

Memorial Park Conservancy



Volunteer Guidelines



MEMORIAL PARK
CONSERVANCY

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To our newest volunteer,

Welcome to Memorial Park Conservancy! Our volunteers are a crucial part of our mission to restore, preserve, and enhance Memorial Park, as one of the largest urban parks in the nation. We look forward to the opportunity of working together in the fulfillment of this mission. Thank you for choosing Memorial Park to dedicate your passion, skills, and time to. We value those gifts and strive to create a meaningful volunteer experience for each volunteer. We want you to feel that your volunteer time with MPC will be one that is both beneficial and gratifying, and we hope this handbook is a good starting point. Thank you so much for your time, and we look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,
MPC Staff



HAVE A HEART FOR MEMORIAL PARK

Handbook Objective

This handbook is intended to provide an overview of Memorial Park Conservancy (MPC) and the volunteer program policies. We hope that it helps maximize your volunteer experience in Memorial Park. The policies and procedures in this handbook are guidelines only. MPC reserves the right to interpret and administer the provisions of this handbook as needed.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

You are a valuable part of our team. It's important that you understand your rights and responsibilities.

As a volunteer, you have the right to:

- Receive adequate training and guidance.
- Work in a safe environment.
- Have risks explained.
- Ask questions and make suggestions.
- Turn down tasks that you feel you are not comfortable with, not qualified to perform, or have not been adequately trained to do.

As a volunteer you have the responsibility to:

- Truthfully represent physical capabilities
- Be courteous to park visitors, staff, and other volunteers, and do your best to answer any questions.
- Conduct work in a safe way, according to training
- Give prior notice of absence
- Respect confidentiality
- Report injuries and accidents promptly to Program Coordinator
- Respect and follow park rules

MPC has the responsibility to:

- Provide volunteers with adequate training and orientation
- Provide a clear outline of duties
- Communicate clearly with volunteer
- Provide supervision
- Provide a safe, healthy work environment

MPC has the right to:

- Release a volunteer that is not conducting him or herself appropriately
- Make decisions on volunteer placement

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

The following is considered unacceptable behavior but is not meant to be an exhaustive list. MPC staff has the right to expand upon this list at any point.

- Use of illegal substances
- Smoking while performing volunteer duties
- Theft
- Using offensive language on company premises
- Violating MPC policy
- Negligent or intentional damage of property
- Willfully endangering the safety of others
- Not upholding the responsibilities listed above

Volunteers are a reflection of Memorial Park Conservancy. You should conduct yourself in a professional, courteous way when interacting with the public in the park.

VOLUNTEER POLICIES

- Memorial Park Conservancy has the right to use photographs or video of volunteers in marketing or public relations material.
- Unchaperoned volunteers must be at least 18 years of age to volunteer at Memorial Park. Youth volunteers (age 12-17) are welcome with a chaperone 21 years of age or older. There must be one adult per ten youth.
- Group leaders are responsible for making certain that all participants in their group follow instructions and abide by Memorial Park's volunteer policies. Groups must agree to arrive in a timely manner.
- We do not have a volunteer uniform, but volunteers should use discretion in choosing appropriate clothing. An individual may be sent home if he or she is wearing clothing that MPC deems inappropriate or unfit for the job assigned.

VOLUNTEER PAPERWORK

All volunteers must fill out our volunteer application on our website, memorialparkconservancy.org/volunteer. This ensures that we have your contact information, emergency contacts, volunteer project preferences, and availability. Your information will be stored in our database, and you'll be added to our mailing list for the monthly volunteer newsletter. This is how volunteer opportunities are advertised.

All volunteers must sign the **volunteer release and waiver** before he or she can perform any work or trainings with Memorial Park Conservancy. The Program Coordinator will contact you when you RSVP if you do not have a waiver on file.

MPC requires some applicants to satisfactorily complete a **background check**. MPC will consider the job duties in determining what constitutes a volunteer submitting to a background check. The volunteer job description will state whether or not one is needed.

VOLUNTEER DAY PREP SHEET

What to wear: Always refer to your information sheet from the program coordinator or information from your volunteer supervisor. In general, you will be working in a natural environment, so closed toe shoes or boots and long pants are **required** (yoga or spandex pants are not acceptable). Please wear clothes that can get dirty and are weather appropriate. MPC also recommends washing all clothes and shoes and showering immediately following volunteer day because there *is poison ivy in the park*, and you may come into contact with it.

