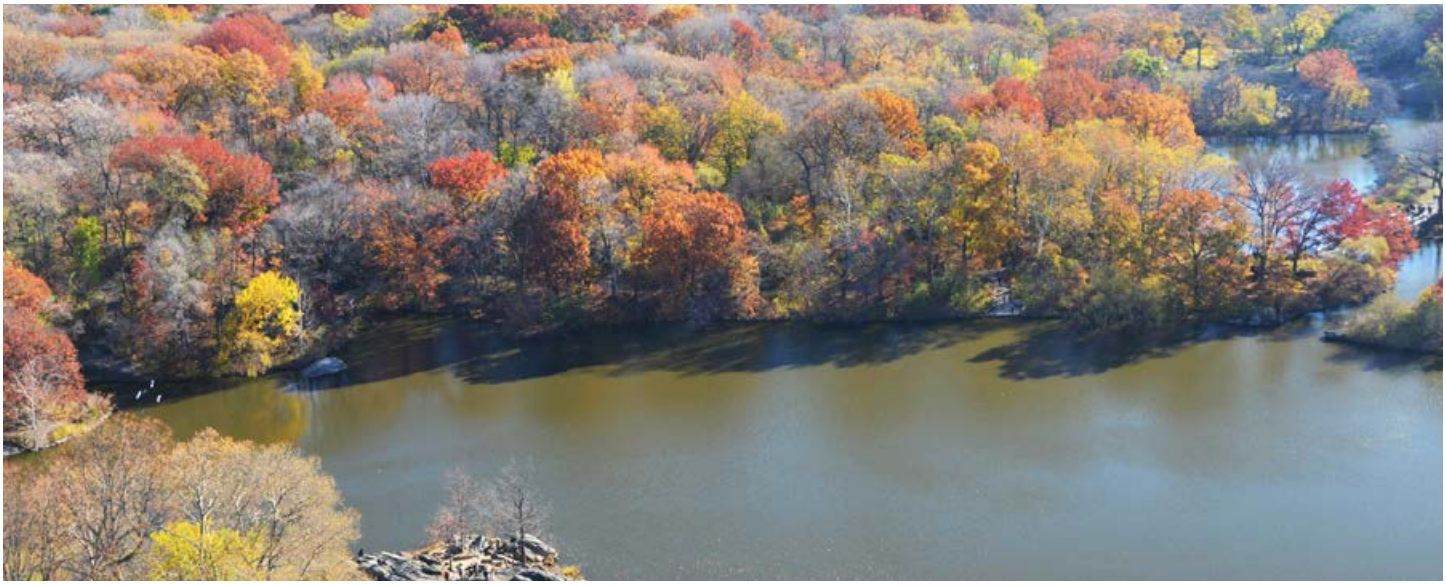
CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY | Institute for Urban Parks

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARK PARTNERSHIP

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARK PARTNERSHIP FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)



The Central Park Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit organization responsible for the management and restoration of Central Park, in partnership with the City of New York.

The Institute for Urban Parks

Since its earliest years, the Central Park Conservancy has been committed to helping other parks. As a leader in the field of urban park management and public-private park partnerships, the Conservancy's success has paved the way for countless other urban parks of all sizes and the partnerships that support them. The Institute for Urban Parks, founded in 2013, draws on the Conservancy's 40 years of experience and expertise to develop programs that educate and connect park organizations, while supporting a vital community of practice among public and private partners. Through continuing education, capacity building, thought leadership, and peer-to-peer exchange, the Institute empowers, informs, and connects the individuals and organizations that care for urban parks. We do this to ensure that all urban park organizations have the knowledge and the capacity to create and sustain great public parks throughout New York City, North America, and abroad.

Overview

Public-private park partnerships have become increasingly commonplace as a way to restore and manage urban parks. New York City has over two dozen such partnerships across the five boroughs, and the model has spread to nearly every major city in the United States.

Although no two partnerships are exactly the same, building a sustainable partnership often presents a common host of challenges and opportunities for the organizations and agencies involved. Drawing on the Conservancy's four decades of experience partnering with the City of New York, the Institute has developed the *Public-Private Park Partnership: FAQ* as a resource for urban park managers. The FAQ distills a series of key principles for cultivating a strong and successful public-private park partnership.

The Partnership: An Overview



Prior to the founding of the Conservancy, trash generated by large events created significant maintenance challenges. The Mall, 1970s



The Conservancy has overseen the investment of more than $1 billion in the Park. The Mall, 2018

What is a public-private park partnership?

A public-private park partnership is an arrangement between a public agency (federal, state, or local) and a private sector entity that focuses on managing parkland. Through a contractual agreement, the skills and assets of each partner are shared to create, maintain, and sustain an urban park. A public-private park partnership might operate as a Conservancy, an Alliance, a Trust, a Friends of group, a Business Improvement District, or a similar title. Examples include Friends of the High Line (New York, NY); Forest Park Forever (St. Louis, MO); Piedmont Park Conservancy (Atlanta, GA); Memorial Park Conservancy (Houston, TX); Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (Pittsburgh, PA); and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (San Francisco, CA).

