



VOLUNTEER MANUAL

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Welcome

Welcome to the Volunteer Program at Erie MetroParks! Thank you for your interest. We look forward to working with you. Volunteers are a crucial component in many areas of park operations.

The purpose of this Volunteer Manual is to provide each volunteer with valuable information about his/her service with Erie MetroParks. The manual is not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather to provide a working guide for staff and volunteers. Certain questions may not be answered in the manual; if questions arise, please contact an Erie MetroParks Staff member or the Volunteer Coordinator.

Erie MetroParks Mission Statement

Under the provisions of the Ohio Revised Code, the mission of Erie MetroParks is to preserve, conserve, protect, and enhance the natural and unique historical resources of the park district. Further, to provide opportunities for visitors to use, enjoy, understand and appreciate these resources in a responsible, sustainable manner.

Park District Information

Administrative Offices of Erie MetroParks are located within the Frost Center at Osborn MetroPark, 3910 Perkins Ave., Huron, Ohio 44839. Office hours are 8:00 am - 4:30 pm Monday through Friday. Parks are open from 8:00 am till dusk (1/2 hour after sunset). Parking and entrance to all Erie MetroParks properties is free. Contact us at 419-625-7783 x221.

Organizational Structure

Day to day operating decisions of the Erie MetroParks are delegated by the Board of Park Commissioners to various employees. The Executive Director bears overall responsibility for the daily operation of Erie MetroParks and for the activities of all employees and other agents of the organization.

Approval of Volunteers

Erie MetroParks retains sole discretion to approve and engage volunteers and make volunteer assignments. Volunteers agree that Erie MetroParks may at any time, for whatever reason, terminate their volunteer relationship with Erie MetroParks, or make changes in the volunteer's assignment. Volunteers may also decide to end their service to Erie MetroParks at any time. Erie MetroParks requests that volunteers provide adequate advanced notice to the Volunteer Coordinator if they decide to stop volunteering for Erie MetroParks.

Volunteer Application and Registration

1. Volunteers must first complete a volunteer application and a background check (if required), and then may register for a volunteer opportunity.
2. Most of our volunteers are regulars and we hope you will be too. For a complete list of on-going volunteer opportunities, please ask the Volunteer Coordinator.
3. If you are interested in an on-going volunteer opportunity, Erie MetroParks also offers the opportunity for community, religious, scout, or commercial groups to volunteer. One-time/group park volunteers may register for a group volunteer project with Erie MetroParks on a supervised project.

Background Checks

Erie MetroParks strives to maintain a safe and productive environment with honest, trustworthy, and reliable volunteers who do not pose a risk to fellow volunteers, staff, or park visitors. Erie MetroParks reserves the right to perform background checks on individuals participating in the Volunteer Program. Some volunteer assignments require prior successful completion of a background check. Erie MetroParks will always seek your prior permission and will share the information with you upon request.

Orientation and Training

Orientation and training will be provided on an as needed basis.

Youth Volunteers

Youth Volunteers are defined as being between the ages of 14 and 17. In general, youth volunteers, if willing, are able to perform all tasks that apply to youth employment and Ohio minor labor laws. All Youth Volunteers must have a parent/legal guardian's signature on the Volunteer Application where indicated. Volunteers under the age of 14 may volunteer but must be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian, or youth group leader at all times.

Sign-In Sheets and Record-Keeping

As a volunteer, you donate something far more valuable than money – your time. It is important that we track and recognize the amount of time you donate. Your volunteer hours can help us achieve great things including grant awards.

Volunteers should record start and end times for each and every volunteer activity including meetings, training, presentations, outreach, events, office assignments, and field assignments. You are expected to keep a record of your hours and may give your hours as a cumulative total to the Volunteer Coordinator. All hourly reporting should be submitted on a regular basis and must be submitted before the end of the calendar year.

Volunteers are responsible to update personal and emergency contact information with your site coordinator and the Volunteer Coordinator.

Volunteer Benefits

MetroParks volunteers are eligible for the following benefits based on the number of hours volunteered. To redeem your benefits, contact the Volunteer Coordinator to verify your hours. A Volunteer Benefit Certificate will be issued and forwarded to the reservation staff. Volunteers must make their reservation through the Reservations

Staff at the Frost Center at Osborn MetroPark. Volunteer Benefit Certificates cannot be redeemed using the MetroParks Online Reservation System.

For every 10 hours accumulated –

Canoe Use at The Coupling MetroPark

(one group reservation, including up to eight canoes & equipment, if available)

One group reservation per month—no booking fee required. Minimum number of persons in group rule waived. Volunteer must be present and accept responsibility for the group.

