



How to Hold a Park Care Event

Park Activation Toolkit

For Community Powered Parks
Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation
hello@oaklandparks.org

These tips can help you plan a park care event in your neighborhood that successfully achieves your goals and engages your community.

Park Care Events

A park care event builds community and park pride by gathering volunteers in a park to clean up litter, maintain grounds (weeding/mulching), paint, beautify, and/or doing minor repairs and have fun. It can be as simple as a few hours organized by one or two community members or as complex as involving volunteers, corporate sponsors, and non-profit partners. Clean parks are safer and increase park visits and enjoyment of a park. Actively caring for a park increases community engagement.

Your city partner for park care is the Oakland Adopt-a-Spot program of Oakland Public Works www.oaklandadoptaspot.org. They will help you plan and supply the event. They can provide: technical assistance, tools, debris pickup coordination, paints, painting supplies, graffiti removal kits, mulching, weeding, tree planting and landscaping support, and can even support beautification art.

The “How To” for a Park Care Event (small-to-mid size; 5-50 people)

- 1. At least 6 weeks in advance: Conduct Preliminary Planning**
 - a. Identify who will play different preparation roles
 - i. Lead Planner, Communications, City liaison, Day-of Leader
 - b. Set your goals
 - i. Make sure your activities are related to your goals
 - c. Consider who will participate
 - i. General community? A specific group? How many people?
 1. Is the local neighborhood included?
 - ii. Are there any barriers to participation that should be addressed?
 1. Transportation? Hours? Language?
 - iii. Check: Are there any other groups that use or care for the park that should be notified or included? Is there any notable park history that might matter to your event? Is there any controversy or opposition you should attend to?
- 2. At least 4 weeks in advance: Contact the City**
 - a. If there is a Recreation Center or RAC¹, contact the director or Chair
 - i. Find the email at: <https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/reserve-a-recreation-center-1>
 - ii. Discuss plan, get permission, pick date, receive guidance

¹ RAC = Recreation Advisory Committee, a neighborhood group formed to support the Recreation Center

- b. Contact Adopt-A-Spot Parks Program: Deidre Martin: dmartin@oaklandca.gov
 - i. Confirm permission and date, set up a time for a walk-through if needed
 - ii. Find out if other groups who care for the park should be involved
 - iii. Identify tools and materials needed from the City and sign up for them [here](#), arrange how these supplies will be delivered, who will collect the trash after, how to handle needles and other sharps, who from the City will attend
 - iv. If seeking corporate sponsors, OPW can provide a list of interested businesses
- 3. **At least 3-4 weeks in advance: Recruit helpers for the event (for 5-30 participants)**
 - a. Recommended 1 helper for 4 participants, 2 helpers for 8, 4 helpers for 15
 - b. 1-2 Lead coordinators: welcomes, sets ground rules for inclusive practices, explains the event, gives instructions, coordinates with the City staff, troubleshoots
 - c. 1-2 at sign-in table: to collect log-ins and to orient volunteers to the jobs, distribute supplies, manage food/drink (if providing, distributing information, tools,
 - d. 1-2 floating helpers to circulate, keep things on track, trouble-shoot
 - e. At least 1 city staff member and representatives of groups who use the space so as to not impact their projects (e.g., community gardens)
 - f. Clean up: make sure all tools, trash, extra materials are taken by the City, tables, etc put away and no trash from event left behind
- 4. **At least 3 weeks in advance: Market the event**
 - a. If you are encouraging the community to participate (versus club members, etc.):
 - i. Fliers at the Recreation Center, and nearby homes and businesses, local newsletters
 - ii. If there is a Recreation Center Director they can post a flier and email their listserv
 - iii. Adopt-A-Spot can share the event to the park steward network
 - iv. Send to OPRYD to share on social media and email at: info@oaklandparks.org
 - v. If collecting RSVPs, be sure to thank people immediately after they sign up
- 5. **At least 1 week in advance: Confirmations**
 - a. Confirm with the City that all is in order
 - b. Send out reminders via your marketing channels
- 6. **Day of Event (generally a 2-3 hour event): Lead, Work, Have Fun!**
 - a. Arrive early to set up table, meet with City staff person
 - b. Pick up supplies or have City deliver them
 - c. Set up sign-in table: participants sign a waiver and, optionally you collect contact info
 - d. Provide greeting and information about the work, any games you'll play, food, etc.
 - e. Monitor progress
 - i. Circulate in the park to answer questions, solve problems, motivate
 - ii. Use SeeClickFix/311 to report maintenance concerns found during the event
 - f. Close the event with appreciations, announcements, recruit future volunteers
 - i. Ask for feedback (it doesn't have to be formal)
 - ii. Optional: take a group photo
 - iii. Make sure OPW staff have all the supplies and trash to be hauled

- g. Clean up, celebrate a job well done!
- 7. **ASAP and within 1 week after the event: Say thank you and share your success!**
 - a. Say thank you! If you have contact info for participants, thank them directly. Consider posting a thank you at the Recreation Center, local businesses, etc.
 - b. Optionally, send group photo to OPRF to post on social media, email list

Great Dates and Time for a Park Care Event!

