



VOLUNTEER POLICY HANDBOOK



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Welcome!

Dear Volunteer,

Welcome to the Portage Park District (PPD)! Our volunteers are an important part of creating a great experience for those enjoying the natural resources in Portage County. This guide will serve as your guide to the best possible experience as a volunteer. It answers frequently asked questions and gives information about the Portage Park District, our mission and your role.

In this handbook you will find a variety of volunteer positions that will assist PPD in its mission to conserve Portage County's natural heritage. We hope you will find a volunteer opportunity that fits your interest and skills. Once established as a volunteer, you will work with the Volunteer Coordinator to answer additional questions.

Thank you for offering your time and expertise to our volunteer program. We look forward to working with you to serve Portage County.

Thank You

Portage Park District Staff



Introduction:

Volunteers are an essential tool in our success. The volunteer program is designed to coordinate and manage volunteer efforts which support the vision and mission of the Portage Park District.

About this handbook:

The purpose of this handbook is to provide guidance, structure and direction to PPD staff and volunteers. The handbook will provide policies, procedures, volunteer job descriptions and guidelines to promote a healthy relationship between volunteers who share their time, talents and skills and PPD staff. The organization's policies and expectations are outlined to ensure a good volunteer experience for each individual and group.

ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

Our mission is to conserve Portage County's natural heritage and provide opportunities for its appreciation and enjoyment.

The Portage Park District is an independent political subdivision of the State of Ohio formed in 1991, organized under authority of section 1545 of the Ohio Revised Code, with its jurisdiction covering all of Portage County. Although it is independent of County government, the Park District utilizes the services of the Portage County Auditor, Treasurer and Prosecutor. It is governed by an unpaid five-member Board of Park Commissioners appointed by the Portage County Probate Judge. The Board appoints the Executive Director who is responsible for implementing Park District plans and policies

Park District Goals:

Conservation

Acquiring and conserving naturally significant areas to protect air and water quality, wildlife habitat, native plant, and scenic landscapes.

Community Engagement and Education

Providing public education and recreation programs to increase awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of our parks and natural heritage. Providing opportunities for community engagement through regular communications and volunteerism.

Park Development and Maintenance

Creating parks and trails with facilities that allow for appropriate use, enjoyment, and healthy recreation by all ages and abilities.

Administration

Developing policies and best practices guidelines for all areas of development and management. Creating and sustaining valuable partnerships.

Funding



The new 1mil levy passed in November 2023 is expected to bring in ~\$4.5 million annually.

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

Policies and Procedures

All volunteers must complete a full volunteer application and waiver before volunteering for any assignment. Most volunteers will be required to attend one orientation session prior to becoming an active volunteer. For opportunities that require training, there will be a short interview process and training session prior to the volunteer being assigned to that on-going opportunity (**refer to job descriptions section**). Additionally, some volunteer positions will require a background check.

Interviews are not required for those volunteering for one day projects. Volunteer information must be kept up to date and reviewed annually.

Age restrictions

The nature of volunteer projects at PPD can vary in intensity; therefore, it is our policy to determine age requirements for volunteers on a project by project basis. For most projects, we welcome children ages 12 to 15 with parental supervision; children ages 16 and up may volunteer without supervision. When a project is listed on our volunteer portal, age restrictions will be noted.

Conduct and expectations

Volunteers are expected to follow rules of conduct that will protect the interest and safety of all volunteers and staff at PPD. Volunteers are also expected to be professional and courteous to staff, volunteers and park patrons. The following are only some examples of inappropriate conduct which could lead to dismissal:

- Violation of Rules and Regulations of PPD
- Theft or inappropriate removal or possession of PPD property
- Destruction of PPD property
- Volunteering under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- Creating a disturbance on PPD premises or PPD sponsored activities which could jeopardize the safety of others
- Lack of cooperation, or disrespectful conduct
- Violation of privacy policy

Attendance

Volunteer attendance is important to the operation of our programs. Please make every effort to honor your volunteer commitment. Volunteers should notify their supervisor in advance if they are unable to be present for their volunteer project.

