



Welcome to the Park District of Oak Park!

Dear Park District of Oak Park Volunteer,

Welcome to the Park District of Oak Park's Acorns 2 Oaks Volunteer Team! Thank you for joining hundreds of other community members who give their time, talents, and energy to our organization. Volunteers support the Park District of Oak Park in a variety of ways – at special events, through clerical office work, with education programs, and with environmental projects. Volunteers add new dimension, personality, and depth to our programs and allow us to provide many services to our community that would not take place without your help.

Volunteers also represent the Park District and assist in fulfilling its mission: *“In partnership with the community, we enrich lives by providing meaningful experiences through programs, parks, and facilities.”* No matter what task you work on while volunteering, the Park District hopes you realize that each hour you give helps us reach our goal of improving the lives of those in our community. This manual will help familiarize you with our volunteer program. It is designed to supplement you're the volunteer orientation and any other related training that you may receive specific to your volunteer position. Please keep it and refer to it as questions arise.

Thank you for giving the Park District of Oak Park your most important commodity – your time! Your enjoyment and personal enrichment are important to us, so please let us know if there is anything we can do to make your volunteer experience more fulfilling. We look forward to working with you and we appreciate your contributions to the Park District of Oak Park.

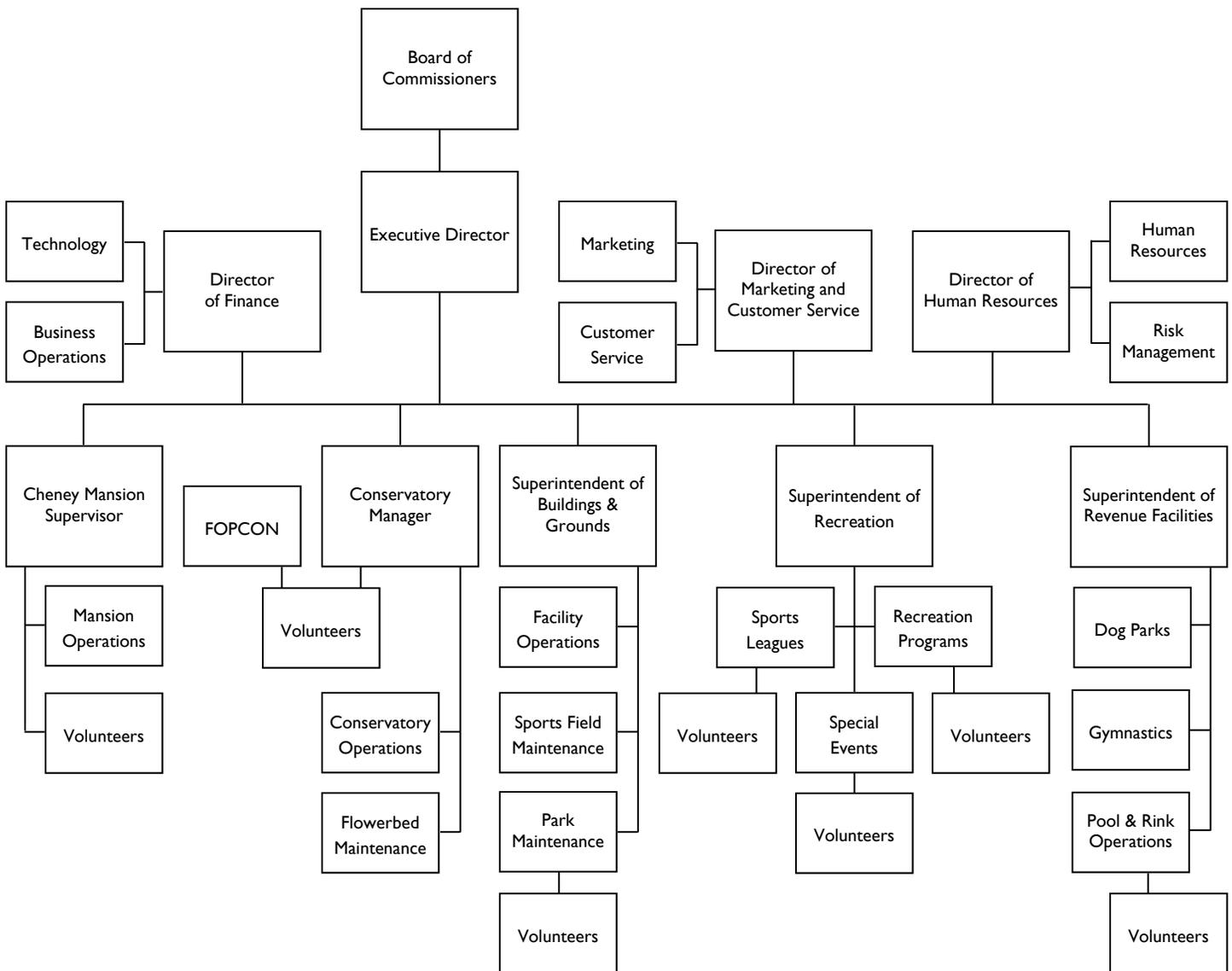
About the Park District of Oak Park

Board of Commissioners

The Park District is managed by an Executive Director who works under the direction of the Board of Park Commissioners. The five-member Board of Park Commissioners is comprised of elected citizen volunteers who collectively donate hundreds of hours of service each year.

Volunteer Chain of Command

The Executive Director, appointed by the Board of Commissioners, is responsible for the administration of the Park District, which employs 50 full-time staff and over 495 part-time and seasonal staff. Volunteers work in many areas of the Park District as shown below.



If volunteers experience any issues or have any questions related to their work with the Park District, they should speak with their assigned volunteer supervisor. If the supervisor is unavailable or unable to assist, the Department Head (titles shown in the chart above) should be contacted next. If needed, the Superintendent of Recreation, who oversees the Acorns to Oaks Volunteer Program can be reached at (708) 725-2021.