Good times for a park care event are months with nice weather and to get ready for busy spring and summer months. Morning hours are best, usually 8:30/9A start, finish 11/12ish. Also, three times per year, OPW supports and promotes locally-sponsored park clean ups throughout the city, making it extra easy to hold a clean-up on these days: MLK Day of Service (January); Earth Day (April); Creek-to-Bay Day (September).

What to do about bathrooms

- If there is a stand-alone bathroom and / or a Recreation Center bathroom work with the center director or OPW to clean, open and close these facilities
- If no restrooms, ask permission from a local business or anticipate shorter participation

Engage children and youth

Kids' first job in parks is to PLAY! Once they have a chance to play and love their park, *then*, then they can learn that to love their park is to care for it. Just being present while the larger community is caring for the park will positively grow children's civic spirit. When kids (of all ages!) do pitch in, make it fun, for example you can try: A contest: for different types of trash (the most, funniest litter, etc.); A race: How long does it take to pick up 10 pieces of trash? Older kids can be leaders! Have them pair up with an adult helper to learn the ropes!

Care for Safety

Park care events are considered low-risk events, but when you are bringing people together, it's important to be prepared. The typical step is to include a liability waiver from Adopt-A-Spot and if you are doing an independent event, a waiver from your insurance. Here are other steps for a safe event:

- Call 911 for anything you would normally call them for, and have a city contact for additional support or facility problems
- Have a first aid kit on hand and someone who knows how to use it
- Have someone who knows CPR on hand
- Make sure walking and parking is safe - work with the City to put out cones, have crossing guards, etc. to support pedestrian safety (and encourage walking!)
- Encourage people to leave cars at home or to drive slowly near the park
- Encourage participants to work with a buddy and avoid isolated parts of the park
- Know the different ways to exit the park in the event of an emergency
- How to handle needles. **Do not touch!** City staff can provide small warning flags that can be placed by any needles found by your volunteers.

Tips for providing food

Food and drink are a nice way to show appreciation and motivate participants.

- Lowest impact option is fruit (oranges/tangerines/whole apples), water. Use thermoses and paper cups to avoid plastic and waste.

- Offering a meal is worth considering if your long-term goals include community and culture-building. Work with a local restaurant (minority/women owned and providing compostable packaging and utensils). Ask for donations or a local company or club may sponsor the food.
- No trash! Avoid plastic bottles, bags, packaging, straws!

How to address encampments

- If the park you are caring for has encampments, do not disrupt them
- If residents of the encampment approach with interest, invite them in
- If you do not feel safe, contact the onsite OPW staff person for guidance

Troubleshooting

Turn to the onsite OPW staff person to help resolve and problems that arise.

More tips for a great event!

1. Make your workday fun—provide food, incentives; ask for a donation or discount from a local restaurant or cafe. Organize fun competition between clean up teams—who picks up the most trash, or the most interesting item, etc.
2. Raffle off fun items—maybe a neighborhood restaurant or hardware store might provide items or gift cards, for example.
3. Tap into social networks in your community to promote your event. People tend to be more responsive when a friend recommends involvement.
4. Ensure that your events are well-organized—volunteers will return when they feel the activity is well- thought out and someone (or several people) are in charge.
5. Yet, be flexible--to give volunteers room to feel they have some input.
6. Take before and after photographs of the park! Photos are a great way to document your progress. They can be shared on social media to celebrate and recruit for your next event; sent as thank yous to participants, sent to your Council Member as evidence of community support, sent to OPRF to share with the larger parks community. A group photo that participants choose to be in is ok, but otherwise stick to photos of the park not the people to avoid misunderstanding about permission.
7. Think beyond one day, to more sustained park stewardship! Every few months, host a fun gathering—it could just be to meet for coffee at a local coffee shop, but you are trying to build community using the park project as your focal point.
8. Questions? Contact OPRF at hello@oaklandparks.org



This Park Activation Toolkit was produced pursuant to a partnership with 10 Minute Walk and The Trust for Public Land.