Minimum hours

PPD hopes you are able to find volunteer opportunities within a 12-month period. All volunteer hours will be recorded by the Volunteer Coordinator. If you have a period of inactivity exceeding 12 consecutive months,



your volunteer information will be placed inactive. You may become active again at any time by contacting the Volunteer Coordinator and updating your volunteer application information.

Uniform guidelines

Volunteers are representatives of Portage Park District. We require that all volunteers follow the guidelines for proper attire listed in each project description. The attire listed for each project is determined based on the nature of the project and with your protection in mind. If a volunteer arrives to a project inappropriately dressed, PPD reserves the right to ask the volunteer to change into something more appropriate before beginning to work.

Volunteer training

Volunteer training will be determined by opportunity. Some opportunities will only require a quick overview of the day's work with a PPD staff supervisor prior to completing the project. Other opportunities will require the volunteer to be trained by the appropriate PPD staff supervisor.

Media

Volunteers are not authorized to discuss matters pertaining to PPD with the media without proper PPD approval. Media questions should be directed to the Executive Director or Public Engagement Coordinator.

Vehicle usage

Volunteers are not authorized to drive any vehicles that are the property of the Portage Park District.

Power tools and equipment

Tools and equipment can be used by volunteers at the discretion of the Portage Park District supervisor.

Accidents & Injuries

Any accident or injury must immediately be reported to the PPD staff in charge of your volunteer project so the proper safety measures can be taken. Volunteers are not covered under the organization's insurance for injury to themselves.

Harassment policies

Portage Park District is committed to providing volunteers with an environment that is free from discrimination and unlawful harassment. Actions, words, jokes, or comments based on an individual's sex, race, ethnicity, age, religion, or any other legally protected characteristic will not be tolerated. PPD encourages volunteers to bring any incidents of harassment to the immediate attention of a direct supervisor or the Executive Director.

Volunteer feedback survey



PPD wants each volunteer to feel satisfied with the work they are involved in at the parks. Volunteers who participate in on-going opportunities will receive an annual feedback survey where they will have the chance to share feedback on their volunteer activities.

Volunteer separation and dismissal

If you have decided to end your volunteer commitment with PPD, please tell the Volunteer Coordinator. You may do this in person, by phone, or via email. A short exit interview may be conducted. All responses are confidential and are used to strengthen our volunteer program.

Every volunteer has the status of "volunteer-at-will," meaning that no one has a contractual right, express or implied, to remain a volunteer for Portage Park District.

PPD may terminate a volunteer's placement, or a volunteer may terminate his/her volunteer commitment, without cause, and with or without notice, at any time for any reason.

VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Jobs with * denote the position requires a background check

***Park and Trail Ambassadors (on-going) Also see detailed job description**

Park sections or sections of trail that require attention are identified by staff. Choose a section of trail from the available list and agree to visit a couple times a month for a total of 2-4 hours. While visiting, ambassadors should do the following:

Help keep the park or trails clean by removing trash and recycling. Not all areas have trash cans, you will need to provide bags and potentially carry trash out with you as well.

Help keep our trails clear. Remove larger sticks from the trail if you are able - toss off trail and out of the way

Share feedback by emailing to report (report form will be given to you) your findings. Share any information visitation or maintenance needs with staff. Examples of needs that would be shared with PPD staff: downed trees, excessive overgrowth on a specific trail, an area that looks like someone has been dumping trash, etc.

***Bike Ambassadors (on-going) Also see detailed job description**

Sections of trail that require attention are identified by staff. Choose a section of trail from the available list and agree to visit a couple times a month for a total of 2-4 hours. While visiting, ambassadors should do the following:

Bike the trail and note areas that may need attention. Remove larger debris from trail. Pick up trash as you are able.

Note approximate pedestrian and bike counts during visit, interesting wildlife, graffiti or vandalism and other maintenance needs.



Share feedback by emailing to report (report form will be given to you) your findings. Share any information visitation or maintenance needs with staff. Examples of needs that would be shared with PPD staff: downed trees, excessive overgrowth on a specific trail, an area that looks like someone has been dumping trash, etc.

