

Friends by the Numbers

FRIENDS OF NYS PARKS AND HISTORIC SITES SURVEY RESULTS



PARKS & TRAILS
NEW YORK

Parks & Trails New York

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY), New York's leading statewide advocate for parks and trails since 1985, works to expand, protect and promote a network of parks, trails and open spaces throughout the state to improve our health, economy and quality of life. With members and supporters across the state, PTNY is the foremost voice in the protection of New York's magnificent state park system and the creation and promotion of thousands of miles of greenways, bike paths, river walks and trails.



NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

The state park system is one of New York's greatest treasures. The mission of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all NYS residents and visitors, and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, historic and cultural resources. Within this capacity OPRHP manages the State Park system, which includes 250 State Parks and State Historic Sites encompassing nearly 350,000 acres. The Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law divides the State into twelve park regions, eleven under the jurisdiction of OPRHP and another, comprised of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves, administered by the Department of Environmental Conservation. All of these outdoor resources contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life of local communities and directly support New York's tourism industry.



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic
Preservation**



INTRODUCTION

Non-profit Friends organizations have been supporting New York's state parks and historic sites for nearly a century. The first Friends group in New York State was the Old Fort Niagara Association, founded in 1927, to provide historic interpretation and preserve the artifact collection of the Fort. Today, 76 State Parks and Historic Site Friends groups across New York State provide critical support and programs to our state park system.

These groups of dedicated citizens—mostly volunteers—clear trails, paint buildings, build kiosks, lead interpretive programs, and raise significant funds for a wide range of capital projects. Friends groups often accomplish herculean tasks on shoestring budgets. Although a few organizations are large and well-funded, roughly half have budgets of \$10,000 or less.

What they lack in funds, they make up for in commitment, creativity, hard work and time. Friends groups are critical to ensuring the state parks and historic sites we love stay open and have the funding needed to protect, enhance and expand New York's world-class state park system. Recent years have seen a dramatic acceleration in the activities and impact of these dedicated groups.

Continuing to build and strengthen these organizations—and their partnership with the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)—will provide a significant complement to New York State's ongoing revitalization of its iconic park system and provide more opportunities for the 74 million annual park and historic site visitors to engage with and appreciate our natural, cultural and historical treasures.

This report compares the data Parks & Trails New York collected from groups in 2015 and most recently in 2018. This report makes evident just how great of an impact the Friends groups have on New York's state park system. It highlights that dedicated volunteers and staff, working together with OPRHP staff, are significantly enhancing their communities.

What is a Friends group?

A Friends groups is a group of individuals who work to support, steward and promote a park or historic site or multiple sites. They come in various shapes and sizes. Whether they are an all-volunteer group or a group with paid staff responsible for generating funds for operations and renovations, Friends groups make a huge impact on the State Park system.

Official Friends groups are registered as charities with the New York State Attorney General's Office and have a current Memorandum of Agreement with OPRHP. They are classified by the IRS as 501(c)(3) organizations or have a Memorandum of Understanding with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt fiscal agent.

Respondents by Region



Total # of survey respondents:

2018 = 70 groups

2015 = 53 groups



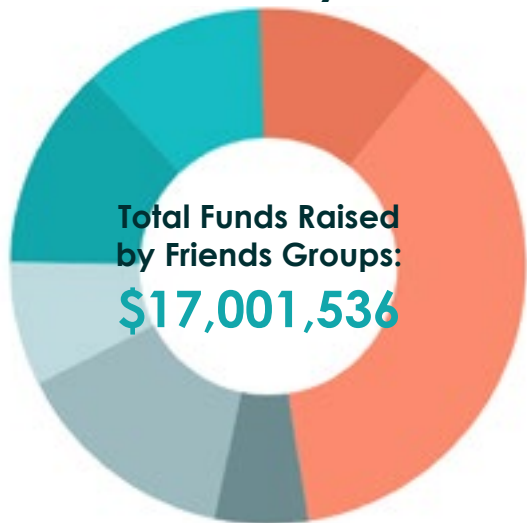
Did you know?

