

2021

Your Guide to Hosting a Park Day Event

PARK DAY



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Introduction

Park Day is the American Battlefield Trust's annual, nationwide, hands-on preservation event to help maintain America's battlefields and historic sites. Each year, thousands of history enthusiasts, families, Boy and Girl Scouts, ROTC units and more come together in an effort to help keep our nation's heritage not only preserved, but pristine.

Since 1996, community-minded citizens have taken part in Park Day events at various sites across the country. Activities are chosen by each participating site and can include building trails, raking leaves, painting signs, putting up fences and contributing to site interpretation. Some sites also choose to offer volunteers a tour or the chance to hear a local historian describe people and events of the past at their site. The Trust will provide participants with an official Park Day water bottle and a copy of our *Hallowed Ground* magazine.

The goal of Park Day is to provide Americans with an opportunity to lend a helping hand at their community's historic sites and museums — and hopefully, learn about our country's history in the process. Though the American Battlefield Trust is focused on preserving America's Civil War, Revolutionary War, and War of 1812 battlefields, we welcome all historical parks, homes, museums, forts, cemeteries, and more to join us and host a volunteer event.

Park Day has the potential to be an extremely rewarding and productive source of volunteer labor for the maintenance and upkeep of your site, as well as an opportunity to promote your site and its unique history. Take advantage of volunteers' efforts where your site needs it the most, whether it's painting, planting trees, trail building, trash pickup, or something else. Park Day can also be used by scout groups, student organizations, training corps programs, many school systems, and more to fulfill the service requirements.



Volunteers pitch in for Park Day 2018 at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, Ga.

If you are interested in hosting an event, this guide can be used as a resource to help you throughout the planning process. For more information about the American Battlefield Trust's next Park Day event, please reach out to the Park Day Coordinator at ctownsend@battlefields.org or visit www.battlefields.org/parkday.

Registration

TIMELINE

The American Battlefield Trust will open registration for Park Day sites in the autumn prior to the following year's Park Day. Sites can keep an eye out on the Trust's website, but the Trust's Park Day Coordinator will also distribute a link to all prior participants once it becomes available. If you would like to be added to this email list, please contact ctownsend@battlefields.org.

There are many dates to keep in mind when deciding when to submit your registration. Though all sites may register any time before their event occurs in the Spring, the Trust recommends registering as soon as possible. At various points throughout the winter and spring, the Trust will use the list of registered sites to help publicize Park Day events on social media and in *Hallowed Ground* magazine, as well as use the numbers submitted by each site to order water bottles. If your site has not registered by these deadlines, you will not be eligible to receive water bottles, be listed in *Hallowed Ground*, etc. Visit the Trust's Park Day event page at battlefields.org for specific dates and deadlines for the next event.

Please note that if you'd like to register in time to be included in *Hallowed Ground* or receive water bottles, but still need more time to determine a specific piece of information for the registration form, you are welcome to submit the form without these details. Contact the Park Day Coordinator at any time to change or add to the information included in your registration form.

THE REGISTRATION PROCESS

Registration is completed via a questionnaire form on the Trust's website. This link will also be distributed to contacts at all site that have previously participated.

Upon submitting your registration, you should receive a confirmation email. If you do not receive this confirmation, please submit your registration again. Details for your event will be posted on the Trust website by the end of January, and starting in February, someone from the Trust will reach out to all sites regularly to confirm water bottle orders, send promotional materials, and provide updates and helpful information.

Once again, if you know you want to have an event but still need more time to figure out the details, please feel free to fill out the registration form and then email the Trust's Park Day Coordinator with any changes or additions.

COMPLETING THE REGISTRATION FORM

When you're ready to register, you'll need to give us a few key details. The below summaries help explain what information is needed in each section on the online form.

Help the Trust Contact You & Get You Ready: Here, please provide the Trust with a point of contact for "behind-the-scenes" operations for Park Day. Essentially, the Trust needs someone at your site that they can send your water bottles and materials to, as well as reach out to with any questions about the logistics

of your event. We'll need your mailing address (we cannot ship to PO boxes), email, and phone number. If you're the person filling out the registration form, this will probably be the place to enter in your own information.

About Your Site: To help volunteers learn more about the parks and historic sites hosting events on Park Day, we ask that you provide your site's physical address, website, social media links, and period of history, where you have this information available. We'll also need to know what date your event will be held. While the Trust will choose an official national date, you are free to hold your Park Day on any day that works best for you. Each year, due to a variety of reasons (weather, conflict with other events, etc.), several sites hold their event on an alternate date.