What to bring: We encourage you to bring a water bottle, snacks, sunscreen, hat, sunglasses, bandana, and bug spray for your personal comfort. Each participant (including leaders, chaperones, teachers, adults and youth) **must** submit signed waiver to group leader 48 hours in advance of volunteer day.

Stay Safe: Drink plenty of water the night and morning before the event and during the work day. Take breaks for 5-10 minutes every hour or as needed. Follow instructions from the MPC staff member leading the group. Never work without staff supervision.

SAFETY

Safety is our #1 priority. You are required to comply with all MPC's rules and guidelines as well as any applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding workplace safety. You must follow safety instructions given by your staff supervisor. Our goal is to keep you safe!

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES:

You must report all workplace injuries, accidents, or illnesses to your supervisor as soon as possible. This includes yourself, other volunteers, visitors, and staff.

In the event of an emergency, please remove yourself from any unsafe or unstable conditions and call 911. Always be aware of where you are in the park in order to accurately report your location.

In the event of a non-emergency incident, report it immediately to your staff supervisor and await their instructions.

PROTECTING YOURSELF:

As a volunteer, it is your responsibility to dress appropriately to the kind of work being done. The Program Coordinator or your staff supervisor will give you more detail on what items are required and suggested. Always wear the personal protective equipment (PPE) that you are directed to wear.

Be prepared for heat, cold, rain, and other weather conditions that come with the Houston weather patterns. Drink plenty of water. In the event of a storm, follow your supervisor's instructions. Check your phone and/or email to see if your scheduled activity will be cancelled.

Do not attempt work for which you are not qualified or authorized to do. You are never required to complete a task if you feel unable to execute it successfully.

If you witness any unsafe conditions or potential hazards, please report them to your supervisor.

Volunteers are not to give out home/cell phone numbers or other personal information for themselves, staff, or other volunteers to any customer, resident, or visitor.

YOUR SAFETY IS OUR HIGHEST PRIORITY!

Contact information

Kelly McCann, Program Coordinator

Office (713) 863-8403 ext.103

volunteer@memorialparkconservancy.org

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

FOR A GROUP:

Trail Clearing

Memorial Park boasts several pedestrian trails, many of which are covered up by an overgrowth of plants. Volunteers remove exotic (invasive) plant species from the trail and prune the native (non-invasive) species back so that trails are passable. Groups may also help level the trails and manage for drainage issues. This is an excellent activity for any size group with a few hours to share.

Park Maintenance

Help us with park beautification projects! This may include tree pruning, mulching, weeding, and other miscellaneous projects. Tools, gloves, and staff instruction will be provided.

Litter Pickup

Trash clean up days are fun for students, corporate groups, and other organizations! It's a very important job especially in our urban park. MPC will provide the equipment.

To sign up: Email volunteer@memorialparkconservancy.org to inquire about availability and projects available. All volunteer projects based on the needs of the park, the type of group, and group size. Once confirmed, each group leader will receive a project description, guidelines, and instructions via email. Volunteers with a group will sign electronic waiver.

FOR AN INDIVIDUAL:

Clerical/Office Work

Volunteers assist MPC staff with filing, scanning, and general organizational duties. Proficiency in MS Office and clean background check required.

Gardening Volunteers

We have regularly scheduled volunteer days with our Horticulturalist that get volunteers out in the park to plant, weed, and maintain gardens within the park.

Litter Pickup

It's as easy as stopping by our office for a Litter pickup packet! Volunteers can stop by the Running Trails Center during office hours to pick up all the necessary equipment for a trash pick-up. Great for adding a community benefit to your hike in the park or for a spontaneous day of service. Staff will point you in the right direction!

Conservation

Memorial Park is an urban wilderness. It takes a lot of work to keep our ecosystems healthy. Volunteers are needed to help with invasive species removal, habitat maintenance, and special monitoring projects.

Bench Cleaning

Commemorative benches stand in memoriam of a loved one or friend. Cleaning helps to honor their memory as well as polish the aesthetics of the park.

Special Event Help

MPC has several signature events throughout the year including the gala, Brunch Run, golf tournament, and Bridge Bash. Volunteers are needed with invitations, set up, wayfinding, check-in, and other general day-of help. These opportunities will be advertised in the newsletter. See page 8 for more details.

Other

Our staff is always coming up with new volunteer opportunities to help the park. Watch our newsletter for these announcements.

To sign up: Fill out the volunteer form online at memorialparkconservancy.org/volunteer. Each applicant is added the newsletter mailing list, where each month's opportunities are detailed. Volunteers RSVP to kmccann@memorialparkconservancy.org.