What are common ways that public-private park partnerships can help a park?

Through a public-private partnership, both public and private stakeholders can leverage their assets and resources to improve their park. Incorporating the strengths of the public and private sectors into the planning and management of an urban park can help park managers raise additional funds, work more efficiently, reach new audiences, mitigate risks or costs, do more with less, or achieve other goals that might ordinarily seem out of reach. In turn, this can expand the capacity of the park to provide services to the public, engage the community, and ensure accountable management during changing administrations and shifting budget priorities.

What is the Central Park Conservancy?

The Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit organization, that manages Central Park under an agreement with the City of New York. The Conservancy is responsible for raising the Park's nearly $74 million annual operating budget and for managing all aspects of Park maintenance, capital improvements, restorations, and visitor experience.



The City appointed Elizabeth Barlow Rogers as Central Park Administrator, paving the way for the establishment of the Conservancy.



Restoring the Dairy building and turning it into a visitor center was one of the Conservancy's first major projects.

What led to the formation of the Conservancy?

The Conservancy was established by a group of concerned citizens in response to the severe deterioration of the Park during the 1960s and 1970s. While the Park has experienced multiple cycles of restoration and decline throughout its history, municipal disinvestment, exacerbated by the fiscal crisis in New York City in the mid-1970s, left the Park in the worst state of disrepair since its creation. Through philanthropy and volunteer support, citizens mobilized to improve the Park, founding the Conservancy as a means to break the cycle of restoration and decline, and restore the Park to its original splendor.

How was the Conservancy established?

In 1975, the Central Park Community Fund, a prominent citizen-led Central Park advocacy organization, commissioned a management study of the Park. The resulting report, E.S. Savas's A Study of Central Park (1976), recommended the establishment of an official position exclusively responsible for the planning and managing of the Park. Receptive to the recommendation, New York City Mayor Ed Koch and NYC Parks Commissioner Gordon Davis created the position of Central Park Administrator in 1979. Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, urban planner and Executive Director of the Central Park Task Force—another notable Central Park volunteer and advocacy group—was appointed as the first Central Park Administrator. The Central Park Task Force and the Central Park Community Fund merged in 1980 to support the initiatives of the Central Park Administrator's office, forming the Central Park Conservancy. Building on successive accomplishments, the Conservancy worked with the City to tackle restoration challenges in the Park and gradually took over full responsibility for the long-term restoration and management of the Park.

To whom does the Conservancy report?

While the Conservancy is entrusted with the management of Central Park, the Park and all the assets within are owned by the City of New York. The Conservancy remains accountable to the City through a dual reporting model in which the Conservancy's President & CEO, as well as a member of the Conservancy's leadership team who holds the public title of Central Park Administrator, report to the NYC Parks Commissioner and to the Conservancy's Board of Trustees. Capital improvement projects that feature noticeable design changes must receive approval from NYC Parks and go through the City's formal public review and approval process. This includes presenting any project requiring public review to affected Community Boards, the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and the Public Design Commission.

Our Agreement



The Conservancy and the City signed their first management agreement in 1998.



More than 225 Conservancy staff members work in Park Operations year-round, maintaining landscapes, horticulture, playgrounds, and infrastructure.

When did the Conservancy enter into a formal management agreement with the City of New York?

In 1993, the Conservancy and the City signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) broadly outlining the nature of their partnership in the management of Central Park. The MOU was superseded in 1998—18 years after the Conservancy's founding—by a formal management agreement that officially recognized the Conservancy as the entity responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the Park. The agreement was renewed in 2006 and again in 2013, reiterating the City's continued trust in the Conservancy to manage the Park.

What is included in the management agreement between the Conservancy and the City?

The management agreement defines the relationship between the Conservancy and the City in three important ways:

- **Authority:** The Conservancy is given the public authority to manage Central Park. As the official steward of the Park, the Conservancy is charged with specific maintenance responsibilities so that the Park can be enjoyed by all who visit. These maintenance responsibilities include cleaning, repairs, and landscape maintenance. In addition to laying out the Conservancy's responsibilities, the agreement stipulates what the Conservancy is not responsible for, such as public safety and security and issuing Park permits. However, the Conservancy does provide oversight for areas that it is not directly responsible for, such as safety, roads and lighting, permits, and rules and regulations.
- **Financial Structure:** The agreement codifies the City's financial obligation to the Conservancy. Currently, the Conservancy privately raises 75% of Central Park's annual operating budget while the City provides the remaining 25%. The City's contribution is derived from a formula that takes into account Conservancy funds raised and spent in the Park, as well as concession revenue generated for the City by Park vendors such as the Tavern on the Green restaurant.
- **Indemnification:** In the event that the Park is involved in a lawsuit, the City serves as the defendant, not the Conservancy.



Central Park Conservancy President & CEO Elizabeth W. Smith and NYC Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver.



The current agreement accounts for damage caused by catastrophic weather events, such as Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

How often is the Conservancy's management agreement revisited?

