

Event Planning for a City Parks: A Guide



Seattle
Parks & Recreation

healthy people healthy environment strong communities

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Event Planning in City Parks – The Basics: Overview

If you have organized a simple family dinner, then you have planned an event.

There are general steps to planning almost any type of event.

These steps in this guide are focused on items specific to outdoor events in [City of Seattle parks](#).

There are so many types of events that can be held in a park, this guide cannot address every possible item. By following the steps that are presented here, a person should be able to tailor these steps to any specific type of event in a park.

One way of thinking about planning an event is to think of the process as a list of questions, and by getting answers to these questions, you will have planned the event.

This guide shows a way of looking at an event that hopefully will help you be clearer in what you want to accomplish by holding it, and more effective in holding it.

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Defining your event

The very first thing is to be as clear as possible about why are you holding the event.

What is the purpose of your event?

Why will people come to your event?

All events have one or more of the following possible purposes, though you may not have thought about an event in this way before.

Possible purpose: Will the event provide a way for people to affirm, enjoy or celebrate established relationships such as living in the same neighborhood, being part of an interest group, or having a shared identity?

Will the event provide a way for people to develop new relationships or meet new people?

Will the event provide a way for people to enjoy an experience, such as:

- Music
- Performance
- Art
- Speech
- Activities or games
- Food

- Will the event provide a way for people to have an experience they are already familiar with and that they enjoy?
- Will the event provide a way for people to have a new experience or one they are curious to try?

Will the event provide a way for people to acquire information or skills?

- Such as a public meeting on a topic of interest to them like public safety or building a new playground?
- Or instruction or 'how to' do something they want to learn (like a sport or dance step)?

The second most important thing is to decide when and where your event will be held.

When will your event be?

Where will your event be? (If unsure ask Event Scheduling for options)

How well does the date and time of your event, and the location of your event support your purpose in holding the event?

Acquiring Permits

You will need to determine if your event in a public park requires one or more permits.

Permits are a way of communicating to the agency in charge of managing a public park what event you want to hold, the details of the event, and possible impacts to the park. Permits are also a way for the agency in charge of managing a public park, to communicate with you what concerns you need to address, and to avoid conflicts, such as with other park users or neighbors of the park.

There are several types of permits you may need: Parks Use Permit, Health Department Permit, Fire Department Permit, and/or Special Event Permit.

Does your event need a permit?

Generally, the first permit you need to think about is whether your event will require a **Park Use Permit**.

Activities in parks can be thought as fitting into one of two categories: informal and formal.

Informal activities: or an informal use of a park is what we usually think of when we think of visiting a park. People bring a minimal number of items (a book, a blanket, a water bottle, etc.), find a spot in the park that is not already being used, and do so by themselves or with a small number of people.

You do not need a permit for an informal use of the park or for an informal activity. An informal activity can be thought of as one:

- That has a smaller number of people. (less than 50)
- That is a limited amount of time (Couple of hours)
- That can use any location in the park that is not already in use by someone else, on a first come, first serve basis.
- Does not set up equipment (tables, chairs, tents, etc)
- Is not a business

Formal activities or a formal use of a park is what we usually think of when we think of an event at a park, like a concert, large picnic, community festival, etc. Formal uses need to get a **Park Use Permit**.

In terms of the City of Seattle Municipal SMC 18.12.042, a formal use of a park – one which requires a permit – is one that has any or all of the below components:

- Where any amplified sound is planned.
- Where any equipment is brought to the park (tent, tables, chairs, etc)
- Which is publicly advertised.
- Which will have more than 50 people and/or impact general use of the park.
- A business running a program in a park.

If you are participating in this guide, most likely the event you want to hold would be a formal event and will require a Park Use Permit. If you are unsure if your event will require a permit, please reach out to the **Seattle Parks Events Scheduling Unit** and they will be glad to help you determine if your event needs a Park Use Permit: **206-684-4080x 3** or parkusepermits@seattle.gov.

If you need a permit of any type, **in general it is best to apply for a permit as soon as possible**. It is better to submit a permit well in advance, even if you don't have all the details of your event figured

out, and then update the permit information, rather than waiting until every detail of your event is perfect and then having the permit denied or having to pay additional late fees.