Volunteer Application Process

Who Can Volunteer?

The Park District of Oak Park welcomes anyone who is willing to donate their time and skills towards making our community better. Examples of volunteers include:

- **Individuals and Families.** Choose an activity or program based on interests and availability. Youth ages 13 & under are welcome to volunteer with an adult parent or guardian present, although some safety-related positions do have age restrictions.
- **Businesses and Organizations.** Build a company's public image, develop teamwork, and improve staff morale by contributing staff and/or resources to a single service project or an ongoing activity.

Volunteer Interest Form

Interested volunteers should complete a Volunteer Program Interest Form and submit it to the Superintendent of Recreation. Park District staff will follow up with you as volunteer positions become available.

Background Checks

A criminal records background check may be required for some volunteer assignments, including all positions where a volunteer will be responsible for directly supervising youth, such as youth sports coaches. Volunteers must complete and satisfactorily pass this check before being allowed to begin volunteering. Although this process usually takes under one week to complete, sometimes the Park District has to wait longer to get back results. Volunteers should factor this extra time when submitting their volunteer application materials, especially when the volunteer position is time-sensitive (such as the start of a sports season).

When the Park District requires a volunteer to complete a background check, it will be done using the Park District's secure online system. All costs for the initial check will be paid by the Park District. The results of all background checks are property of the Park District and will not be released to volunteers.

Volunteer Benefits

The Park District of Oak Park values each of our volunteers and wants to recognize them for their efforts.

Proof of Volunteer Service

Individuals who need proof of service hours can receive a letter documenting their hours upon completion of their volunteer commitment. Individual volunteer records are available for service within the past year.

Annual Volunteer Event

All volunteers are invited to a volunteer appreciation event each year to honor their service at a fun event full of food and socializing.