Tell Your Volunteers What to Expect: This section helps any potential volunteers learn more about what Park Day will look like at your site. We ask that you include a meeting place and time, as well as a description of the projects taking place during your event. When choosing projects, it is important to determine how your site could best benefit from a volunteer presence. Projects come in all shapes and sizes, but some of our most common include: building/clearing trails, raking leaves, painting signs, building/painting fences, clearing brush, picking up trash, installing markers or interpretive signs, and landscaping. Sites with museums, visitor's centers, or historic homes often have volunteers help dust, sweep, or paint the inside of buildings. Since Park Day is usually in the spring, many sites use this as an opportunity to prepare the site for tourist season that summer.

However, this is **your** Park Day event, and you're welcome to have your volunteers help in any way that you see fit. Perhaps you need your cemetery's headstones cleaned, or your battlefield's cannon needs to be painted. Park Day can be a time to complete general, routine annual maintenance and cleaning, or, you can use this volunteer time to complete those tasks that your staff has never seemed to have time for on their own. You may also consider offering low-impact projects for children or volunteers with limited mobility, such as sweeping or picking up trash. No matter what projects you choose, hopefully, your site will be in tip-top shape for tourist season.

This is also the area to let us know if your site will provide any historical or educational programming, food, or beverages. You may also choose to ask volunteers to bring specific tools or supplies, such as rakes, gloves, etc. Please let us know about your rain plan as well.

Point of Contact for Volunteers: All sites will need to have a person that is the "face" of Park Day. This person's contact information will be on the Trust website, so potential volunteers can reach out with questions or comments. This person may also be tasked with compiling registrations, if your site chooses to make volunteer registration an option or mandatory.

Planning Your Event

APPOINT A PARK DAY COORDINATOR

To streamline the planning and coordination of your Park Day event, the Trust recommends appointing a Park Day Coordinator to oversee all aspects of the process. Most organizations choose someone that has experience planning events and/or managing volunteers, but this person can be anyone within your organization that would be willing and able to take on the management on this project.

The coordinator will be the Trust's point-of-contact for Park Day communication and will be in charge of registering your site, working with other staff to determine projects, reaching out to local businesses, coordinating the recruiting and registering of volunteers, and later on, managing day-of logistics. Even if the coordinator is not completing all of these tasks on their own, it is helpful to have someone at the helm who can ensure that the various steps of the planning process are occurring in an organized and timely manner – and nothing is being overlooked.

GET LOCAL BUSINESSES INVOLVED

When determining what food, beverages, and supplies you will need for your event, consider asking local businesses if they would be willing to donate these items. Many of our sites have had great success in reaching out to local coffee shops and convenience stores, and even if it turns out that your local stores are not interested, there is no harm in asking. Though it may be best to ask in person, feel free to reach out via the “Letter to Businesses” template from the Trust, which will be distributed about a month prior to the event.

When reaching out to managers at area stores, start by providing an explanation of Park Day, letting them know that it is an event to clean up and maintain local parks and historic sites. Focus on the benefit that local parks provide to the community and remind them that the volunteers are generally citizens from the surrounding area. With that in mind, consider offering to provide free advertising for their store, perhaps in your press release or on posters at the event. Share some information about the projects that you plan to offer-- and ask if they would be willing to donate materials, water, coffee, or food to help your organization bring those plans to fruition.

A few materials to consider asking for:

- Coffee and pastries from coffee or dessert shops
- Water and snacks from convenience stores
- Trash bags, gloves, and other supplies from hardware or home improvement supply stores

Ideally, sites that contribute this year will be willing to do the same in future years, and once you establish that relationship, all it will take to acquire your annual donations is a call or visit from your Park Day coordinator to that site.

PRE-REGISTRATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

Though the Trust does not require sites to ask volunteers to pre-register, we highly recommend that you do so, especially if you plan to have a large event. Knowing who is coming to your event in advance is helpful in number of ways, as it gives you a better idea of how many volunteers to expect and what their ages and abilities are. For example, if you discover that a troop of young Boy Scouts plans to attend, you can consider adding educational programming to your agenda. Or, if an ROTC group registers, you can perhaps add a project that is perhaps a bit more strenuous. Further, having the contact information for all of your volunteers is incredibly useful when the time comes to distribute information or reminders, or in the event that you need to cancel or change your plans due to bad weather.

If you do choose to require volunteers to pre-register, consider also assigning them to specific projects and tasks. This is not as crucial for small events, but for those with a few dozen or more people, it will help your event run much smoother day-of. Once individual volunteers and groups have been assigned, you can reach out to let them know what projects they can plan to complete at the event. When they arrive at Park Day, your volunteers will already know what to expect and where to go, and if needed, they'll be able to bring the appropriate supplies.

Having participants pre-register will also make the sign-in process much smoother for your volunteers. Rather than asking them to enter their name on the sign-on sheet, consider using a checklist of pre-registered participants, adding only the names of those volunteers that did not pre-register. At the end of your event, simply send this list of attendees to the Trust via email, rather than having to mail or scan in your numerous sign-in sheets.