- 21 Friends groups have formed since 2000.
- Founded in 1927, Friends of Old Fort Niagara is the oldest Friends group.
- Friends of Peebles Island is the newest group, formed in 2017.



OVERVIEW

Funds Raised by Friends Groups in 2018



- Individual contributions: \$2,172,439
- Grants: \$1,983,411
- Special Events: \$1,915,697
- Programs: \$6,225,965
- Corporate/business contributions: \$1,017,079
- Gift shop/merchandise sales: \$2,381,205
- Other: \$1,305,740



Sweat Equity: Volunteer Power

Friends groups bring volunteers to parks. In 2018, groups harnessed the power of **5,192 volunteers** for a total of **131,798 hours of volunteer time**.

The Independent Sector reports the 'value of volunteer time' at **\$24.69** per hour—this equals **a \$3,254,092 value Friends group volunteers contribute**.



Getting Their Communities into the Great Outdoors

On average Friends groups reported hosting **35 programs** in 2018, compared to just 18 programs in 2015.



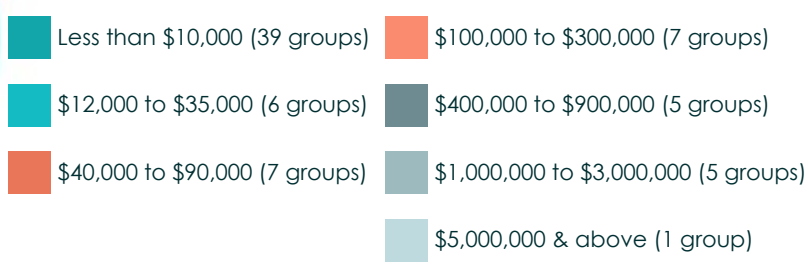


FINANCES & NUMBERS

Annual Budget Analysis



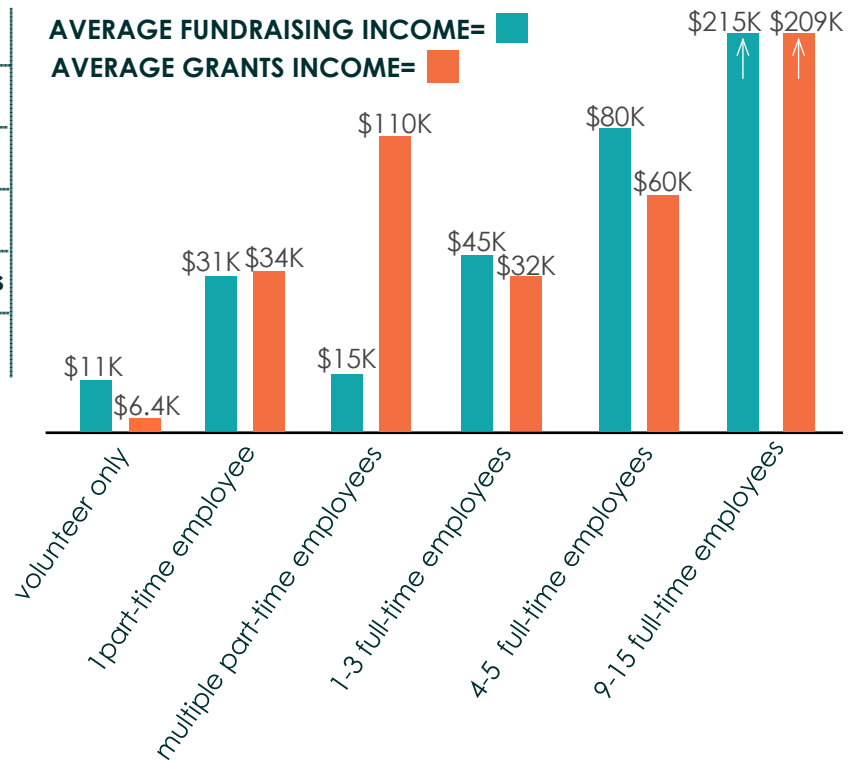
Out of the 70 Friends groups surveyed, 39 were working with a budget of less than \$10,000 in 2018. Friends groups are doing a lot with very little!