ANNUAL SPECIAL EVENTS

MPC Gala, February

Friends and supporters of the park are able to celebrate together the hard work from the previous year and the exciting things to come. This formal dinner is one of MPC's most important event.

Brunch Run, April

The Brunch Run boasts the best run after party in town! The event gets a lot of media exposure for underwriters and provides an opportunity for area companies to host their employees in the Corporate Challenge health and wellness event.

Golf Tournament, May

This annual Florida scramble is a much-anticipated event each year, and participants mark their calendars early so as not to miss out! Sponsors are the celebrated guests at the event, and the afternoon ends with a reception featuring cold beverages and hot-off-the-grill Becks Prime burgers.

Urban Wild Bridge Bash, November

Urban Wild, our young professionals group, members enjoy a party under the stars on top of the Living Bridge. Tickets are also available for purchase.

GROUP LEADER CHECKLIST

If you would like to volunteer as a group, please contact volunteer@memorialparkconservancy.org. Our Program Coordinator will work with you to determine if the group is a good fit and if so, will help work out the details. We prefer to host volunteer events on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings. They typically last 2-4 hours, depending on your preference and staff availability. We have limited availability on weekends, Mondays, and Fridays; more accommodations can be made with at least 3 months' notice.

1-3 months prior to event

- Set date, time, and number of volunteers with Program Coordinator
- Recruit volunteers

2 weeks prior to event

- Read and distribute information sheet to participants including parking, required clothing, maps, waiver, and timing

1 week prior to event

- Send reminder email to participants to fill out waiver

48 hours in advance

- Ensure each participant has either digitally signed waiver or scan and send copies of signed waivers to Program Coordinator.
- Contact Kelly McCann, Program Coordinator, during business hours at (713) 863-8403 ext. 103 with any questions.

During volunteer project

- Ensure all participants are dressed appropriately, are following instructions, and staying on task
- Remind participants to take water/snack breaks as needed
- Take time at the end of project to clean up and help load tools, trash, and debris

APPENDIX

Volunteers are a reflection of Memorial Park Conservancy and an extension of the organization in the field. We hope that you will enjoy learning about the park from the following materials and will feel prepared to answer simple questions from visitors while you are volunteering with us.

PARK MAP



ABOUT MEMORIAL PARK

Memorial Park is one of the largest urban parks in the nation, encompassing almost 1500 acres in the heart of Houston, Texas. Nestled between I-10 and 610, the park has been a respite for Houstonians for more than 75 years. Visitors of all ages can enjoy running, hiking, biking, and horseback riding on over 30 miles of natural surface trails. Buffalo Bayou is the southern border of the park, and a boating access point allows small-watercraft users to float into downtown Houston.

HISTORY

Memorial Park is named in memory of the Camp Logan soldiers who lost their lives in the First World War. Camp Logan was established in 1917 on the forested banks of Buffalo Bayou. It was built to house 44,899 soldiers on 3000 acres. The camp closed in 1919 after the war ended, and the land was acquired by the city in 1924, officially dedicating the park to the memory of the soldiers who trained there. Ten years later, the Works Progress Administration employed 500 men to build the golf course that still stands in the northeast corner of the park.



The Arboretum and Nature Center was designated by the city in 1964 as a nature center and urban wildlife sanctuary in the southwest corner of the park. Houston's most popular public health amenity, the Seymour Lieberman Exer-trail was added in 1978. Memorial Park Conservancy was founded in 2000 to protect the park. MPC is dedicated to continually improving the park and embarked on a 20 year master plan in 2015. The plan will rearrange Memorial Park to allow visitors access to more acreage, continue a conservation plan, and add amenities such as a running track and lakes.

ECOLOGY

The forests of Memorial Park are the product of over 10,000 years of human activity. Buffalo Bayou was edged by bald cypress trees and other bottomland species. This transitioned to a pine and hardwood mix going north from the bayou and included patches of grassland savannahs. Dramatic drops in elevation were provided by small tributaries and ravines. Today's forest has been impacted by Native Americans, early settlers, Camp Logan soldiers, and city developers played their part in the ecological history of Memorial Park. Today's dense understory is a result of invasive species dominating the canopy as well as the gradual evacuation of important ecological functions such as grazing by large mammals and natural induced grass fires. In 2011, the driest year and second hottest on record arrived in Houston, creating another ecological disturbance. By then, the bottomland-hardwood-savannah mosaic ecosystem had grown into a virtually single age closed canopy forest with little to no natural regeneration occurring. Houstonians watched as the already stressed forest encountered a drought, beetle infestation, and Hurricane Ike, accelerating the decline of the pine forest. Memorial Park Conservancy in conjunction with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department developed a conservation-oriented master plan which included plans to restore the forest as the canopy gradually died. The process was expected to take ten years. Since 2012, the Conservancy has treated 500 acres of invasive plant species, planted approximately 105,000 seedlings and trees, and completed fire hazard mitigation. Ecological restoration is an ongoing process in the park supported by staff, volunteers, and dedicated park users.