For every 20 hours accumulated and not previously used –

Osborn MetroPark Picnic Shelter – One reservation per year, no fee required.

Volunteer must be present and accept responsibility for group.

The Coupling Reserve Station House – Two reservations per year, no fee or deposit required. Volunteer must be present and accept responsibility for the group.

For every 45 hours accumulated and not previously used –

Overnight Use at The Coupling Reserve - One group reservation per year, no booking fee required. Volunteer must be present and responsible for group.

Volunteer Recognition

Erie MetroParks recognizes the efforts and contributions of our volunteers by periodically hosting a special Volunteer Event. These are opportunities for our staff to show how much our volunteers mean to us and all volunteers are encouraged to attend!

Emergency Procedures and Contacts

You should call 911 in any life-threatening situation in which immediate medical attention is needed or there is immediate danger. You should contact the supervising Erie MetroParks staff member when an incident report needs to be taken, or when immediate staff action is required.

Scheduling and Absences

Generally, volunteer scheduling is handled through the Volunteer Coordinator. If a volunteer needs to change or cancel his/her shift, contact the supervising Erie MetroParks staff member as soon as possible. Volunteer assignments may be restricted due to the health or qualifications of the volunteer.

Conduct and Appearance

We hope that you will be proud to be identified as a volunteer with Erie MetroParks. We will provide you with volunteer identification in one or more of the following forms: button, name badge, shirt, pin, or another approved identifier. Please do not wear Erie MetroParks volunteer identification when you are not volunteering or when you are off park property, except in travel to or from volunteering. Since Erie MetroParks volunteers represent the park system, the following guidelines have been established:

- Volunteers should be friendly & helpful.
- Volunteers should only provide accurate information to visitors. If you cannot answer a question, refer them to a staff person.
- Volunteers should dress appropriately for the job being performed.

Smoking

Smoking is not permitted in any area of any Erie MetroParks buildings. If you smoke, please do so outside, away from the public. Extinguish and dispose of cigarettes properly.

Safety Rules, Restricted Areas and Equipment

Erie MetroParks is committed to providing a safe environment for volunteers, staff, and park visitors. Please exercise caution in all of your volunteer activities. Your safety and well-being are important to Erie MetroParks. If you are unsure about a task or procedure or method, please ask.

Volunteers will follow all Erie MetroParks safety procedures and guidelines. Safety training will be provided according to the needs of the job by Erie MetroParks. For reasons of safety, security or legal requirements, some areas and/or equipment are off limits to volunteers. Volunteers must be assigned by an Erie MetroParks staff member to enter the maintenance shop areas.

Adult volunteers (at least 18 years of age) may operate non-licensed, motorized, self-propelled maintenance equipment with the permission of the Park Manager to whom the equipment is assigned. The Park Manager shall first perform an assessment that the volunteer (the assigned operator) is responsible and qualified. No one shall operate any equipment without employing the approved personal safety equipment required by Erie MetroParks policy, and without first receiving instruction as to its proper and safe operation. Volunteers under the age of 18 shall operate motorized equipment only to the extent that Ohio minor labor laws and Erie MetroParks safety rules authorize such use by Erie MetroParks employees. These regulations generally prohibit use of motorized equipment by minors.

Some volunteers may occasionally be assigned and authorized to drive licensed motor vehicles. If so, they shall first undergo a vehicle training session and successfully complete a driver's record check. All operators should familiarize themselves with and obey the safety and operating instructions issued by the manufacturer of any equipment assigned to them.

Harassment, Discrimination, and Bullying

Erie MetroParks volunteers are expected to treat other volunteers, staff, and park visitors with respect and dignity at all times. Everyone has a right to be in an environment that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits discriminatory practices and harassment. Harassment, whether verbal, physical, or environmental, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Since an individual's volunteering may extend beyond the confines of the workplace, conduct that occurs off duty and off premises may also be subject to this policy. Prompt reporting of all perceived incidents of discrimination or harassment is necessary. Erie MetroParks will thoroughly investigate such reports. Retaliation against individuals who report discrimination harassment (and/or participates in an investigation) is prohibited.

Definition of harassment and bullying is defined as unwelcome or unwanted conduct of an offensive nature (whether verbal, visual, or physical) in which: 1) submission to or rejection of this conduct by an individual is used or threatened to be used as a factor in decisions affecting any aspect of volunteer service; or 2) this conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's volunteer service or experience or creating and intimidating, abusive, hostile, or offensive environment.

