

Information drawn from:

Making Friends: An Introduction to Building National Park Service Friends Groups, Mary Hanson, Roger Knowlton, Omaha, Midwest Region, National Park Service, March 2008.

Friends Groups

A Friends Group is any nonprofit organization established primarily to assist or benefit a specific park area, a series of park areas, a program, or the entire National Park System. A Friends Group can be the vehicle to provide an outlet for citizens' passion about a park's mission. Groups vary in size, structure, and purpose and benefit NPS in various ways, such as providing volunteer services, assisting with resource management and preservation, conducting fundraising efforts, and publicizing important issues. Funding to support the activities of the group come from donations, and often to a lesser extent, earned income.

The Role of NPS Friends Groups

Friends Groups are a partnership between the community and the park. Their boards can act as ambassadors of sorts, helping to extend the presence and values of the park into the community in a positive way. They help leverage the work of park employees through donated labor and funds. They may provide an avenue for public stewardship of park resources. Ultimately, they are a way to deepen public support for the park and the value of the park to the community. Traditionally, Friends Groups function in support of a park as volunteers and advocates, and provide additional financial resources through fundraising activities.

Some of the roles that Friends Groups have undertaken in their efforts to support NPS parks and programs are:

- **Recruit and Manage Volunteers** - Friends Groups can recruit and manage their own volunteers, or they can help the NPS to manage its volunteer program.
- **Involve Community** - Members of a Friends Group may have more access than park employees to the broader community itself, as well as underserved sectors of a community. The public may also find a nonprofit organization more approachable than a government agency.
- **Inform elected officials of park issues** - A Friends Group can be an advocate for the park by visiting with and providing information to elected officials.
- **Support Staff** - Friends Group staff can supplement staff capability by either

hiring staff or supporting NPS staff. Note: There are restrictions on NPS hiring permanent positions that are supported by donated funds.

- Conduct Market Research and Awareness Building - Members of Friends Groups may have better access to media and marketing expertise and can leverage or augment in-house staff capabilities. They can work with cooperating associations as appropriate to develop park awareness and branding materials.
- Deliver Program and Stage Events .. Friends can assist with special programs and events under permits from the park, on or off-site.
- Operate and Maintain .. Some friends groups can assist a park with all or portions of operation and maintenance responsibilities for structures, visitor centers, parks, or specific programs.

Naming the Friends Group

The name of a Friends Group can immediately provide the purpose of the organization to others. A name should communicate a place or program that people will be motivated to support. A good rule of thumb is to include the park, park clusters, or unit name. You are establishing an identity and a brand that you want people to remember and make a positive association with. The name should convey an organization that people will give to versus one that suggests that you make grants. Choices include: Friends of , Conservancy, Foundation, Trust, Fund, etc.

If your Friends Group plans to incorporate and obtain nonprofit status, it is important to ensure that the organization name selected is not being used by another group. A simple online search can help to eliminate this possibility. Also, check the Federal Trademark Registry and the state trademark registry. With today's use of the Internet, it is also important to find a domain name that is available. Go to www.networksolutions.com to check the domain name registry.