Acorns Rewards

Volunteers who reach certain levels of volunteer hours throughout a season have the ability to earn special rewards through our Acorns to Oaks Volunteer Program. Volunteers should use the tracking form provided and submit it to the Park District at the end of each season in order to be eligible for these rewards. Current rewards include:

- 10 Hours: **Acorn** Flashlight
- 20 Hours: **Acorn** Notepad & Pen
- 30 Hours: **Acorn** Lunch Bag

Volunteer Guidelines

Attendance, Punctuality, and Dependability

In order to ensure that Park District programs and services run smoothly, it is important that volunteers arrive on time to any scheduled shifts. Volunteers are responsible for keeping track of and turning in records of your volunteer hours for service recognition.

The Park District understands that unexpected events or illnesses may come up that conflict with your volunteer assignment. If a situation arises that will cause you to be late or miss an assignment, please contact your volunteer supervisor so that we can make alternate plans. Continual absenteeism will result in a review of the volunteer's work assignment or term of service.

Proper Dress and Appearance

There are many different volunteer opportunities available through the Park District. Some require work outdoors or in an active setting, while others may require work at a desk. The Park District asks that while you volunteer, you follow the dress and appearance guidelines given for each specific opportunity. This may include the requirement to wear a Park District-issued shirt or badge or other clothing or items to protect volunteers from certain elements and environments.

In general, all volunteers should remember that they are a representative of the Park District. Using common sense regarding the activity that you are about to participate in (for example, closed-toed shoes are best in most cases) and the people that you are about to interact with will usually steer you in the right direction. Volunteers' appearances should be clean and not include any references to alcohol, drugs, etc. If you have any doubt as to whether or not your attire is appropriate, please contact your volunteer supervisor.

Communication with the Park District

Park District staff communicates with volunteers in many different ways depending on the volunteer position. Please be sure to notify the Park District if your e-mail address or phone number changes so that we can reach you if needed. Volunteers will be invited via e-mail to participate in an annual survey to give the Park District feedback and suggestions on how to best improve their volunteer experience. However, the Park District welcomes feedback about your volunteer experience at any time.

Use of Supplies, Equipment, and Vehicles

When volunteering, the Park District of Oak Park will provide all necessary supplies, equipment, and any necessary vehicles for transportation. These resources are for Park District-related use only and are not to be used for personal business. For example, volunteers should refrain from using Park District phones for personal calls and are not allowed to print or make copies of personal documents on Park District copiers. In some cases, volunteers may be assigned supplies or equipment (such as sports equipment assigned to youth sports coaches). These supplies are only to be used for Park District programs and should be returned at the end of the volunteer program.

Under no circumstances are Park District volunteers allowed to transport participants or visitors to a medical facility, to their home, or any other location.

Park District volunteer positions rarely require volunteers to provide personal supplies or vehicles for official Park District use. Therefore, in most cases, the Park District will not reimburse volunteers for any expenses incurred while volunteering including transportation costs for traveling to and from the volunteer site. Any exceptions to this guideline must be approved in advance by the volunteer supervisor. Expenses not reimbursed while volunteering may be tax deductible; volunteers should speak with a tax professional for more information.

Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act

The Park District is committed to compliance with the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (325 ILCS 5/4). Pursuant to this Act, professionals and persons working with youth are legally required to report or cause a report to be made to the child abuse hotline number, (1-800-25ABUSE) whenever they have reasonable cause to believe that a child may be neglected or abused. If you have any questions regarding this responsibility or if you should suspect neglect or abuse, please contact your volunteer supervisor.

Creating a Positive Environment

The Park District of Oak Park strives to create a welcoming and safe environment for all participants, visitors, volunteers, and staff. Park District volunteers are expected to treat everyone with respect and dignity. Relationships with those that volunteers interact with should be business-like and free of bias, prejudice, and harassment. Volunteers are encouraged to report incidents of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation. Volunteers must not use or be under the influence of alcohol or drugs while acting on behalf of the Park District. Tobacco use is prohibited in all Park District parks, facilities, and vehicles and including within 15 feet of any Park District building entrance (even if it extends beyond Park District property).

Providing the Best Service Possible

Give Good Information

Provide only correct information. It's perfectly acceptable to say, "I don't know, but I'll find out for you."

Instead of just referring a participant or customer to a phone number or website, do your best to find out the answer by asking a Park District staff member for assistance or checking the website yourself (if you have access). Don't be afraid to pull out a brochure or flyer and give it to the visitor to take with them for reference.