Most agencies require a permit to be submitted at least 2 weeks before the event. Submitting a permit at least 30 days before the event is better. Some permits are required to be submitted months in advance (such as Special Event Permits, at least 90 days). Some agencies, such as **Seattle Parks and Recreation**, **allow you to submit a permit to reserve a park up to 1 year in advance**. In general, the sooner you submit a permit, the more likely you will be to be able to reserve a park on the date you most want, and avoid paying late fees.

Getting a Park Use Permit will require you to have **proof of insurance** for your event. that covers the City of Seattle and is very specific. This historically takes many first time organizers the longest to secure, especially if trying to use existing insurance. Online insurance can be acquired in less than 30 minutes. All permitted events, except some 1st amendment events require insurance and in general is a good idea to protect you and organizers from owing the cost of treatment if someone is injured at the event, or if some other accident happens

Note that any structure you construct (rather than rent), such as a stage, may be subject to a department safety review. and may need a permit from Seattle Department of Construction & Inspection (SDCI)

Permit Type	Agency	Why	Web Address
Park Use Permit	Seattle Parks and Recreation	Event has amplified sound, will require equipment, is publicly advertised, or will impact the normal uses of the park.	http://www.seattle.gov/parks/reserve/outdoor-event-permits
Temporary Food Service Business Permit	Seattle/King County Health Department	Event has any food that is being provided to the public, whether is sold or for free, regardless of whether the event is organized by a non-profit or for profit group, and the food is not exempt or pre-packaged.	https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/environmental-health/food-safety/food-business-permit/permanent.aspx
Assembly or Occupancy Permit	Seattle Fire Department	An event expects to have an enclosed space, such as a fenced beer garden	https://www.seattle.gov/fire/business-services/special-events
Open Flame Permit	Seattle Fire Department	An event will have open flame, such as candles or a BBQ grill of any sort, or any other type of open flame.	https://www.seattle.gov/fire/business-services/special-events
Special Event Permit	City of Seattle Special Events Office	A Special Events Permit is required for an event that significantly impacts the surrounding neighborhood or requires substantial public services, including: any of the following: more than 500 people, a substantial impact to the park, and/or a substantial impact to public services and/or multiple city departments, and/or will require a temporary closure or exclusive use of a park, road, or other public space.	www.seattle.gov/special-events-office

If you believe your event may need a particular permit, or you are not sure whether your event will need a particular permit, reach out to the agency in charge of each type of permit for guidance. They will assist you in determining if your event needs their permit.

Creating a budget

In general, if your event needs one or more permits, you will benefit from creating a budget.

A budget is two lists: one showing what costs, expenses, or resources you will use to hold your event. The other, what income, funding, or resources you have acquired to use in holding your event. The goal is for the total value of the list showing the income, funding, and resources you acquire to be greater than the total value of the list showing the costs, expenses, or resources you will use. Simple, right?

A main benefit from creating a budget is so the event organizers can keep track of all the things they need to hold the event; how much each item costs; or what the value of each item is. Above all else to keep track of all the income and resources they will receive and use in paying for ore making the event happen.

Resources

What do you need to hold your event?

What items will the event organizers provide?

What items should people attending the event expect to bring themselves or be responsible for?

Of the items the organizers will provide, which items will cost money?

Of the items the organizers will provide, which items can be donated (also called 'in-kind')?

How will you get the resources (cash or in-kind) for the items the organizers are providing?

A Simple Budget

Expense	Amount	What		Income	Who	Amount	Type
Permits	\$500	Park permit, health permit		Main sponsor	Local business	\$1000	Cash
Food	\$250	100 hot dogs, bottled water, napkins, charcoal		Grant	City program	1000	Cash
Posters	\$200	\$40 for design \$160 for printing		Donations from friends	10 @ \$50 each	\$500	Cash
Performers	\$1000	4 performers at \$250 each		Food items	Local grocery	\$200	In-Kind
Sound system	\$400	Microphones, mixing board, amp, speakers		Poster printing	Local printshop	\$200	In-kind
Sound technician	\$200	A person to operate the sound equipment					
Total Expense	\$2,550			Total Income		\$2,900	

Total **Income** (\$2,900) less Total **Expense** (\$2,550) = + \$350.