***Education & Natural Areas Program Assistance**

Education Ambassador - Volunteer will assist with educational programming. Background in biology and natural areas is a plus, but not required. Volunteer will work under the direction of the Education Program Coordinator and follow guidelines to focus on supporting the mission of Portage Park District.

Citizen Scientists – Help us monitor our parks for ecosystem health and environmental stability. Citizen science engages volunteers of all ages, some with little or no prior scientific training, in collecting scientific data on our park properties. This position will work with the Natural Areas Steward and/or Education Program Coordinator for guidance and project information.

Stewardship work – Assist the Natural Areas Steward in controlling invasive plant species.

Administrative volunteer – Assist with projects in the PPD office. Projects would include administrative tasks such as data entry, filing, organizing of information and historical documents.

Special event volunteer – PPD attends several events throughout the year that require a booth to be set up and staff or volunteers to be available in the booth to interact with the public. The volunteer will be trained to help answer questions about our parks and assist with children’s activities when appropriate.

***Mascot costume** – Wear our mascot costume and greet adults and children as a representative of PPD. Volunteers wearing the costume will be guided by a “handler”.

Photography/Videography volunteer – **Enjoy** the outdoors and take pictures of scenery in our parks. Share your pictures with our staff and allow us to use in media and occasionally promotional materials. At times, there may also be a need for volunteer photographers or videographers for our events – here you will receive a list of pictures we are looking for and work with our staff and other volunteers to ensure the event is captured well.

Special skills volunteers – Volunteers are encouraged to connect with PPD if they have a special skill or interest that would be a benefit to the parks that is not listed above. Examples include: A person who is fluent in American Sign Language to assist with park programs; construction trades specialists; professional services.

Community Service hours

Those needing service hours for school, groups or organizations are welcome to complete these hours doing volunteer work at PPD. Volunteers are encouraged to review opportunity descriptions and chose the best option for their hours.

Volunteer groups - Community, Civic, and Days of Service Groups



PPD has volunteer opportunities designed for groups wishing to provide ongoing volunteer help or select one single day of service. We work with community and civic organizations, school groups, scouts, and other groups. We will do our best match your groups' skills and location request whenever possible. The group representative should contact the Volunteer Coordinator (at least 6 weeks in advance), by calling 330.297.7728 or email your request to the volunteer coordinator, to discuss the volunteer options.

MARKETING DEPARTMENT MESSAGE TO VOLUNTEERS

You are representing Portage Park District

As volunteers and staff, **we are all advocates for Portage Park District.**

What you do and say matters

You are the face of Portage Park District. You may be the first person someone meets from PPD and you now have the responsibility of making a good first impression. You never know who is paying attention at any given time, so be sure to choose your words and actions wisely. Foul and condescending language and actions are not acceptable in any situation. Please refrain from sharing personal opinions regarding park policies, etc. with patrons. If you have feedback for PPD, share that with staff as outlined below.

When NOT to answer a question

We all want to make park users happy, however if you're approached by someone with a question that you do not know the answer to, please be honest and say you don't know that answer, but will get the information to the right contact for follow up. Use the Experience Feedback forms supplied by the park. If you don't have the forms or anything to write on, have them call into the main office (330.297.7728) for the right contact or direct them to the website for contact information.

How to give us your feedback

Speak with the Volunteer Coordinator at an appropriate time if you have an interest or concern to discuss. We can solve anything if we work together.

Stay positive

It can be frustrating to hear a park visitor or other member of the public complain. Keep in mind there may be a logical reason the situation exists and it's up to all of us to educate users about the park processes. Apologize for the dissatisfaction and take the complaint to the Volunteer Coordinator. Be a promoter of the benefits of the park system and work toward understanding the reasons behind situations so you can offer an informed and positive answer. **You are part of the team!**

RESOURCES

Website – portageparkdistrict.org



Social Media

Facebook - facebook.com/portageparkdistrict

Twitter - @PortageParkDist

Instagram - @portageparkdistrict

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND RECEIPT

Receipt and review of policies form

Signature on this receipt acknowledges that you have reviewed the Portage Park District volunteer handbook.