ABOUT MEMORIAL PARK CONSERVANCY

Memorial Park Conservancy (MPC) is a 501 (c)(3) organization founded in 2000. The mission of MPC is to restore, preserve, and enhance Memorial Park for the enjoyment of all Houstonians, today and tomorrow. Memorial Park Conservancy aspires to implement principles of exceptional park management and stewardship in a successful public-private partnership with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD).

Memorial Park Conservancy advances our mission through the following areas of focus:

CONSERVATION including reforestation and preparation, watering and irrigation, invasive species control, wildlife conservation, soil conservation, and fire protection zones.

AMENITY DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE including new trails, trail maintenance, new buildings and construction, commemorative plaques and pavers, and existing facility maintenance.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND EDUCATION including volunteer conservation and forestry work, community events, newsletters and social media, and advocate for Park needs.

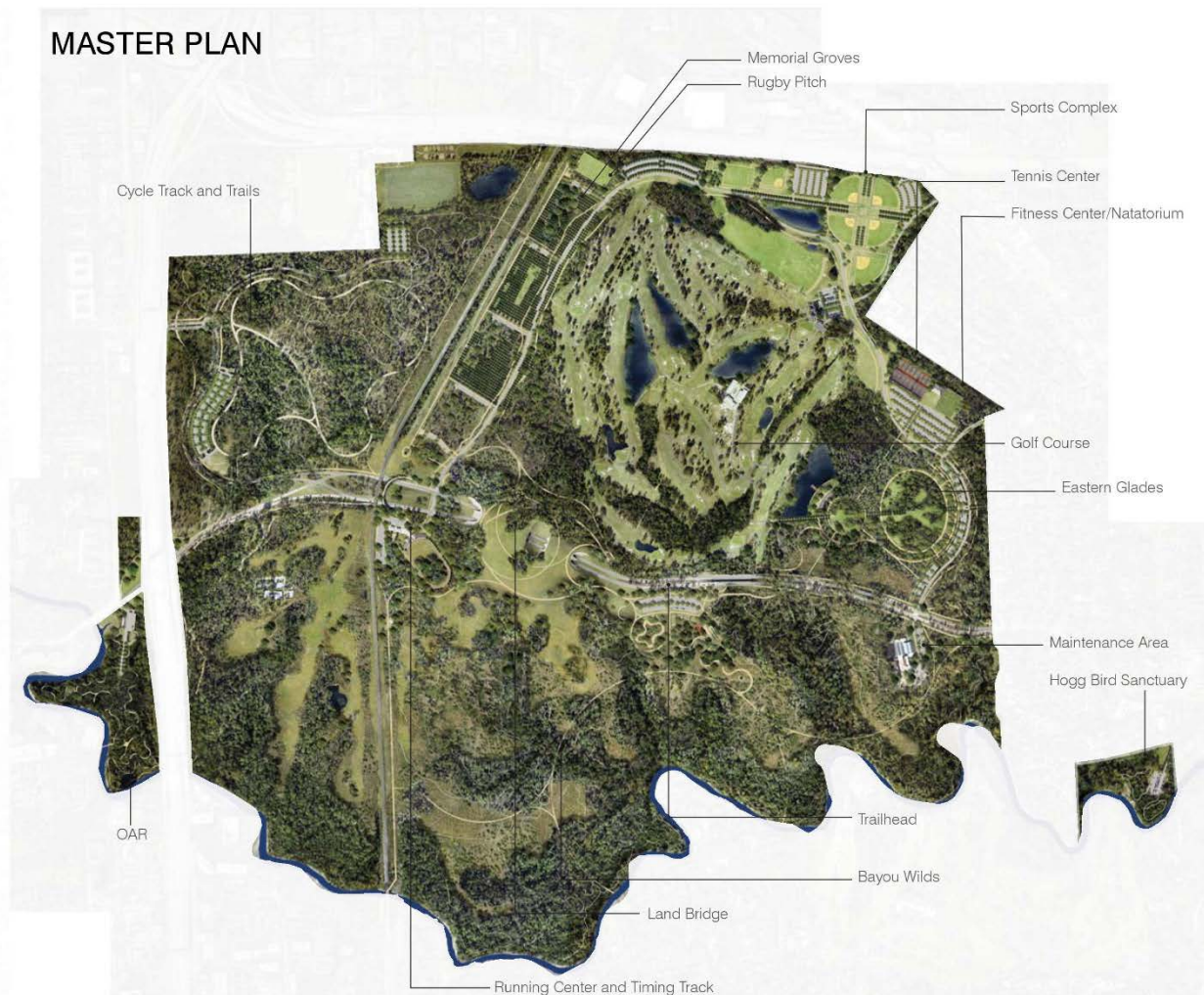
LEADING AN INFORMED LONG-RANGE MASTER PLAN in collaboration with HPARD and the Uptown TIRZ, with the goals of restoring the habitat and a healthy ecosystem to the park, upgrading existing amenities, addressing unmet community needs, elevating the Park to a nationally recognized, award-winning park, and honoring the Ima Hogg legacy of protecting and embracing human and natural history.