Fundraising

Fundraising means asking people or organizations to donate or contribute resources – usually cash – which the event organizers will use in holding the event, but it can mean in-kind donations also.

All fundraising is about building a relationship with donors: donors are people who believe in what you are doing, and who are choosing to help you do it. They are contributing cash or in-kind resources, rather than giving of their time (by volunteering or serving on the planning committee).

Common Fundraising Methods

In-Person Ask

Direct ask: ask people directly, in-person. Either people you know, arrange to speak to a like-minded group, etc.

Canvassing/door-to-door: similar to Direct Ask, but you go door-to-door or you participate in a different community event or you do intercepts by stopping and talking to people on the street.

Written Ask

Direct mail/Telephone/Email: Postal mail, call or email people from a curated list of people who are likely to support your event. The communication should contain information about your event, reasons why someone should donate to you, and instructions on how to donate (mail a check, donate online, etc.).

Website/accepting donations electronically/KickStarter etc.: Include the same information as Direct Mail on the website or electronic media. You will need to promote the website for people to find it, often by sending information by email to people.

Sales

Fee for a service/use profits from one event to fund another event: Either offer a service or hold an event that generates a profit, and use that profit to hold your event. Sometimes a fee to receive the service or participate in the event is higher than similar items, because people understand they are giving to a cause they believe in and that the profits will be used to support an event they care about. Ex: a bake sale where you charge more than the local bakery.

Products for sale/Premium for donation: the offering of an item which a donor will receive for making a specific donation amount, such as receiving a coffee mug with the name of the event or cause for a \$50 donation.

Exchange

Sponsorships: generally a sponsor receives some benefit in exchange for the donation they make, such as having their name or business listed on the event flyer. To solicit larger sponsorships, developing a sponsorship packet or prospectus may be essential. (*note sponsorship fees may apply during park use permitting*)

Grants: an organization or individual who makes donations available (usually cash) by means of an application process, and who has specific conditions which those applying must meet to be eligible to receive the donation. Usually the one giving the donation will have requirements such as a report on how their donation was spent, or what benefit was achieved by their donation, etc and they usually provide a form or guide on what they want that to look like.

Charitable Gifts: typically charitable gifts are donation that are given to established 501c3 non-profit or charitable organizations. The conditions for giving charitable gifts may be similar to grants, or there may be a wider variety of methods or conditions for giving a donation.

Tips on Fundraising

Whether cash or in-kind, a donor is any person/group/organization that gives you resources you need for the event.

Whether cash or in-kind, the event organizers will need to tell people what resources they need and why they should support the event with their donation.

Everyone can think of examples of each of the common fundraising methods.

Each method has some advantages and some disadvantages.

Each method requires particular types of resources, such as: labor to go door-to-door or organize a fundraising event, or money to print and mail a fundraising letters.

A particular method may be better at generating certain types of resources or certain amounts of resources that are needed for a particular event than others.

Each group of organizers may have access to certain resources that are needed for a particular method, such as a lot of volunteer labor, or access to the use of a space to hold a fundraising event at little or no cost, or access to someone with grant-writing experience.

A fundraising example:

A group decided to organize a pancake breakfast to raise funds for their event in a park.

The group knew a lot of people, and most people know how to cook pancakes without needing a lot of instruction, so it was easy for the group to recruit people to help make the breakfast happen.

The group raised \$400 from the pancake breakfast. They also got to talk to all the people who came to the pancake breakfast.

One result is the group used a large amount of volunteer labor to generate a small amount of cash. Possibly the group could have made better use of the volunteer labor by asking people to help on the day of the park event with setting up, and cleaning up. It's possible that some of the tasks to do at the event may have been more complex than cooking pancakes, and would have taken more time to instruct people in how to do them.

Another result is by talking to a large number of people at the pancake breakfast, they were able to inform many people about their park event and what resources they needed to make it happen. Among the people attending the pancake breakfast were three people who did not previously know about their park event, and who decided to become sponsors at \$500 each.

