

Riverside Park Conservancy

Grassroots Volunteer Program

Volunteer Manual

Updated September 2022

Riverside Park Conservancy Volunteer Manual

ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This handbook is provided for volunteers with the Riverside Park Conservancy (“RPC”) who are part of the Grassroots Volunteer Program. You will find policies and procedures that our volunteers are expected to follow, as well as useful information to guide your volunteer experience. Your participation in the Grassroots Volunteer Program is “at will,” meaning that both you and RPC are free to terminate the relationship at any time.

RIVERSIDE PARK CONSERVANCY POLICY STATEMENT

The history of the Conservancy is intrinsically linked to Riverside Park’s volunteers. Since the 1980s, when local grassroots volunteers took on providing an added level of care for their neighborhood park, volunteers have been central to our mission. They continue to make Riverside Park a place of beauty, community, and successful environmental stewardship. Our staff Zone Gardener Program was first developed as a support system to our volunteers, and we encourage the collaboration of volunteers and staff to offer the best services possible for park users. Grassroots Volunteers provide their time and skill to the many landscaped gardens, lawns, and pathways throughout the Park and serve as ambassadors, sharing our mission with the public. RPC is committed to providing volunteer opportunities that support the many different facets of park operations – and we support the work of our volunteers throughout the Park.

THE RIVERSIDE PARK OPERATIONS TEAM

The Park Operations team is responsible for the recruitment, orientation, and placement of volunteers, and for coordinating activities between volunteers and the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (“NYC Parks”). The Volunteer Program Manager will serve as the liaison between you and NYC Parks employees. This ensures that common goals are understood, NYC Parks’ approved methods are followed, and volunteers’ needs are met. Working with our horticulture staff throughout the Park, the Volunteer Program Manager develops and plans volunteer assignments and provides regular communication between the Park and its volunteers. All questions regarding the Volunteer Program should be addressed to the Volunteer Program Manager.

ABOUT THE GRASSROOTS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The Conservancy's work encompasses seven primary areas:

- We train, guide, and equip members of an extensive Grassroots Volunteer Program.
- We engage with neighborhood groups to organize and make improvements to specific park areas.
- We raise private support for park maintenance, safety, and enhancement.
- We advocate with public officials to secure funding for renewal and restoration projects.
- We offer environmental education experiences for schoolchildren and families.
- We communicate with local residents about park issues, needs, and activities.
- We sponsor events in the park and encourage its use.

Our Grassroots Volunteer Program is at the heart of the organization's mission to restore, maintain, and improve the park through community involvement. As part of our program, individuals of all skill levels and availability can make significant contributions to improving Riverside Park's overall horticultural care, dog runs, playgrounds, and athletic fields.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

We have a variety of levels at which volunteers can engage with the Park.

ParkRover: Volunteer sporadically at various sites in the park as needs emerge, attend our monthly public volunteer days, and help out with our frequent group programs. This is a great way to start out and provides an opportunity for us to get to know you and for you to get to know the program and the park.

PlacePartner: Work as part of a pre-existing group or with a ParkTender who tends a specific area. PlacePartners volunteer at least monthly during the growing season, either individually or as part of an area-wide volunteer day. Volunteering as a PlacePartner provides a good deal of flexibility while still offering the opportunity to make an ongoing contribution in a particular area of the park.

ParkTender: Make a long-term commitment to care regularly for an assigned area of the park. ParkTenders write a plan describing the work they are interested in doing and carry out the plan after it is approved by RPC. This is a larger commitment and requires a broad understanding of horticulture as well as NYC Parks' policies. ParkTenders work independently and have at least two years of gardening experience.

User Groups: Individual volunteers can also assist with the various volunteer User Groups in the park, such as the dog runs, playgrounds, and athletic fields.

RIVERSIDE PARK CONSERVANCY MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Riverside Park Conservancy is to restore, maintain, and improve Riverside Park in partnership with the City of New York for the enjoyment and benefit of all New Yorkers. We support the preservation of the park's historic landscape, structures, and monuments, engage the community in active stewardship of the park, and provide a wide range of public programs.

From 59th Street to 181st Street, from riverfront to city—side we work to enhance this Olmsted gem for present and future generations. Whatever it needs, Riverside Park Conservancy is by its side. Think of us as its gardener. Its advocate. Its sustainability manager. Its art curator. Its historian. Its visionary. And its guardian.

We work side-by-side with the New York City Parks Department, and we make improvements as diverse as the park itself and the city it serves. With the dedication and generosity of neighbors and park lovers like you, we can elevate your park experience and preserve this historic treasure for generations to come.