Volunteers gather for Park Day 2017 at Guilford Court House National Battlefield Park, Greensboro, N.C.

Recruiting Volunteers

The Trust promotes the national Park Day event on social media, national and local news outlets, and our magazine, *Hallowed Ground*, all of which will point people in the direction of our website, where all sites are listed. However, if you want to ensure a good turnout at your event, the Trust recommends taking steps on your own to spread the word as well.

Approximately six weeks before the official Park Day date, the Trust will send promotional materials to assist you with recruiting volunteers. These include customizable posters, a press release template, and sample social media posts. These can all be used to help bring people to your event, but feel free to get creative and make your own materials and posts as well.

PROMOTE YOUR EVENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a great avenue for inviting the local community to your event. In addition to notifying your existing follower base, social platforms allow your audience to share posts themselves, further broadening your reach and sharing the information with more people.

Outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn all provide opportunities for you to share the details of your event. When crafted the right way, posts about Park Day will let people know what the event is, provide details for those that may want to attend, and finally, encourage new volunteers to attend. Remind followers of information such as time, location, and projects, while also letting them know about the potential benefits, such as historical & educational programming, water bottles, service hour fulfillments, and of course, opportunities to get outside and help restore our country's most historic locations. However, it's important to keep posts short and sweet where possible, so consider cutting down on the post's length by sharing a link to the Trust's event listing for your site, where more of these details will be provided.

To draw attention to your posts, include photos or videos of prior Park Day events. If you're a first-time participant, consider sharing photos from a prior volunteer event, or simply provide eye-catching image or video from your site. Feel free to also use the Trust's annual Park Day hashtag on all relevant posts, as well as on any promotional materials you may create.

Social media platforms such as Facebook also allow you to create events and invite your followers. To make the most of this ability, create your event early and encourage your followers to mark themselves as "attending" and share the event on their own profiles. The more your posts and event listings are shared by your followers, the more your event will gain attention from potential attendees that otherwise would have been unaware. When creating an event on Facebook, feel free to add the Trust as a "co-host," and your event will then show up on our Facebook page as well.

LOCAL NEWSPAPERS, RADIO, AND TELEVISION OUTLETS

Approximately six weeks before Park Day, the Trust will send all participants a fill-in-the-blank style news release template. All sites are welcome to customize this news release however they see fit, or, if

preferred, build one of their own. Either way, it is important to make sure that your release includes a brief description of Park Day; your event's location, time, and date; contact information; and a link to your online event page for those looking for more information.

Once your press release is ready to go, you'll want to send it to your local newspaper, radio, and television news outlets a few weeks before your event. Hopefully, the event will be mentioned in some capacity through these mediums, creating greater awareness in your community, which will bring in more volunteers. In some cases, the outlet may contact your site for more information, or a reporter may visit your event to acquire more information.

OUTREACH TO LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS

Another great way to recruit volunteers is to reach out to local Boy and Girl Scout troops, AARP chapters, Civil War Round Tables, Reenactor groups, youth groups, Greek organizations, student conservation groups, Junior ROTC, history classes at nearby schools, and more. Many of these organizations are like-minded in mission, or they have service requirements that members must fulfill. Consider reaching out to contacts at some of the groups in your community, introducing Park Day, and inviting them to join.

In addition to utilizing existing contacts, the following websites can be used to find groups, troops, or units in your area:

- Boy Scout Troops: www.bsahosting.org/locator
- Girl Scout Councils: www.girlscouts.org/en/about-girl-scouts/join/council-finder.html
- AARP Chapter: <http://secure.aarp.org/applications/VMISLocator/searchChapterLocations.action>
- CWRT: http://civilwarseminars.org/?page_id=346
- Reenactor groups: <http://civilwar-reenacting.com/reenactment-units>
- Army ROTC: <https://www.goarmy.com/rotc/find-schools.html>
- Army JROTC: https://www.usarmyjrotc.com/JROTC_Schools.html
- Navy ROTC: http://www.nrotc.navy.mil/colleges_nrotc_unitsXP3.html
- Navy JROTC: http://www.njrotc.navy.mil/host_schools.html
- Air Force ROTC: <https://www.afrotc.com/locator>
- Air Force JROTC: <http://www.airuniversity.af.mil/HolmCenter/AFJROTC/Display/Article/950637/>

For local youth groups, history classes, Key Clubs, National Honor Societies, Greek organizations, etc., consider reaching out to local schools and churches for more information. If you have a contact within any of these organizations, even better! Let them know that you would like to invite their group to your event, and explain the possible benefits that can come from attendance. Remember, Park Day can be a great way to fulfill service requirements associated with JROTC, scout groups, and more.