Some fundraising resources and local funding opportunities

<http://MovieMondays.com>

Website with free weekly videos of fundraising examples, generally for non-profits but often helpful.

www.501commons.org

Trainings on topics of interest to non-profit boards, useful even if your group is not a non-profit.

www.seattle.gov/services-and-information/grants-and-funding

All grants and funding program offered by the City of Seattle on one webpage.

Acquiring entertainment

Review what the purpose of your event is. Review what your budget is.

What type of performers or performances will be of interest to your intended audience?

What type of performers or performance will work well with your event?

How can you preview samples of what a performer does?

- Musicians/singers ?
- Dancers ?
- Acrobats ?
- Spoken word/poets ?
- Storytellers ?
- Comedians ?
- Theater/actors ?
- Skits ?
- Other types of performances?

To find entertainers, think about where you see the type of performances you are interested in. Do internet searches. Ask friends and friends of friends. The more detailed you can be in what you are looking for, the more likely you will figure out where to find it.

Whatever type of entertainment you have, it is important to clearly communicate expectations:

- What do the performers require, what do you require?
- How do you confirm the agreement?
- When is the event date, time, location?
- What is the performance time and length?
- Is the content of the performance to be family-friendly?
- Who performs in what sequence/time slot?
- What equipment or items do you provide, what equipment or items do entertainers require?
- Who operates the sound equipment or other equipment?
- How will power be provided? (a generator?)
- What kind of staging equipment, tents, and floors are needed?
- What is the amount and type of compensation available?
- How and when and to whom is payment made?
- What are the details about how entertainers can load-in and load-out their equipment?
- Where can performers park their cars or vehicles?
- What promotional or marketing opportunities are there?
- Will the entertainers name or website be listed on the event materials?
- Should the entertainers promote the event to their fans on their website or facebook page?

It is a good idea to:

- have expectations and key information in writing or email.
- make sure the entertainers agree to it and have that information well in advance of the event.
- to have that information with you on the day of the event.

If there is any misunderstanding on the day of the event – such as confusion about what the performance time is, how much the payment is, or when payment is to be made – it is helpful to have the information with you.

Vendors and information booths

Many events want to have either vendors selling products or organizations tabling with information of interest to event attendees. The more detailed you can be in what you are looking for or open to, the more likely you will be able to get it.

- Are there particular types of vendors or information booths that you particularly want, or don't want?
- How many booths are you able or willing to provide, and how much space will each booth have?
- Often booths are 10 feet x 10 feet, and have one 6 foot long table, 2 chairs and pop-up canopy.
- Who will provide each of these items, the event organizers or the vendors?
- Is there an expectation that vendors will have their booth in service for specific hours during the event?
- Will you charge a fee for each booth?
- Will you charge different amounts for different types of activities?
- Will you need to pay for particular types of booths? (such as a face-painting booth)
- Are there certain booths that work well next to other types booths, or that don't work well next to other types of booths?
- What is the placement of each booth in the layout or site map for the event, and how will each vendor know which booth is theirs when they arrive to set up?

Offering food

Many events want to have some kind of food available, and food can make an event more fun. As an event organizer, the first question to address is how involved should the food offered be?

The simplest way to offer food is to choose types of food that don't require you to get a health department permit. To do this, you must only offer food that is on the health department's list of **'exempt foods'** There is a page on the health department's website on this topic:

www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/environmental-health/food-safety/food-business-permit/food-exemptions.aspx

Below is a list of examples from their website. You can think about exempt foods as ones that come pre-packaged or in portions that are individually packaged, that do not need to be cooked, or kept hot or cold to avoid spoiling, and/or that are fruit with a peel-able skin (such as bananas or oranges).

- Popcorn (including kettle corn)
- Cotton candy
- Herbs and spices (if processed in an approved facility)
- Machine crushed ice drinks (premix is frozen and dispensed completely within a self-enclosed machine; such as icees, slushies or slurpies)
- Corn on the cob (prepared for immediate service with butter, shake-on spices or commercial mayonnaise in squeeze bottle only)
- Whole roasted peppers (if roasted for immediate service)
- Roasted nuts, roasted peanuts (including candy-coated)
- Fruits and vegetables for sampling (if used for individual samples of non-potentially hazardous produce)

If you decide you want to offer food that is not exempt, then you will need a permit. It does not matter if you are selling the food or giving it away for free, or if the organization running the event is non-profit, or for profit, or a group of friend or neighbors. **If your event is in any way providing food to the public that is not exempt, you must have a health department permit.**

What about potlucks? In general potlucks at public events are not recommended. As an event organizer, you have no way of knowing how each of the dishes that people bring will be prepared, and if someone gets sick because from food poisoning at your event, you may be held liable.

