Central Park Conservancy
Institute for Urban Parks

Building & Running a Successful Volunteer Program
Statement of Purpose

The Central Park Conservancy Institute for Urban Parks is the educational arm of CPC.

The Institute develops programs designed to facilitate discovery of the Park and transfer knowledge of our world-class urban park management and stewardship practices, both locally and globally.
Volunteering in Central Park

CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY
central to the park
Central Park Conservancy

- Founded in 1980 to raise money to rescue the Park
- A not-for-profit organization now under contract with NYC to manage the Park
- Our mission:
  - Restore, manage, and enhance the Park in partnership with the public
Public-Private Partnership

• The Conservancy privately raises 75% of the $57 million annual expense budget required to care for the Park's 843 acres
• The city provides the remaining 25%
• In 34 years, the Conservancy has overseen more than $700 million in park improvements
Central Park Conservancy by the Numbers

• 40 million visits annually
• 35,000 individual members
• 300+ employees
• 400 volunteers contributing 50,000 hours annually
Volunteering in the Park
Volunteer Department

• Conservancy was founded in 1980
• Volunteer Department was founded in 1983
• 31 years of a pro-volunteerism environment
• Staff introductions
Organization

President & CEO, CP Administrator
Doug Blonsky

VP for Operations Management
Frank LoCastro

Associate VP for Operations Management
Alex Egan

Director of Volunteer Services
Jim McGuire
Volunteer Opportunities

• PAWS Volunteers Program
• Greeter Programs
• Field Program (Horticulture)
• Tour Guide Program
• Special Events & Administrative Support
Paws Volunteer

• Paws Area Representative
  – Engage with dog owners to increase awareness of the privileges and responsibilities of dog ownership in the Park

• Support special events for the dog-loving community
  – My Dog Loves Central Park Fair
  – Bagel Barks
  – Bark before Dark
Kiosk Greeter
Kiosk Greeter

• 3 Park information kiosks staffed by volunteers
• Assist visitors with questions about Park features and events
• Provide directions
Greensward Guide
Greensward Guide

- A walking version of a kiosk greeter
- Assist visitors with questions about Park features and events
- Provide directions
- Needed: an excellent sense of direction!
Visitor Center Greeter
Visitor Center Greeter

• Three Park Visitor Centers
  – Chess and Checkers House
  – Belvedere Castle
  – Dana Discovery Center

• Help visitors enjoy activities unique to each Visitor Center
  – Board games
  – Fishing
Horticulture Volunteer

Weekday Gardener’s Assistant
Horticulture Volunteers

Saturday Green Team
Horticulture Volunteer

• Help beautify the Park by weeding, raking, mulching, shoveling snow, and painting

• Weekday Gardener’s Assistants
  – Help a Zone Gardener meet the horticulture and maintenance needs of a park zone

• Saturday Green Team
  – Groups who complete large scale horticulture and maintenance projects throughout the Park
Tour Guide

- Help visitors discover Central Park's history, ecology, and design by leading regularly scheduled walking tours
- Must already have experience as a Conservancy volunteer
Special Events and Programs

• Help out at one of the Conservancy’s numerous special events
• Pumpkin Float, Ice Festival, Holiday Lighting, Great Jazz on the Great Hill
• Provide office admin support
Corporate Volunteering

• "Day in the Dirt" program
• Allows corporate groups to promote volunteerism and environmental stewardship
• Builds employee cohesiveness and camaraderie
Day in the Dirt

CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY
central to the park
Pitch In, Pick Up

• Visitors can help keep the Park clean on their own schedule by volunteering to pitch in and pick up
  – Stop by a Visitor Center
  – Sign out a volunteer name-tag
  – Choose a trash-grabber or sweeper
  – Pitch in by helping to pick up litter
Volunteer Training

- All volunteers attend universal orientation
  - Park and Conservancy history and background
  - Volunteer handbook – policies and procedures
- Job specific training
  - Horticulture volunteers
  - Greeter/guides and Paws volunteers
  - Tour guides
Horticulture Training

• Horticulture Orientation Session
• Three in-Park Sessions
• Emphasis on Safety and Proper Use of Equipment
• Ongoing Schedule
Greeter/Guide and Paws Training

- Four Classroom Sessions
  - Role Play Scenarios
  - Scavenger Hunt Review
- Three in-Park Mentoring Sessions
  - Three different veteran guides
- Mentor Performance Review
- Quarterly Schedule
Tour Guide Training

- Competitive entry with auditions
- Homework requiring significant research
- Four classroom sessions
  - The Spiel – perform in character
- Two group tour presentations
- Solo certification tour
Volunteer Communications and Liaison

• Weekend and Weekly Updates
• Steering Committees
  – Tour Guide
  – Greeter/Guide
  – Horticulture
  – Paws
• Quarterly Meetings
Volunteer Recognition

• Annual reception
• Volunteer development
  • Classes, lectures, trainings, tours
• Annual Holiday party
• Invite to select membership offerings
Database Management

- Front end: MyVolunteerPage.com
- Back end: Better Impact
- Contact info, scheduling, sign ups, logging hours, reports
- Powerful program, but steep learning curve for staff and volunteers
Branding

- Volunteer uniforms follow Conservancy branding guidelines
- Volunteers wear green, staff wears grey
- T-shirts, sweatshirts, and hats issued
- Winter jackets – a huge morale boost
A Final Thought...

You can never say thank you enough
Thank you