Be specific. When you are directing a visitor to a location, use terms that are universal (north, south, left, right, etc.) instead of terms that are only known locally ("Barrie Park is just across the highway from Buzz Café."). Don't assume that a participant or customer is as informed and aware of Park District news and locations as you may be. Ideas that may be clear and easy for you may not be to a visitor.

Be patient. Volunteers will interact with participants and visitors of all walks of life, including some that may have speech or language difficulty. Remain friendly and courteous at all times.

Handling Complaints

Listen to the entire complaint. Don't interrupt. Often, the participant or visitor feels a need to tell you something and will be more calm after having a chance to tell you their issue. Additionally, these extra details can sometimes help you troubleshoot the root of the problem or what could be done to fix it.

Accept the feelings of the client and acknowledge that they are upset. You may feel like disagreeing with many things that the person is saying, but the key is to put yourself in their shoes and look for the feelings or statements that you can agree with and tell them that you understand. Don't take the person's complaint as a personal offense. Chances are that it is not directed specifically at you. Once you have done this and can help remove the emotion from the situation, you can move onto solving the specific problem.

Clarify the complaint. If you believe that you have a good grasp of the problem, state it back to the person with the emotional aspects removed if possible. If the solution is not immediately evident, simply ask, "How can I help you?"

Take action. Using the information in this manual and the tools provided in any additional training received, try to solve the problem to the best of your ability. Often, this may require asking your volunteer supervisor or other Park District staff for assistance. But whatever you do, make sure that you follow through on anything you say you are going to do.

Remain cheerful and helpful. Your attitude can ease the situation greatly if you handle it correctly. Smile! Remember that the person with the complaint is probably most upset because they don't feel that they have been treated fairly or have been given the service expected. The best way to assist them is by showing real attention and interest in their problem.

Safety Procedures

Incidents & Accidents

In the event a participant or visitor is injured or is affected by an illness during a program or on park district property, volunteers may provide first aid consistent with their comfort level and training. Park District full-time staff and many part-time staff are trained in First Aid and should be called upon for assistance in addressing and documenting the situation. However, when a volunteer is without staff assistance, 911 should be contacted immediately in the following situations:

- The injury or illness requires care greater than you are able to provide
- You feel uncomfortable with the situation. If any doubt exists, it is recommended to err on the side of caution and contact the local paramedics who can use their advanced medical training to determine what treatment is needed.
- A head injury has occurred. Many people suffering from head injuries are not capable of making sound decisions regarding their own medical treatment.
- If the injured or ill person is unable to drive themselves and a relative or friend cannot be reached.

Under no circumstances may Park District volunteers transport participants or visitors to a medical facility, to their home, or any other location. Anytime that 911 is called, the volunteer supervisor must be contacted as soon as the situation has been stabilized. If you are unable to reach your supervisor, please leave a message and follow the chain of command (on page 2) for information about who to contact next.

Volunteer Injuries

The Park District of Oak Park is committed to conducting its recreation programs and activities in a safe manner and holds the safety of volunteers in high regard. The Park District continually strives to reduce such risks and ask that all volunteers follow safety rules and instructions that are designed to protect the volunteer's safety. We also hope that all volunteers will share any safety concerns or hazards that they notice while with the Park District so that they may be addressed. However, volunteers must recognize that there is an inherent risk of injury when choosing to volunteer for any activity or program.

Please recognize that the Park District carries only limited medical accident coverage for volunteers. For this reason, it is strongly urged that all volunteers review their own health insurance policy for coverage.

Additionally, each volunteer is solely responsible for determining if he/she is physically fit and/or properly skilled for a volunteer activity. It is always advisable to consult a physician before undertaking any physical activity.

Emergencies

Emergencies don't happen often, but when they do, it is important to act calmly, quickly, and properly. Because each volunteer site is unique, Park District staff have developed specific emergency action plans for each Park District facility and will communicate those procedures to you during your volunteer orientation.