How Friends Groups Staff Up

- 45 Friends groups have no paid employees
- 10 groups have 1 to 3 full-time employees
- 6 groups have 9-15 full-time employees
- 4 groups have 1 part-time employee
- 3 groups have multiple part-time employees
- 3 groups have 4-5 full-time employees

AVERAGE INCOME vs. # OF EMPLOYEES





COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

Better Together

————— **93%** —————

of Friends groups report meeting with Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation staff on a regular basis.



62% of Friends groups host programs specifically for youth

Youth programming included a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics summer camp, field trips, nature journaling, snowshoeing, movie nights, scavenger hunts, story hours, animal tracking, kite flying and many more!

Fun in the Park!

2018 was a busy year at NY's parks! Friends groups brought in a total of **675,689 people** through programming and events. Volunteer-only groups managed a tremendous amount of outreach, bringing in nearly 30,000 attendees through programs. Volunteer power!



46 Friends groups host park clean-up or improvement programs



42 groups host educational programming



39 groups host history-related programming

38 groups host guided walks and hikes



37 groups host guided community events





Staying in Touch



61

Groups use e-mail alerts



57

Groups use social media



56

Groups have a website



53

Groups produce a print newsletter



43

Groups produce e-newsletters



43

Groups give presentations at community events

Social Standing



41 Groups use Facebook



21 Groups use Instagram



18 Groups use Twitter



79% of responders participate in

I LOVE MY PARK day



ADVOCACY EFFORTS

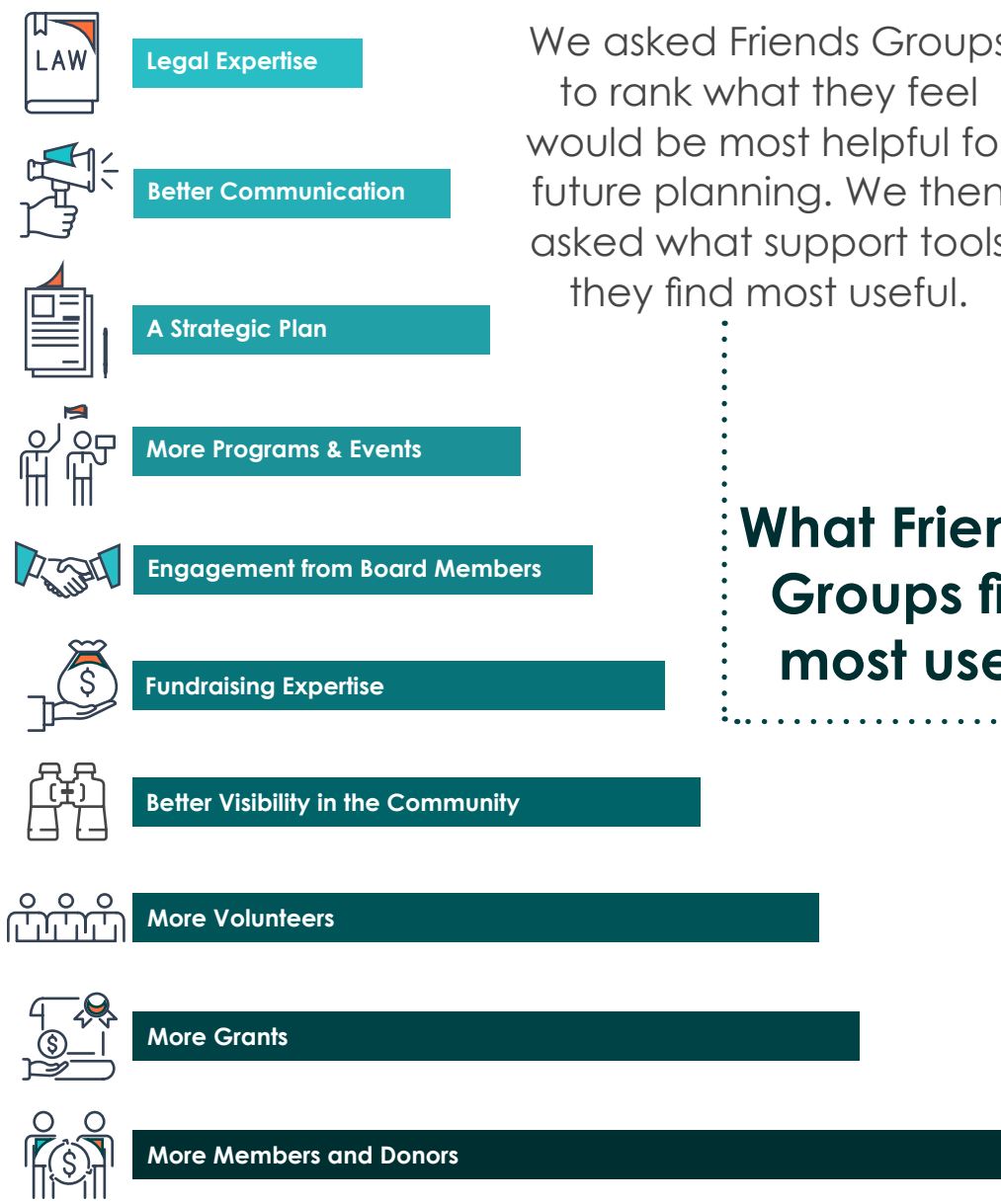
In 2018 Friends groups were active in advocacy efforts which supported New York State Parks.