If you have decided that you want to offer food that will need a permit, there are two options:

1. The event organizers coordinate the process of making the food available themselves (get a permit, buy food, keep it cold, set up a food booth as required, prepare and serve the food according to the permit requirements). The type of health department permit you will need is a **"Temporary food service business permit"** and information about it is online here:

www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/environmental-health/food-safety/food-business-permit/temporary.aspx

2. Or the event organizers **hire a company to cater the event.** Often this is in the form of a food truck, A caterer, or restaurant with a catering license, will handle all the details of providing the food at your event, and may include them charging you a fee.

Items to consider about providing food yourselves

Do not wait until the last minute to apply for a permit. You will need time to understand the requirements and acquire the items you will need to operate a food booth at the event in a safe and proper manner.

You must have at least one person who has a current food handlers card supervise and be at the booth for the entire time the booth is in operation. (No walking off for a break)

You will benefit from putting someone in charge of the food operation who either has previous experience with food service or food booths at events, or who is detail-oriented and dependable.

You should expect that a health department inspector will show up at your event, and that they will take the temperature of all food items you are serving, and if the temperature of any food items are not in the safe zone, they will require that you throw that food away immediately.

Do not argue with the food inspector. They have the authority to shut down your booth immediately, **with no exception**. They take their job of insuring the health of the public seriously. As should you.

If any of the above items feel like too much to take on, you should either hire a caterer or consider only offering exempt foods.

Items to consider about hiring a caterer

If you hire a caterer you should ask to get a photocopy of the company's King County Caterer's License. For more information on this, contact the Seattle King/County Health Department's Food Protection Program at 206-263-9566.

You should be clear about your expectations. Agree in writing and have signed.

What foods and/or beverages will be offered?

Will the attendees pay for the food they get, or will the event organizers?

Will there be a limit of the number of portions served?

Who is responsible for providing trash or recycling receptacles?

Who is responsible for hauling away the trash or recycling generated by the food offered?

Will the caterer need a power source, such as a generator, or does the park happen to have an electrical outlet that can be available as part of the park reservation?

Marketing to your audience

Review the purpose of your event, and who your intended audience is.

How will you tell them about your event?

How do you know that a particular method will reach your intended audience?

How can your method of telling them about your event communicate (visually or otherwise) key qualities of your event?

Print: flyers (8 ½ x 11 inches), posters (larger), or handbills (2 or 4 to a page)?
Who designs them (graphic artists) and what do they charge?
Who prints them and for what price?
How will they be distributed, get to people, or be placed around the city?

Online: E-mail – who or where is the email sent to? (neighborhood email lists?)
Facebook post – who posts it? Who can update the information?
Website – who designs the page? What is web address? Who can update the information?

In-Person/Word of mouth: where? on the street, at meetings, at other events?

Professional media (print or digital): Community calendar listings
Community newsletters or blogs
Organization newsletters or announcements
Press release
Earned media, such as a story or article on your event
Paid advertising

Other: Promote your event via swag, novelties, buttons, etc.

What will you tell them about your event?

What is the essential information your intended audience needs to know for them to be interested in coming to your event?

- When and how long is the event?
- Where is the event location?
- What are the options for getting there?
(bus routes, parking, shuttle?)
- Is it free?
- Will there be food?
- Will there be seating?
- Are children welcome?
- Are there restrooms?
- What should they bring?
- What will organizers provide?
- Are there noteworthy performers or guests?

Are there limits to how much information you can place in a particular method of marketing?
Such as having the essential date, time and location of the event, and a short description of the event on a flyer or handbill (postcard), with the web address for people to get more information?

How does the public contact the event organizers if they have questions?

Who checks the email, facebook messages, or phone calls?

Planning physical details and logistics

Think about your event and where it will physically take place.