Volunteer Handbook Statement of Certification

I, _____, certify that I have received and reviewed the Portage Park District Volunteer Handbook.

I further understand that, by signing this statement as required I am indicating that I have read the Volunteer Handbook and understand its contents or have discussed questions I have with the Volunteer Coordinator. I also realize that this statement will become a permanent part of my volunteer personnel file.

Volunteer Name (Please Print)

Signature

Address

City, State, Zip

Date

Please sign and return to:
Portage Park District



Attn: Volunteer Coordinator
705 Oakwood St., STE G4
Ravenna, OH 44266

Addendum

Board of Commissioners:

The Portage Park District has been very fortunate since its inception to have high quality leaders to serve as Park Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners of the Park District are appointed by the County Probate Court Judge. The five members of the Board oversee the Executive Director, and are responsible for setting policy, developing rules and regulations and approving the budget. They serve as volunteers for a renewable 3-year term.

Judge Patricia J. Smith

Portage County Probate Judge Patricia J. Smith selects and appoints Commissioners to serve on the Portage Park District Board.

Allan Orshan

Allan is a realtor who brings decades of land transaction and property management expertise to the park district, as well as serving on the Regional Planning Commission and as a board member of local non-profit organizations. He enjoys the parks while hiking and cycling.

Renee Ruchotzke

Renee serves on the boards of the Kelly's Working Wel Farm, the Kent League of Women Voters, and the Portage County NAACP. Renee works for the Unitarian Universalist Association as a congregational consultant. She is a frequent park user and enjoys nature.

Charles Engelhart

Chuck Engelhart has over 20 years experience in parks management, currently as Director of Parks with Cleveland Metroparks. He holds degrees in Biology and Interdisciplinary studies, and is a hunter, hiker and cyclist.

Thomas Hrdy

Tom is recently retired from Portage County Department of Job and Family Services and is a licensed social worker. He enjoys gardening, bee keeping, hiking and is an avid outdoorsman.



Kurt Ruehr

Kurt is the CFO for Townhall II, and organization promoting a holistic approach to health, wellness, and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Kurt has served with the PPD Foundation, emceed the Environmental Conservation Awards Dinner, and is an ambassador for conservation in Portage County.

Senior Staff:

Executive Director

Christine Craycroft
kniertert@portageparkdistrict.org

Chief Ranger

Kevin Nietert ccraycroft@portageparkdistrict.org

Operations Manager

Craig Alderman
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Natural Areas Steward

Bob Lange
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Education and Outreach Manager

Jennifer White
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Administrative Assistant

Eric Seachrist
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Education Program Coordinator

Holly Stoneberg
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Education Outreach Specialist

Rebecca Rodhe
rrodhe@portageparkdistrict.org

List of Parks:

Berlin Lake Trail Trailheads
ST RT 225
Kirkbride Rd.
Breakneck Creek Preserve (not open to public)
Chagrin Headwaters Preserve (not open to public)
Dix Park
Dix Preserve (not open to public)
Eagle Creek Greenway Preserve (not open to public)
Franklin Bog Preserve (not open to public)
Gray Birch Bog Preserve (not open to public)
Headwaters Trail-Trailheads
Garrettsville Village Park
Liberty St.
State Route 700



Asbury Rd.
Limeridge Rd.
Vaughn Rd.
Peck Rd.
Mill St.
Mennonite Rd.

Kent Bog Expansion Preserve (not open to the public)

Morgan Park

Red Fox Boat Access

Seneca Ponds Park

Shaw Woods Working Lands Park

The PORTAGE Hike and Bike Trail-Trailheads

Cleveland Rd.

Oakwood St.

Wall St.

Redbrush Rd.

Towner's Woods

Lake Rockwell Rd.

Riverbend Blvd.

Franklin Connector

Trail Lake Park

Towner's Woods

Walter Preserve (not open to public)