- 50 groups personally invited elected officials to programs and events.
- 24 groups regularly sent updates to government officials.
- 20 groups visited legislators in their district offices.



HELPING OUR FRIENDS

What do Friends Groups Need the Most?



We asked Friends Groups to rank what they feel would be most helpful for future planning. We then asked what support tools they find most useful.

What Friends Groups find most useful





LOOKING AHEAD

After compiling and analyzing the data collected from the survey, the tremendous impact Friends groups have on New York's state park system is clearly evident and quite remarkable. From raising more than \$17 million in 2018 to hosting an average of 35 programs which brought in nearly 700,000 visitors, Friends groups truly enhance and support our state parks. However, like all dedicated groups, they want to do even more and make an even larger impact.

What do Friends groups need to enable them to achieve an even greater impact? The numbers show that through grant funding, fundraising and dedicated volunteers, so much is possible. Friends groups, working in partnership with managers, contribute greatly to their communities.

Friends groups cited needing more members and donors, which is always a challenge for non-profit and volunteer organizations. Parks & Trails New York is always looking for ways to help groups boost membership, donations and awareness. We want our Friends to grow and thrive.

The second greatest need identified by the Friends groups was access to more grant opportunities. The now \$1 million Park and Trail Partnership grant program will allow even more groups to benefit from those available funds. The grants have helped groups hire staff, tackle stewardship projects, and enhance fundraising and outreach efforts, which have improved their parks for all to enjoy and experience.

The partnership of Parks & Trails New York, Friends groups and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation will ensure the continued revitalization of New York's iconic state park system and provide more opportunities for the 74 million annual park and historic site visitors to connect to our natural, cultural and historical treasures.



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33 Elk Street, Albany, NY 12207
518.434.1583 | ptny@ptny.org
www.ptny.org

Parks & Trails New York is New York's leading statewide advocate for parks and trails, dedicated since 1985 to improving our health, economy, and quality of life through the use and enjoyment of green space.