

Park Surveys by Friends Groups

Friends groups might consider the value of park user surveys to help them focus their time, energy and resources where they are most needed. The input of park visitors about their experience often gives fresh insight to issues that can be addressed by Friends. In addition what we learn can help us promote the aspects of our park that are most enjoyed. Another benefit of surveys is that in the process of taking them you meet new people who might become members of your organization.

First, you should clear this with your park staff and work with them to develop the questions you are going to ask. This is important so that they do not feel threatened by what you are doing and because you want the result of your survey to be helpful to them as well.

Second, keep your surveys brief. After all the people you are talking to came to enjoy the park and you don't want to aggravate them. When you are speaking to them let them know they only have to share the information they are comfortable with. They don't have to give you their contact information unless they want to hear from you or they are interested in joining your group. When you encounter a family or group usually one person answers the survey but you should count everyone in the group as a visitor. If they come from more than one town try to record each zip code in the group. Also keep the group doing surveys to a minimum. People don't like being approached by a "gang". (One survey taker to one person or group together.) If parking at your park is a premium it might be a good idea to car pool. Above all if someone does not want to be surveyed respect that and go on to the next person.

Third, be sure the kiosk is stocked with park maps and other material they might want. If you are not near a kiosk have that material with you to hand out if asked. It is a good idea to have a brochure about your organization that includes a membership form available if the person shows interest.

Fourth, if people have questions give them the park supervisors contact information if you can't answer it. Many users do appreciate that and you may hear from them again to be an intermediary.

Fifth, be sure you contact your local police department each time you are going to be at the park doing surveys. Let them know that your park staff is aware that you are doing this and give them the names of the people who will be doing it that day. They may ask for the vehicle registration numbers for your volunteers. They will appreciate the courtesy if they get calls of concern from people checking on you.

Along with this consider the safety of your volunteers. No one should ever do surveys alone. They should always be with one other person.

Every survey can and should be tailored for you park but some of the generic questions you might ask include:

1. Name (last name is sufficient)
2. Contact info if the person wants to hear from you.
3. Town and zip code
4. How often do they use the park? (Daily, weekly, monthly, occasionally, first time)
5. What do they do when they come? (Hike, dog walk, mbike, equestrian, bird watch, fish, swim, etc:)
6. Comments. (Record both good and bad.)

Finally, be sure to compile the statistics as soon as you can and share them with your park staff. Keep a record of the information because you can use it in the future to make a point or if you do more surveys to compare any changes.