Grassroots Volunteer Program Expectations

As an RPC volunteer, you can expect to:

- Have a unique experience of being a contributing member of the robust community of Park volunteers.
- Be treated with respect by staff and volunteers.
- Be given training, support, and supervision from RPC staff: Zone Gardeners, Horticulture Supervisors, and the Volunteer Program Manager.
- Be given a clear understanding of the job, including: duties, responsibilities, support structure, and time commitment.
- Have safe conditions while volunteering.
- Have an opportunity to share your knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm with others.
- Meet new people and develop new skills.
- Have access to tools, supplies, and plant material necessary for your volunteer service.
- Be able to freely discuss problems, ask questions, or make suggestions.

As an RPC volunteer, you are expected to:

- Be open and honest regarding intent, goals, and skills, and honor your time commitments.
- Track your volunteer hours and submit at the end of the calendar year to the Volunteer Program Manager.
- Adhere to the design framework of Riverside Park, and accept the guidance and decisions of RPC staff.
- Abstain from bringing personal plant material into the Park.
- Maintain the dignity and integrity of RPC with the public.
- Act professionally and respectfully including honoring confidentiality.
- Be alert, sober, and drug-free while volunteering.
- Understand and not exceed your own physical limits.
- Notify Volunteer Program Manager of any health problems.
- Report any accidents, injuries, unsafe conditions, or defective equipment and communicate concerns in a timely manner.

Volunteer Guidelines

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

All volunteers have the benefit of receiving specific on-the-job training from experienced RPC staff or other volunteers. Examples of such training and educational opportunities may include: practical work days with gardeners, a tree and shrub pruning workshop, special lectures and tours on the history, design, nature, etc. of Riverside Park, and training on safety and other Park-related matters.

SCOPE OF VOLUNTEER DUTIES

In order to promote volunteer and public safety, volunteers are requested to engage only in activities that are either directed by RPC staff or outlined in their volunteer position description.

PARK RULES

Volunteers are asked to help set a good example by obeying all Park rules. While you do not have authority to enforce Park rules to other patrons, you may encourage proper behavior as appropriate.

PARK VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT

Volunteers may not operate any vehicle, machinery, or other powered equipment (car, truck, cart, weed whacker, leaf blower, chainsaw, etc.) belonging to RPC or NYC Parks, unless the volunteer has prior approval from both entities.

TOOLS & SUPPLIES

RPC provides tools, supplies, and all plant material used in the Park for volunteers to be able to do their job easily. Staff provide instruction on proper tool usage, and volunteers are expected to use tools as instructed in a safe and responsible manner to ensure safety for themselves and others. Please use tools only for the purpose that the tools were designed to be used. At the end of a volunteering session, volunteers should clean and return all tools to the proper storage facility.

DRESS CODE

Appropriate attire and appearance is expected of each volunteer. As Grassroots Volunteers, you are ambassadors of RPC and thus represent our image. When you are working outside, wear the appropriate work attire that can get dirty. Closed-toe shoes are required for all park work. Volunteers who have RPC branded items (volunteer t-shirts, hats, bandanas, etc.) are strongly encouraged to wear them when volunteering. Volunteers do not have a uniform and are therefore expected to dress appropriately for the conditions and performance of their duties, and in a manner that reflects positively upon RPC. By cooperating with these requirements, volunteers promote safety as well as public awareness of RPC's efforts and its volunteer programs.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS

Volunteers are cautioned not to bring valuables when working in the park. RPC assumes no responsibility for the loss or theft of any personal property.

APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION

RPC is committed to recognizing volunteers for the significant contributions they make to Riverside Park. Throughout the year, events are organized to celebrate the extraordinary work provided by volunteers, culminating in a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner each fall for all active volunteers who have volunteered twenty or more hours that calendar year.

WEATHER

Much of the work in Riverside Park goes on rain or shine. However, no outdoor work will be done in electrical storms. Volunteers should discuss specific weather policies with their Zone Gardener.

Being A Volunteer

AGE REQUIREMENTS

The minimum age to volunteer by one's self is 15. If you are under 15, you can volunteer only with a parent or guardian present. All volunteers under the age of 18 must have a Consent and Waiver Form signed by a parent or guardian on file before volunteering. Adults may bring children with them for volunteer shifts, if it does not limit their ability to complete their duties. Children must remain under adult supervision at all times, and must abide by the same rules and standards that we have for volunteers. Some volunteer activities may not be appropriate for children, even if accompanied by adults.

TIME RECORDS

Volunteer records are used to determine eligibility for individual volunteer benefits, to quantify volunteer impact for RPC purposes, and to assist with volunteer program promotion. Volunteers must accurately record their volunteer time to the nearest 30 minutes. Records will be maintained on each volunteer including mailing address and contact information, dates of service, positions held, and duties completed.

ATTENDANCE & HEALTH

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Riverside Park. Simply said, the Park would not be the vibrant community space it is without its volunteers. We have put a great deal of trust in our volunteers to help carry out the mission of the Conservancy. For this reason, it is important that volunteers honor their commitments. Volunteers who no longer able to fulfill their responsibilities should notify the Volunteer Program Manager so that alternative arrangements can be made to cover their responsibilities.