Are there things that need to be done before the day of the event?

- What is each item that needs to be done in advance?
- Who is doing each item?
- When does each item need to be done?
- Do some items need to be done before items?
- Who is in charge of keeping track of what items need to be done, when they need to be done by, and whether they have been done?

Example:

	What?	Who?	By When?	Completed?	Notes
✓	Confirm permits	Gwen	April 10	yes	
✓	Confirm performers	Abdi	April 30	yes	
✓	Hire caterer	Maria	April 30	yes	
	Make flyers	Habib	May 10	not yet	
	Write and send email announcement	Bob	May 10	not yet	
	Distribute flyers	Inaya	May 20	not yet	
	Pick up tents	Chris	June 3	not yet	
	Day of event	Everyone	June 4		

Key logistical details:

- When is the event?
- Where is the event?
- Are permits required, and if so, what types?
- What labor is needed to hold the event?
- How many volunteers do you need?
- How will you recruit the volunteers you need?
- What equipment is needed to hold the event?
- What supplies are needed to hold the event?
- What funding or resources is needed to hold the event?
- What transportation is needed to hold the event?
- What safety issues are there to address?
- Will you record the event, with photos, or sound recordings, or by other means?
- What is the physical layout of the event?
- What is the plan if the weather is bad?
- How will you let people working on event know if the weather is bad?
- How will you let people planning to attend if the weather is bad?

Managing the day of the event

A successful event is not an event that has no problems. Rather it is an event where the problems that do happen can be solved easily by what you have on hand at the event.

- Are there tasks that need to be done, or items that need to be brought to the event or picked up on the way?
- Who is in charge of each of these tasks or items?
- Are there tasks that need to be done or items that need to arrive and be set up before other items?
- When does the event open to the public and what needs to be done by that time?
- When does the event end and what needs to be done by that time?
- What are the steps to cleaning of the site and leaving it in good condition?
- Who is in charge of keeping track of what tasks or items need to be done, when they need to be done by, and whether they have been done?
- **A reminder that Seattle Parks require event organizers to arrange for their own disposal of all trash/recycling/composting generated by the event.**

A good way to prepare for a successful day of the event is to create a chart that lists details of each hour of the day, from start to finish.

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE

<i>Hour</i>		<i>STAGE</i>	<i>GAMES</i>	<i>FOOD BOOTH</i>
Preshow (10:00 am-noon)	10 am set up starts	Sound technician is Ahmed		Set up according to permit
				Mya is in charge
Hour 1 (Noon-1pm)		Noon: MC is Sabina		Hot dogs, chips, fruit, juice, water available
		Noon: 1 st playlist		
		12:30 Jumping Bean Dogs performs		
Hour 2 (1pm-2pm)		1:00 MC is Ashok		1:00 first 20 pizzas delivered
		1:00 open mic	1:20 Waterballoon toss with Josh	
		1:15 2 nd playlist	1:40 Watermelon contest with Lane	
Hour 3 (2pm-3pm)		2:00 MC is Latoya		2:00 rest of pizzas delivered
		2:00 Dance-U! performs	2:40 Basketball demo with Kami, Roger, and Dale	
Hour 4 (3pm-4pm)		3:00 MC is Fabian		
		3:00 Fresh Roots performs		
		3:30 Nae Nae dance		
Post Show (4pm-6pm)	4:00 clean up starts			

After the event

After all the work, it is worth taking the time to plan a way for everyone who made the event happen to celebrate together. There are some details to take care of first:

- Where will the items that you brought to the event site go after the event, and who will take them there?
- Are there payments that need to be made? (Ex: the Parks Department requires 10% of gross sales on-site to be remitted to the Department)
- Is there a report or summary about how the event that you need to do? (to donors, helpers, attendees, and the media)
- What resources do you need to report back about how the event went?
- Will you do a review or debrief about how the event went, and how the whole planning process went?
- Will you do a survey of those attending (if they provided a way to contact them), or performers, or vendors about their experience of the event? (a digital survey is usually your best bet)
- What worked well?
- What should be done differently or better the next time (if there is one)?
- How will you thank everyone who helped? (cards, a photo page, a gift card, a party)

For questions about this guide please contact:

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