



Power of Partnerships: The 2026 Friends Gathering

September 18-19 | Lake George, NY

Call for Presentations

General Guidance

Parks & Trails New York is hosting the bi-annual Statewide Friends Conference in Lake George, New York on September 18-19, 2026 and is inviting you to submit proposals for presentations. This event will bring together a wide variety of public lands champions that support New York's state parks, historic sites, environmental education centers, and other public lands. The conference is intended to provide an opportunity for nonprofit leaders and grassroots volunteers to network, learn, identify opportunities for collaboration, and share best practices.

During this two-day conference, we are hoping to offer a diverse array of presentations, case studies from experienced practitioners, and engaging, interactive workshops that address a wide range of topics focusing around the themes/key areas of focus below.

Focus Areas

The conference themes were selected to align with PTNY's mission to support and strengthen NY's public lands, and the Friends groups that care for them. The themes reflect the same areas of work emphasized through the Park and Trail Partnership Grant program, while allowing for a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

Presentations do not need to highlight a specific Park and Trail Partnership Grant funded project, or formal partnership with PTNY. We welcome proposals that explore these themes in flexible and creative ways by sharing ideas, strategies, tools, lessons learned, and case studies from a variety of contexts. Submissions may draw from work in parks, trails, greenways, public lands, community organizations, municipalities, or related fields.

Across all focus areas, PTNY welcomes proposals that demonstrate how partnerships can expand access, foster belonging, and remove barriers to participation on public lands. Submissions may explore physical accessibility improvements, inclusive program design, relationship-building with new communities, cross-sector collaborations, or creative approaches to engaging people who may not yet see themselves reflected in public lands spaces.

These focus areas are designed to support peer-to-peer learning and practical takeaways. Whether your experience comes from a small, volunteer-led effort or a larger organization, we invite proposals that contribute meaningful insights and help strengthen the collective work of Friends groups statewide.

[CLICK HERE TO SUBMIT YOUR PROPOSAL*](#)

PLEASE NOTE: It is preferred that you complete this form online via the above link. If that is not possible, you may email your responses with the list of items needed, along with the required attachments noted, to friends@ptny.org

Themes/Key Areas of Focus (Select all that apply)

1. Improving Visitor Experiences on Public Lands

Sessions focused on helping people access, enjoy, and engage with parks, trails, historic sites, and public lands — including interpretation, education, stewardship activities, and preservation-focused programming.

Examples include:

- Improving physical or programmatic access — including adaptive recreation, ADA-focused upgrades, stewardship projects, or site beautification efforts
- Welcoming new or underrepresented audiences through outreach, new recreation opportunities, events, or partnerships
- Enhancing interpretation and visitor services to make public lands more inclusive, engaging, and user-friendly

2. Strengthening Your Organization from the Inside

Sessions that address the systems, structures, and practices that help Friends groups and partners operate effectively — including structures that support stewardship projects, preservation work, and ongoing site care.

Topics may include:

- Governance, policies, and administrative systems that support effective operations
- Financial management, fundraising strategies, and long-term sustainability
- Strengthening and building relationships with site managers, agencies, and community-based organizations
- Embedding accessibility or inclusion goals into organizational planning

3. Building Staff and Leadership Capacity

Sessions focused on staffing, volunteer leadership, and building the people and skills needed for long-term success.

Topics may include:

- Recruiting, training, and retaining staff and volunteers from diverse backgrounds
- Leadership development, succession planning, and preventing burnout
- Creating inclusive, welcoming team cultures
- Volunteer recruitment, training, and retention

4. Friends Groups 101: Getting Started

Sessions focused on forming a Friends group and navigating the early stages, including structure, roles, and initial sustainability.

Topics may include:

- Starting a Friends group and establishing a mission
- Legal structure and relationship to the site
- Early fundraising and programming
- Navigating common challenges and lessons learned in the first years
- Building early partnerships and launching initial programs that welcome new communities

Dates and Deadlines

- Call for Proposals Opens: **Jan 29, 2026**
- Call for Proposals Deadline: **April 8, 2026**
- Conference Session Invitations: **early May**
- Final Conference Schedule Released: **late June**
- Conference Dates: **September 18-19, 2026**

Types of Presentations

Presentations may be formal presentations with A/V, or may include more interactive, participatory elements. We encourage you to get creative! Each conference session will be one hour long, but individual presentations may range from 15-45 minutes, reserving 15 minutes at the end of each session for Q&A.