RESIGNATION

Volunteers may resign from their volunteer service with the Riverside Park Conservancy at any time. It is requested that volunteers who intend to resign provide advance notice of their departure and a reason for their decision. This helps us to keep our records current and up to date. For volunteers who are interested, an exit interview can be arranged with the RPC Volunteer Program Manager or the VP of Operations.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Should any problems or conflicts arise during a volunteer's service, the volunteer is asked to first work with their Zone Gardener to find resolution. If this approach does not lead to a satisfactory solution, the volunteer should contact the Volunteer Program Manager. If necessary, volunteers may request a meeting with the VP of Operations.

STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR

As representatives of RPC, all volunteers are expected to behave in a manner consistent with the mission and values of the organization. RPC does not tolerate the use of inappropriate language, working under the influence of intoxicants, discrimination, retaliation and/or harassment based on age, race, sex, religion, nationality or sexual orientation, and any behavior that endangers the welfare of others. Volunteers should not post material on social media that is incongruent with RPC's prohibited policies mentioned above, in their capacity as a volunteer with RPC. Personal social media activities should not interfere with volunteering commitments of being a good ambassador for the Conservancy.

DISMISSAL OF A VOLUNTEER

Volunteers who do not adhere to the rules and procedures of RPC or who fail to satisfactorily perform their volunteer assignment are subject to dismissal. No volunteer will be terminated until they have had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for possible dismissal with supervisory staff. All volunteer dismissals will be done with the consultation and assistance of the Volunteer Program Manager. Reasons for dismissal may include, but are not limited to: insubordination, use of inappropriate language, working under the influence of intoxicants, discrimination, retaliation and/or harassment based on race, religion, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity, negligent or willful damage of property, theft, physical harassment, violating confidentiality or media policies and any behavior that endangers the welfare of others.

PERSONAL PROFILE

RPC maintains a personal profile for each volunteer in ElementsXS, the online volunteer management system. It is the volunteer's responsibility to notify the Volunteer Program Office either in writing, by telephone, in person, or by e-mail of any change in name, address, home telephone number, or of person's emergency contact information. Volunteers may also log onto ElementsXS online and make the changes themselves. All profiles are treated as strictly confidential.

Policies

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Equal opportunity is a fundamental principal at RPC. In all of our hiring, employment, and recruiting practices, we seek out and place talented individuals who meet the qualifications for each position. All aspects of employment and placement are based upon personal capabilities and qualifications without regard to race, creed, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, disability, age, military status, genetic information, domestic violence victim status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, partnership status, alienage or citizenship status, consumer credit history, or any other protected class as established by federal, state or local law.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information they are exposed to while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves RPC staff, fellow volunteers, clients, other public persons, or involves overall RPC business. No information, materials or reports (copied or original) should be taken from the office, sent to others or posted on social media without permission.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

As appropriate for the protection of the public, volunteers in certain assignments may be asked to authorize and undergo a criminal background check. In instances where this is required, volunteers who do not agree to the background check may be refused assignment.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PRESS

Volunteers working in Riverside Park will have numerous opportunities to interact with the public. As representatives of RPC, volunteers should have a pleasant, professional, and helpful attitude, and should never knowingly give false or misleading information. Volunteers who are not certain about the answer to a question should refer a visitor to their Zone Gardener. **Please do not speak to the press or engage with social media (blogs, video, Facebook, etc.) on behalf of RPC or NYC Parks without prior authorization by the Volunteer Program Manager.** RPC has a strict policy for handling all press inquiries. All press inquiries must be referred to the Volunteer Program Manager. Please remember, there are NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule.

Safety

Protecting the health and safety of our volunteers is a top priority of RPC. Although staff are required to ensure a safe working environment for volunteers, volunteers must also take an active role in promoting safety on the job. Volunteers are responsible for: knowing and abiding by safety rules as explained by their Zone Gardeners; supporting efforts to promote safe volunteering conditions and practices; making full use of safety equipment and safeguards provided for assigned tasks; and immediately reporting all unsafe work conditions to their Zone Gardener.

ACCIDENTS ON THE JOB

Volunteers involved in an accident must notify their Zone Gardener or Volunteer Program Manager immediately. The volunteer's supervisor is required to complete an Accident/Incident Report Form and submit it to the appropriate persons. All accidents and injuries must be documented in this manner.

NOTE: A volunteer who has been injured while performing volunteer duties is NOT eligible to receive Workers Compensation or Disability benefits through RPC. By completing a volunteer application and/or participating in a volunteer event at Riverside Park, you acknowledge and understand that you are not covered under the Worker's Compensation or Disability benefits policy.