The 1998 and 2006 agreements each had an eight-year term. The current agreement, signed in 2013, has a 10-year initial term which may be renewed for two additional five-year terms, upon agreement of the City and the Conservancy.

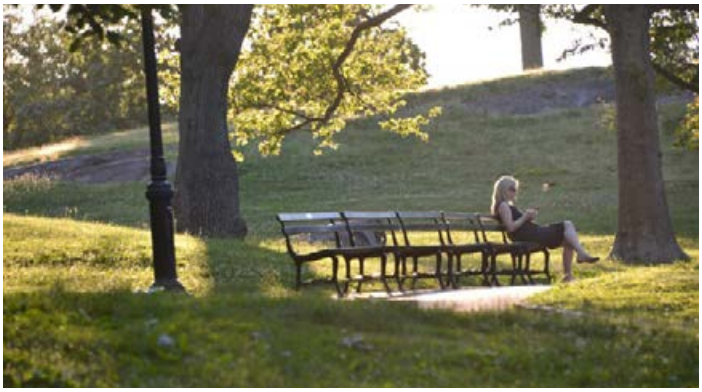
How has the agreement changed over time?

While the terms of the agreement have remained largely the same, later versions of the agreement have revised the funding commitments of the Conservancy and the City, and added provisions for catastrophic events, such as clean-up expenses following extreme weather occurrences. The current agreement also defines intellectual property rights for materials relating to the Park and the Conservancy and expands the Conservancy's scope of work to include maintenance in several other New York City parks outside of Central Park.

Guidelines and Practices



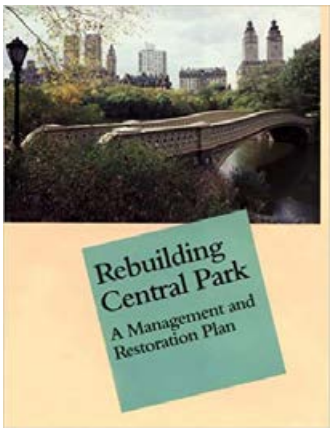
Initial efforts started with small, achievable projects, such as fixing benches and mobilizing volunteers.



The Conservancy utilizes a variety of fundraising strategies including an Adopt-A-Bench program.

The following strategies have been effective in helping the Conservancy to build a successful partnership:

- **Be a partner:** The Conservancy is committed to maintaining a relationship with the City that is based on mutual trust and respect. To do this, the Conservancy works to build strong, communicative relationships with every Parks Commissioner, the City, and related City agencies, with City officials and mayoral appointees to the Conservancy's governing board. While the City is responsible for overall regulations and policy regarding Central Park (and all other public City parks), it consults with the Conservancy on issues that affect the day-to-day operation of the Park, such as special events. Since public-private park partnerships generally operate on land owned by the public partner while being managed by the private partner, the support and investment of both is essential for success.



- **Have a plan:** One of the earliest steps taken by the Conservancy was to create a plan—Rebuilding Central Park: A Management and Restoration Plan—which laid out the Conservancy's vision for restoring the Park. The plan incorporated viewpoints from both experts and the public, which helped demonstrate the Conservancy's commitment to the community and the Park. The Conservancy also proactively planned "shovel-ready" projects that could be quickly put into action when funding became available. Today, with the majority of the Park restored, the Conservancy continues to engage in strategic planning in order to manage long-term capital projects, improvements to maintenance systems, and new initiatives. For a park stewardship organization, a well-defined plan is vital to helping both internal and external parties understand the organization's strategies and also serves to generate interest and excitement about achieving the organization's goals.
- **Identify your funding model:** The Conservancy's particular fundraising model is philanthropic, which is specific to the community that surrounds Central Park. In addition to individual contributions, which make up the majority of donations, the Conservancy leverages a variety of fundraising programs, including a membership program, various endowment programs such as Adopt-A-Bench, special benefit events, and corporate sponsorship events. While different public-private park partnerships utilize different strategies for fundraising, it is important to develop a model that reflects the community around the park, as well as the city at large.

Trash & Recycling Receptacle Design



Restored woodlands support a more diverse wildlife habitat.
The Ravine, 2018



A focus on long-term management has helped the Park support more than 42 million annual visits.

- **Walk, don't run:** The Conservancy started with small, doable projects, such as fixing lighting and benches and removing graffiti, which created visible change and encouraged the public to use the Park. This served to build critical trust and support for the Conservancy early on. The Conservancy was subsequently able to take on larger restoration projects, which might not have been successful had they been attempted earlier.
- **Think long-term:** As seen in Rebuilding Central Park: A Management and Restoration Plan, long-term management has formed the core of the Conservancy's relationship with the Park. The Conservancy ensures the long-term success of its restoration efforts through a consistent focus on maintenance. The Conservancy builds long-term maintenance into the budgets of capital projects, including four to five years of maintenance costs, to support fundraising for both capital and maintenance. These sustainability measures for management and restoration allow the Conservancy to maintain the Park for over 42 million annual visits.

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Contact Us

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