

How are park friends promoting their groups and their parks?

Here are some methods friends groups are using to promote their groups and their parks [based on a discussion held by London Friends Groups]: General / Projects and partnering with local groups / Email lists / Social media / Events / Notice Boards / Petitions / Leafleting / Posters / Banners / Estate Agents Boards / Word of Mouth

General

- What works often depends on the demographic / local community – there's no one size fits all
- Talk to people! ... and make it easy for them to sign up e.g. with stalls at events
- The Borough Health and Well-Being Board can fund publicity – check your council's funding schemes
- New Members don't necessarily translate into new volunteers – or this may take time. Build up lists / contacts and over time and eventually this may help to recruit volunteers.

Projects and partnering with local groups

- Partnering e.g. with schools, sports clubs, runners, dog-walkers is a great way to gain members. You support them, they support you. Co-opt user groups onto your friends group!
- One group in Lewisham created raised beds for a local disabled school and other beds for another school so those children all know about the park and friends group. Then schools can publicise the group to parents too.
- Projects are great way to engage people, either getting people to help or talking to them while you are doing some activity or project in the park.
- One group had worked with a school to create a digital nature trail, with the kids talking and recording the information for each point on the trail and also taking the pictures.

Email lists

- These are usually built up over years through proactive work at events and word of mouth. Lordship Rec have built theirs up over 5 years to 1,400 members
- They can be easily managed with Mailchimp.

Social media

- Try all the main channels because different ones work for different groups. Possibly allocate someone to manage the social media and just do that.
- Facebook can be great. Harrow Parks have a single Facebook page which promotes all events in all Harrow Parks. They now promoted 78 events – each of the borough's friends groups can post events or they can send them to Harrow Parks Forum who make a lively banner and post it. They have steadily built up Likes on the Harrow Parks page to 1,100. Other User Groups like running groups are now coming to them to advertise their activities and events. They can share this with e.g. the local health forum and other interested providers and 'Harrow Parks' is now a real brand in Harrow which helps them gain access to the council and others. <https://www.facebook.com/pg/harrowparks/events/>
- Harrow Parks Forum feel Facebook is good because they capture a key demographic – women aged 35-44. They feel this is helpful because this demographic has children, partners, older parents and their own local friends networks who can all also benefit from knowing about what's going on in parks.
- Twitter / Instagram – Sometimes Facebook doesn't work. Twitter and Insta work better for other groups. On Twitter you can directly engage groups around the park by using the @xxx function in your tweet. Twitter is often used by local councillors and is a good way to engage them. It can be a quick and effective way to engage the council.
- Whatsapp Group – some park user groups use a Whatsapp group e.g. dog walkers groups.

Events

- Gather contacts at your own events BUT ALSO have a stall at other organisations' events.
- Litter picking works for some but not others: these engage lots of people in some parts of London – but in other parts they are the least popular means of engaging people.
- Tree walks, bat and bird walks, Autumn and Spring Walks, history walks – these can all be very popular as well.
- Health and Wellbeing Walks: Lewisham run Health Walks on a borough wide basis. These are a good way to raise awareness of all the different friends groups in the borough e.g. if you go on the walk and get people's

emails or hand out leaflets. There are walks every day of the week, usually more than one walk per day – some targeted at particular groups of society. Health walks can be for specific issues like dementia or bereavement. <https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/walkfinder/lewisham-healthy-walks>

- The Haringey Parks Forum has produced a Walking Tours booklet with routes which take in different parks and also a 'Tottenham café trail'.
- Broomfield Park in Enfield hold Blues in the Park during August on Sundays and have a stall there.
- Harrow Parks Forum use the events they publicise via their Harrow Parks facebook page to gain more members.
- Harrow Parks Forum run events in parks called Harrow Nature Heroes to engage young people more and promote volunteering.
- Southwark Park have organised events around the 150 years anniversary. They had a local well-known author do an event, for example. This helps to engage a wider range of people.
- Doing walks for specific groups e.g. for deaf people, can help to encourage people to enjoy the park who might not otherwise.
- Jubilee Country Park had their first 'Meadow Day' and Wildflower Walk with guest like Friends of the Earth.

It was stressed that events don't necessarily translate into increased membership for your group and it's important to be proactive at events and get people to sign up to e-lists or join Facebook groups etc., for example by having a stall signing people up there and then, or handing out leaflets etc..

Notice Boards

- These are a good way of letting people know you exist, where they can find out more, to advertise events etc.
- Some friends groups have the key to the boards and help with keeping them tidy and fresh.
- Be careful that they are weather protected, if you're going to be putting leaflets up, but also beware that some boards suffer with condensation which makes it very hard to see what's inside.

Petitions

- Petitions can be a great way to engage a LOT of people and usually you have access to them i.e. you can email them for around a year after the petition is set up.
- In Barnet they are petitioning against the opening of parks at night, for example. They have slowly built signatures up to 1,300. They then went back to them and now have 16 people who would like to set up a borough forum.

Leafletting

- Direct leaflet drops – Lordship Rec do this for events – they drop to 2,000 households door to door at any one time -but then move to a different set of households next time. They recognise that not all people respond to leaflets and they need to do more on social media.
- One group did a leaflet drop for the Big Lunch.

Posters

- Whether on-line or on paper, keep them bright and clear!
- One group reported that they continue to put posters up around the park but these are reducing in effectiveness – and feel they might need to do more on social media instead.

Banners

- Large waterproof banners which can be placed at park entrances, for example, are relatively cheap now and can be used at events or to advertise events (though ideally would be reusable).

Estate Agents Boards

- Estate agents in some areas have been happy to put up board to advertise events in parks and have even given out leaflets about the park friends group in their welcome pack for buyers.

Word of mouth!