EMERGENCY PROTOCOL

In the case of an emergency where medical attention is required, follow this protocol:

- Call 9-1-1. Tell them you are in Manhattan, as it will occasionally route you to New Jersey due to proximity. If so, they will re-route you to Manhattan.
- Give the cross street of the nearest Park entrance in which a vehicle can enter (i.e. West 116th Street & Riverside Drive)
- Deploy RPC staff, another volunteer, or park patron to that entrance to lead emergency vehicle down to you. Call Zone Gardener, Volunteer Program Manager, or Park Central Communications.
- Know the nearest emergency rooms.
 - Mount Sinai West: W59th St between 9th & 10th Aves.
 - Mount Sinai Morningside: W113th St & Amsterdam Ave
 - New York-Presbyterian/Columbia: W168th St & Broadway

See list of phone numbers at end of document.

Permit Guidelines

Grassroots Volunteers receive a permit from RPC once they have attended an orientation and have demonstrated their commitment to the program. The permits are individualized to each volunteer, marking which area(s) each volunteer is permitted to work. Additional permit guidelines are as follows:

- Changes that alter the park (for example: painting, expanding horticultural areas, removing or repairing property) must have the approval of RPC's Volunteer Program Manager. Volunteers are counted on to take responsibility for the maintenance of any plantings provided by RPC that they introduce to the park, and to adhere to historic horticultural guidelines, as interpreted by City representatives.
- Helping out in the park does not entitle the volunteer to any special rights or privileges beyond those of any member of the public using the park.
- Volunteers may not under any circumstances engage in the following activities:
 - Spray chemicals or pesticides in parks.
 - Request or order any member of the public to leave the park or any part of it. In the event of an emergency, dial 911. If you observe a deleterious Parks condition in the process (ex. illegal tree cut or vandalism) contact Parks Enforcement Patrol at 646-613-1200.
- Please note your permit does not authorize you to engage in the following activities (which require further approval from RPC or NYC Parks in the form of a separate permit or other authorization):
 - Organizing or conducting any special event in the park
 - Restricting access to the park or any part of the park
 - Operating a vehicle or mechanized equipment in the park
 - Collecting funds for any charitable or commercial purpose, or allowing any other organization to do so on its behalf
- Volunteers are independent contractors. Volunteers agree that they will not hold themselves out as, or claim to be, officers or employees of RPC or the City, or of any department, agency, or unit thereof, and that they will not, by reason hereof, make any claim, demand, or application for any right or privilege applicable to an officer or employee of the City or RPC, including but not limited to worker's compensation coverage, unemployment insurance benefits, social security coverage, or employee retirement membership or credit.
- Volunteer permits are valid for one year from the date issued and may be renewed each year. RPC and/or NYC Parks may revoke this permit at any time if the above guidelines are not followed.

Contact Information

Riverside Park Conservancy
475 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10115

Phone: 212-870-3070

Fax: 212-870-3079

E-mail: grassroots@riversideparknyc.org



riversideparknyc.org



[riverside.park.conservancy](https://www.facebook.com/riverside.park.conservancy)



[riversideparkNY](https://twitter.com/riversideparkNY)



[riversideparkNYC](https://www.instagram.com/riversideparkNYC)

PHONE NUMBERS

Riverside Park Conservancy Office.....	212-870-3070
Director of Volunteer Initiatives (Mobile).....	347-287-1114
Grassroots Volunteer Program Coordinator (Mobile).....	646-629-4620
North Park Outreach Coordinator (Mobile)	646-899-5694
Volunteer Events Coordinator (Mobile).....	646-629-5755
Hippo Park House Rental.....	212-870-3070
Bench Donations.....	212-870-3070
Ballfield Permits.....	212-408-2029
Special Events Permits.....	212-408-0226
User Group Fundraising Events.....	212-870-3070
Riverside Clay Tennis Courts Hotline.....	212-978-0277
Tennis Permits (119th St)	212-360-8133
General Ulysses S. Grant National Memorial.....	212-666-1640
Riverbank State Park.....	212-694-3600
Ellington in the Park.....	917-370-3448
Pier i Café.....	212-989-6363
Manhattan Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP).....	646-613-1200
NYC Parks: North Park Operations Office.....	212-283-3320
NYPD - 20th Precinct.....	212-678-6411
NYPD - 24th Precinct.....	212-678-1811
NYPD - 26th Precinct.....	212-678-1311
NYPD - 30th Precinct.....	212-678-8811
NYPD - 33rd Precinct.....	212-927-3200

Thank you for volunteering with the Riverside Park Conservancy and for your commitment to contributing toward making our park a beautiful and safe community space. We hope that this manual is useful for your volunteer experience.

We simply cannot do what we do without our volunteers. You are an important member of our community and we are committed to making the most of your volunteering. If there is anything we can do to make your experience more enjoyable or satisfying, please let us know. We look forward to working with you!