Reporting a Complaint

Erie MetroParks encourages all individuals who believe they are being harassed or bullied to firmly and promptly notify the offender that his or her behavior is unwelcome. Erie MetroParks does, however, recognize that, in some instances, power and status disparities between the alleged harasser or bully and the individual may make such a confrontation impossible. If such informal, direct communication between individuals is either ineffective or impossible, the following steps should be followed in reporting a complaint.

1. Notification of Complaint

Individuals who believe they have been subjected to harassment or bullying, or has knowledge of harassment or discrimination, should report the incident to their site supervisor or the Volunteer Coordinator.

Erie MetroParks encourages prompt reporting of complaints so that it may take rapid response and appropriate action. However, due to the sensitivity of these problems and because of the emotional toll such misconduct may have on the individual, no limited time frame will be instituted for reporting complaints under this policy. Delays in reporting of complaints will not in and of itself preclude Erie MetroParks from taking remedial action. All conduct an individual believes in good faith rises to the level of harassment or bullying or, if left unchecked, will rise to such a level, should be reported within seven days, even if the individual is unsure the conduct violates this policy.

2. Protection against Retaliation

Erie MetroParks will not in any way retaliate or tolerate retaliation against any individual who makes a good faith report of misconduct under this policy or who

assists or cooperates in an investigation under this policy. Retaliation is a serious violation of this policy and should be reported immediately. Any person found to have violated this policy by retaliating against another individual for making a report under this policy or for assisting or cooperating in the investigation thereof will be subject to the same disciplinary action provided for other violations of this policy.

3. Investigating the Complaint

Any allegation of misconduct under this policy brought to the attention of Erie MetroParks will be thoroughly, promptly, and impartially investigated. Confidentiality will be maintained where possible throughout the investigatory process to the extent practicable and appropriate under the circumstances. Volunteers are encouraged to respond to questions by the investigator and participate, as appropriate, in the investigation.

4. Resolving the Complaint

Upon completing the investigation of a complaint of misconduct under this policy, Erie MetroParks will communicate its findings and intended actions to the complainant, target, and the alleged harasser or bully. If the investigation finds that a violation of this policy has occurred, the person engaging in misconduct will be subject to appropriate disciplinary sanctions, as listed below. If the investigation determines that no violation has occurred, this finding will be communicated to the complainant in an appropriately sensitive manner.

Disciplinary Sanctions

Individuals found to have engaged in misconduct in violation of this policy will be disciplined promptly, consistently, and in proportion to the severity of the misconduct, up to and including termination of the volunteer relationship with Erie MetroParks.

Although Erie MetroParks ability to discipline a non-volunteer or employee harasser or bully (e.g., park visitor) is limited by the degree of control, if any, that Erie MetroParks has over the alleged wrongdoer, any individual who has been subjected to harassment or bullying by such an individual should still file a complaint and be

assured that Erie MetroParks will take actions it deems appropriate in an attempt to bring such misconduct to an end.

Resignation and Exit Interviews

Volunteers may resign from their park service at any time. We ask that volunteers who intend to resign do so by advanced written notice and complete a volunteer exit interview form. This form includes your position information, date of exit, reason for leaving, and suggestions for improving the volunteer program or position.

Volunteer Service Contact:

Sandy Flittner Visitor Service Coordinator
sflittner@eriemetroparks.org
office: 419-625-7783 x221
3910 Perkins Ave.
Huron, OH 44839

Volunteer Agreement

To be read, signed and returned prior to beginning any volunteer activities.

I understand that this handbook does not imply or constitute a contract or employment agreement of any kind between Erie MetroParks (EMP) and myself. I understand that I am not a volunteer with EMP until the Volunteer application and background check (if applicable) are completed and approved. I also understand that EMP has the right to end the volunteer relationship at any time, and that I have the right to resign from volunteer services at any time.

I understand that this handbook contains general statements about current EMP policy, and that EMP retains the right to depart from, or to revise or modify the terms, information, and policies at its discretion at any time.

I understand that if I have knowledge, either direct or indirect, of harassment, discrimination, retaliation, safety violations, or any other policy violation contained in this handbook, I am obligated to report the circumstances immediately to the site supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Erie MetroParks Volunteer Handbook, and that I understand it is my responsibility to read and comply with the policies and any revisions made to them. I understand that this Volunteer Handbook replaces and supersedes any previous volunteer handbook or manual and any previous communications regarding policies and procedures, whether written or oral. I understand that I should consult with the Volunteer Coordinator or the site supervisor regarding any questions or concerns I might have about EMP policies and practices.

Volunteer Signature

Date