VOLUNTEER WEBSITES

Finally, feel free to also post your volunteer opportunity on websites such as Volunteer Match (www.volunteermatch.org) and Indeed (www.indeed.com).

Final Preparations

In the days leading up to your Park Day event, ask yourself the following questions:

1. How does the weather report look? Do I need to start taking steps to implement my rain plan? Does my event need to be rescheduled due to the rain date?
2. Do I have all of the materials that I need for my site's projects? Volunteers may bring some materials if they were asked, but otherwise, be prepared to have some extra. This includes items such as trash bags, gloves, shovels, rakes, etc.
3. Do I have water and/or food for the volunteers? We do not require that sites offer anything to volunteers, but if you advertised that it would be offered, make sure something is available.
4. Do I have my sign-in sheets and waivers printed out and ready to go? To make matters easier, consider using a checklist of your pre-registered volunteers.
5. Are my parking and meeting areas clearly marked so that volunteers know where to go?
6. Do I have my water bottles ready to go?
7. If possible, have I reached out to my volunteers to confirm meeting time and location, as well as what project they will be assigned to?
8. Do my staff and other helpers know what their responsibilities are? For larger events, consider assigning everyone to a specific duty, and letting them know that this is what they will be handling during the event. Individuals can be dedicated to tasks such as registration, refreshing snacks and beverages, parking, water bottles distribution, etc.
9. Have I designated someone to take photos and post to social media? Again, this is not mandatory, but photos are great to use when recruiting in future years. Also, if you share them with the Trust, we may share them on our own social media platforms or publish them in *Hallowed Ground*.
10. Do I have mechanisms in place to ensure that my volunteers will be safe and well hydrated throughout the event? Be sure to have plenty of water available, particularly if your event takes place on a hot day. Consider starting off the day with a safety briefing, and then assigning a staff member to watch over your volunteers and ensure that no one is operating in an unsafe manner or overworking themselves.

After Park Day

When your event comes to a close, keep the momentum going by posting your photos and videos on social media using the Trust's annual hashtag. Invite followers to come see your cleaned-up site, which hopefully, is now in tip-top shape and ready for the summer!

If you have leftover water bottles, feel free to donate them. Some sites also choose to use them for a future volunteer day or give them to students visiting their site. If you had a large number of extras, please keep that in mind when ordering your water bottles for the following year.

There are also a few administrative items that the Trust asks that all participating sites do. First, after your event, please mail or scan/email the sign-in sheets to the Trust's Park Day Coordinator. Acquiring these emails allows us to notify participants about the following year's event and send them a volunteer survey. We also ask that you fill out the survey for participating sites, which will be sent shortly after your event. Since Trust representatives cannot be at every site, these surveys help us to know how your event went, and we very much appreciate any feedback we receive as to how we can continue to make Park Day better for all involved.

Last, enjoy your newly cleaned-up site!



Volunteers clean up the Princeton Battlefield on Park Day 2018.

Park Day Checklist

Five Months Before Park Day

- ☐ Appoint a Park Day Coordinator to oversee your event
- ☐ Decide what projects your Park Day will involve

Three/Four Months Before Park Day

- ☐ Register your site

Two Months Before Park Day

- ☐ Confirm your water bottle order
- ☐ Open up registration for volunteers & start recruiting

Four to Six Weeks Before Park Day

- ☐ Get local businesses involved and ask for material donations
- ☐ Reach out to local newspapers and television & radio outlets
- ☐ Promote your event on social media
- ☐ Reach out to local organizations to recruit their members as volunteers

The Week Before Park Day

- ☐ Assign staff and helpers to specific responsibilities, and let them know what they'll need to do
- ☐ Acquire any materials that volunteers may not bring, such as trash bags
- ☐ Buy any food and beverages that were not donated, such as water and snacks
- ☐ Print sign-in sheets and waivers
- ☐ Clearly mark your parking and meeting locations
- ☐ If possible, reach out to volunteers to confirm meeting time and location
- ☐ Watch the weather report, and put your rain plan into action, if needed

The Day of Your Event

- ☐ Set up tables for water bottles, registration, and food and beverage stations. Put water bottles, drinks, and food or snacks out for volunteers to take
- ☐ Make sure your staff and helpers are in their place and ready to go
- ☐ Perform a safety briefing, and assign someone to watch for unsafe actions or overworked volunteers
- ☐ Take plenty of photos & videos, including a group photo

After Park Day

- ☐ Post your photos to social media and send them to the Trust for us to share as well!
- ☐ Donate leftover water bottles, or use them for a later event
- ☐ Send the Trust your waivers and sign-in sheets via mail or a scan
- ☐ Fill out the site survey, which will be sent by the Trust after your event
- ☐ Enjoy your newly cleaned up site!