EXECUTING CURRENT PROJECTS including ongoing forestry care and preparation, construction of the Running Trails Center with an onsite Conservancy office, the Seymour Lieberman Exer-Trail upgrade and daily Park maintenance.



THE MASTER PLAN

When the recent drought decimated the existing pine-dominant canopy in the park, the event created an opportunity to reevaluate the long-term planning strategy for Memorial Park. Memorial Park Conservancy, along with Houston Parks and Recreation Department and Uptown Houston, began the process with a public input series and consulting endless local and national professionals in ecology, history, recreation, engineering, and more. You can read more here: <http://memorialparkconservancy.org/master-plan.html>.



GENERAL PARK RULES

1. All efforts must be made to avoid negatively impacting the park or other park users in any way.
 2. All events must take place within standard park operating hours and adhere to the City of Houston noise ordinance. MPC staff are authorized to lower sound if deemed too loud.
 - a. Memorial Park Hours: 6 am – 11 pm, 365 days a year
 - b. Picnic Loop Hours: M-F 11 am – 3 pm, S-Su 6:30 am – 8:30 pm
 3. All items, equipment and trash must be promptly cleared at the end of the event. Renter assumes all responsibility in cleaning the event area and dispersing the crowd by the end of the event.
 4. No attaching anything to the exterior or interior of any park property which will cause permanent changes or alterations.
 - a. No tape, nails or staples can be used on anything within the park, including trees.
 5. Admission or gate fees may not be charged without permission from MPC.
 6. Use of any restrooms will be non-exclusive.
 7. Parking is not allowed in any way outside of authorized parking areas. Vehicles are not permitted on grass.
 8. Memorial Park strictly adheres to the City of Houston Smoking Ordinance and is smoke-free.
 9. Volleyball court rentals do not include a net. Renter must provide a net.
 10. Grills are available for use on-site, and personal charcoal grills are allowed (unless a burn ban is in effect). Fires may only be built for the purpose of food preparation and must be contained in grill. Use of propane requires a permit from the fire marshal.
 11. Renter may not distribute alcohol or food beyond their invited guests. No glass containers may be used.
 12. For the comfort of other park users, generators are not allowed.
 13. Use of the following is not allowed without proof of additional permitting or insurance and may require a deposit. A copy of required permits and insurance must be provided to MPC at least 14 days prior to the event.
 - a. Propane, amplified sound equipment, any structures, and distribution of food or alcohol will require a permit from the City of Houston.
 - b. Canopy/tent exceeding 800 square feet, portable stage, portable toilets, and any event exceeding 250 guests will require advance proof of insurance.
 - c. Onsite cooking or service from a commercial vendor will require advance proof of health certificate.
 14. To ensure the health of the park ecology and the safety of other park users, the following activities are prohibited:
 - a. Water activities such as dunking booths or ‘slip and slides’, water balloons, petting zoos or non-domestic animals, moonwalks or other inflatables.
 - b. Candles, rice, confetti, flower petals, smoke/fog machines, silly string, birdseed, potpourri, glitter or any substance of that nature.
 15. MPC reserves the right to require at its discretion or as required by law, additional security and/or off-duty Houston Police Officers at the Renter’s expense.
 16. No structures, including tents and canopies that exceed 10’x20’ or of any size that advertise a commercial product of any kind, may be erected on park grounds without the permission of MPC.
 17. The sale and/or marketing of goods or services are not permitted.
 18. No gambling of any kind is permitted.
- Events that practice discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, gender, national origin, age or condition of handicap are not permitted. MPC reserves the right to deny any event, activity or equipment in its sole and absolute discretion.