- Individual Presentation Session
- Group Presentation Session
 - A group of presenters may submit a proposal for a presentation around a common theme. The presenters are expected to work together to ensure a cohesive presentation.

Consider presentations related to:

- Challenges, Solutions, & Lessons Learned
- Innovative Ideas
- Tips & Tools

Submission Instructions

Please fill out the form: <https://ptny.wufoo.com/forms/r1r4qhua0okm087/> completely. You may also **reference the “Proposal Materials”** below for you to share and gather information prior to submitting your proposal, but we request that you submit your proposal via our online form. If you cannot do this for any reason, you may also email the proposal contacts below. Make sure that you have answered all questions thoroughly.

The deadline for presentation proposals is **April 8** to be eligible for review. If you have questions or need clarifications regarding your presentation proposal, contact friends@ptny.org.

Please Note:

Due to the large number of proposals expected we will not be able to accept every proposal, and we may ask some presenters with similar topics to combine and create a new Concurrent Session.

At this time we are unable to cover presenter expenses. We are actively searching for sponsors. Pending

confirmation from potential sponsors and the availability of sufficient funding, we will seek to provide discounts for selected presenters and/or scholarships for those in need of additional assistance.

We work very hard to keep our registration fees low and we hope you realize that the interaction and opportunity to speak in front of your peers is of great value.

Please share this opportunity through your networks and through your social media!

Proposal Materials

- **Primary Point of Contact Details**

This section is used for the person filling out this form and will be the person we connect with for any questions and the final decisions made on the program.

- First and Last Name*
 - Organization*
 - Email*

- **Presentation Details**

- Presentation Title (not to exceed 60 characters with space)*
 - Presentation Type (select all that apply)*:
 - Individual Presentation Session
 - Group Presentation Session
 - Conference Key Areas of Focus (select all that apply):
 - Improving Visitor Experiences on Public Lands
 - Strengthening Your Organization from the Inside
 - Building Staff and Leadership Capacity
 - Friends Groups 101: Getting Started
 - Presentation Description (200 word maximum) - Please make sure to describe both the format and content of the presentation:*
 - Learning Objectives (please list at least three things attendees will learn or be able to do after your session)
 - Audio/Visual Needs and Room Set-up (every meeting room is equipped with a projector, screen, wired mic podium, and one wireless microphone - presenters must bring their own laptop). You can also use this section to indicate how long you anticipate your presentation will be (15-45 minutes).
 - Scheduling Constraints for Your Session (sessions and workshops will be scheduled Friday September 18 and Saturday, September 19 - please indicate any dates or times in that timeframe that you absolutely CANNOT be scheduled)
 - Number of presenters for this proposal* - This form can accommodate up to three presenters. **If additional presenters are planned, please email this detail to friends@ptny.org**

- **Main Presenter Contact Details**

- First and Last Name*
 - Organization*
 - Title*
 - Email*

- City/State*
- Headshot*
- Bio (200 word maximum)*
- **Additional Presenter Details**
 - First and Last Name*
 - Organization*
 - Title*
 - Email*
 - City/State*
 - Headshot*
 - Bio (200 word maximum)*
- **Additional Presenter Details**
 - First and Last Name*
 - Organization*
 - Title*
 - Email*
 - City/State*
 - Headshot*
 - Bio (200 word maximum)*

I understand that the acceptance and scheduling of this presentation is at the discretion of the conference organizers. The Review Committee may accept the proposal with changes including to the presentation format and length.

How Proposals Will Be Evaluated

Proposals will be reviewed by the conference planning committee based on the following criteria: alignment with conference themes, clarity of learning objectives, practical takeaways for attendees, innovation or creativity, feasibility of the proposed session format, and consideration of accessibility and inclusive practices. Due to scheduling constraints, not all proposals may be accepted, and similar topics may be combined into a single session. Final decisions will be made by the committee and communicated to applicants in early May.