaving Park landscapes and infrastructure clean and intact. If cleanup or repairs are needed, event organizers are required to cover the costs. For public events, the City may require a security deposit or bond. The event organizer is required to give proof of commercial liability insurance, which covers the City as well as the Conservancy.

# Operations Management

October 29 to November 5

## WEST DRIVE CLOSED

to vehicle traffic due to setup for the  
New York City Marathon



CENTRAL PARK  
CONSERVANCY  
central to the park



Event signs inform Park visitors about restricted access or closures in the Park.

NYC Parks and the Conservancy coordinate with multiple City agencies.

## How does the Conservancy manage the trash that special events generate?

Event organizers are required to remove all trash from Central Park and leave the event site litter-free. If an event is expected to generate a large quantity of trash, the organizer is required to supply their own trash receptacles, and the Conservancy removes the existing trash receptacles from the event space. For these large events, the Film and Special Events staff remain on site throughout the event to monitor trash removal and general event production. At the conclusion of an event, the Film and Special Events staff does a walk-through around the site with NYC Parks and the event organizer to ensure the space has been properly cleaned. For more information concerning trash management and recycling in Central Park, please refer to the *Central Park Conservancy Institute for Urban Parks Trash Management and Recycling FAQ*.

## How does the Conservancy mitigate turf damage from special events?

The Conservancy uses a combination of strategies that starts with ensuring the health of the turf year round. The Conservancy's Turf Care staff renovates major lawns annually to facilitate drainage and promote resilient turf. Additionally, the staff conducts seasonal maintenance and restorations of heavily used turf. For more information concerning turf care in Central Park, please refer to the *Central Park Conservancy Institute for Urban Parks Turf Care FAQ*.

NYC Parks keeps the number and size of events at a level the turf can withstand. When possible, special events take place on asphalt or hard surfaces. NYC Parks and the Conservancy review the plan provided by the event producer to minimize turf damage. Conservancy staff and the event producer coordinate load-in and load-out, using portable flooring on the turf and vehicles with special tires. After an event, Conservancy staff remediates any damage by aerating, reseeding, or laying new sod and, if necessary, closing the lawn for a period of time while the turf recovers. The event producer is responsible for paying for any damage caused by the event.

# Operations Management



Turf equipment is used to mitigate damage to the Great Lawn during an event load-out.

## Who handles security and crowd management at events?

Event organizers are responsible for hiring private security to oversee large events (as defined through their contract with NYC Parks). If a problem occurs, private security steps in. Private security also manages ticket collection, VIP areas, and crowd control. If NYPD deems it necessary, they may provide officers to handle law enforcement and public safety. Additionally, PEP officers are usually present at large events.

## How does the Conservancy ensure a special event complies with its permit? What happens when an event takes place in the Park without a permit?

Using the event “physical” as a guide, the Film and Special Events staff monitors the event from load-in through load-out to make sure everything goes as planned. If a concern arises – for example, if equipment is leaning on a fence or a vendor leaves a truck on a path – the Conservancy contacts the event organizer to correct it. If the issue is with a vendor, Conservancy staff speaks to the event organizer, never directly to the vendor.

While completing daily maintenance tasks, Operations staff monitor smaller private events in the Park. If a group or an organization does not comply with NYC Parks Rules and Regulations – for example, by attaching balloons to a tree – the Operations staff will give a gentle reminder. If there is a situation involving a repeat user group, such as a school or an athletic league, the Director of Community Relations will speak with the group.

All events are listed on an internal weekly events calendar, which is communicated to the entire organization, so Operations staff can check whether a large gathering or film shoot has a permit. If not, the staff notifies the Section Supervisor or the Film and Special Events staff. A Film and Special Events staff member is in the Park every day of the week (including weekends) to address events issues, should they arise.

## What steps do the Film and Special Events staff take on the day of a special event?

- **Pre-event walk-through:** Before load-in, the Film and Special Events staff does a walk-through of the location with the organizer to ensure the group is not held responsible for any pre-existing conditions. If the event is an organization’s first in the Park, or the producer is not familiar with the Park, staff provides more direction and oversight.
- **Monitoring event vehicles:** Conservancy staff monitors event vendor vehicles, making sure the event vehicles follow the approved plan, enter at a designated entrance, travel on the approved route, drive slowly, use hazard lights, and park in the correct place.

# Operations Management



Event organizers are required to remove all trash generated by the event and supply their own trash receptacles for large events.

- **Equipment check:** Film and Special Events staff checks to see that cables, speakers, stages, and other equipment are placed as specified in the site plan, and do not cross or block paths, lean on benches or other infrastructure, or harm turf, plants, or trees.
- **Staff supervision and coordination:** When Operations staff assists at an event, the Film and Special Events staff manages the effort, including setup and removal of signs, pedestrian barricades, tents, tables, and trash receptacles; trash collection during the event; and cleanup afterward. The Film and Special Events staff also coordinates with PEP officers and other NYC Parks staff.
- **Event monitoring:** The Conservancy maintains a staff presence during the event, cleanup, and load-out.
- **Post-event walk-through:** The Film and Special Events staff completes a walk-through with the event organizer to make sure that all trash has been collected, that there has been no damage, and that the landscape is in the same condition as it was prior to the event.

## When an event restricts access to major parts of Central Park, how does the staff perform its regular maintenance responsibilities?

Some events require many weeks of preparation inside the Park. The NYC Marathon, for example, takes three weeks to load in, and a week and a half to load out. Planning for a large event can begin anywhere from several months in advance to one month in advance. The Film and Special Events staff coordinates event planning with other Operations departments so that all parties are aware of restorations or horticulture projects scheduled at that time, as well as regular maintenance work at the event site, including trash collection.

When a race is scheduled on the Park drives, Film and Special Events staff informs all staff working in the Park about the race during the morning two-way radio announcements. This helps the staff prepare to keep vehicles off the drives during the race. When the race finishes, Film and Special Events staff notifies staff that the drives are clear for use by Conservancy vehicles.

## When are events cancelled due to bad weather, who makes the decision, and how are people notified?

Event organizers develop weather contingency plans for events. These plans are vetted by NYC Parks and the Conservancy. Decisions are made by City agencies, sometimes in consultation with the Conservancy. Weather conditions that have required events to be canceled include hurricanes, blizzards, extreme heat or cold temperatures, and high winds. If possible, it is best to make a decision to cancel an event with enough time to notify event participants via signage, email, website, and social media.

# Operations Management



The Conservancy's Film and Special Events staff coordinate with producers and location managers for film shoots.

## What happens if there is an accident or emergency during an event?

Emergencies are handled via the 911 system.

## What is the process for film, television, video, or photography shoots?

Producers or location managers apply for a permit through the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment. Before productions can receive a permit from the Mayor's Office, producers or location managers must receive approval from the Conservancy's Film and Special Events staff, specifying the location, time, number of people involved, and equipment to be used. The Film and Special Events staff use a dedicated email account for this communication. The Film and Special Events staff review and discuss the request with the producers or location managers before the shoot. Filming is generally limited to one to two days.

Large productions must provide advance notice, so the Conservancy can determine if the proposed "action," special effects, number of performers, and equipment can be accommodated at the requested location. The Conservancy's Film and Special Events staff does a site walk-through with location scouts and suggests modifications as needed, including restrictions on vehicle parking and equipment.

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The Central Park Conservancy Institute for Urban Parks is the educational arm of the Central Park Conservancy. The Institute teaches park users and managers to care for urban parks everywhere.

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