



A Strategic Blueprint for Cultivating New Donors, Supporters, and Community Participation for the Friends of the Public Garden

Executive Summary: A Blueprint for Sustainable Growth

The following report provides a comprehensive and actionable strategic roadmap for the Friends of the Public Garden (FPG) to expand its community involvement, grow its supporter base, and diversify its donor acquisition channels. The strategy is built upon three foundational pillars: Activating Community Engagement, Expanding the Supporter Base, and Diversifying and Scaling Donor Acquisition. It leverages FPG's existing strengths—a mission to "renew, care, and advocate" for the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall—while introducing sophisticated, data-informed models from successful urban park conservancies and general non-profit best practices.

A central tenet of this blueprint is the recognition of a powerful, often underestimated, pipeline for financial contributions: existing volunteers. Data reveals that 42% of volunteers later donate to the organization they support, a powerful causal link that transforms time and effort into a deeper sense of ownership and commitment. The proposed strategy integrates this principle by formalizing a "Volunteer-to-Donor Pathway." Furthermore, the report addresses a critical challenge facing urban park conservancies—the perception that they may prioritize the interests of wealthy donors over public needs. This report's strategy offers a direct solution by advocating for a community-led co-design model, thereby building a broad-based, inclusive, and resilient support system. The implementation of this blueprint, supported by a multi-channel digital and communications strategy, will not only cultivate new supporters but also establish FPG as a leading model for modern, community-driven urban park stewardship.

Introduction:

The Friends of the Public Garden at a Strategic Crossroads

For generations, the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall have served as the "souls of the city," acting as vital green spaces for millions of residents and visitors. As one of the nation's oldest park advocacy groups, the Friends of the Public Garden has been an indispensable partner to the City of Boston, working to preserve, protect, and enhance these historic parks. FPG's existing operational framework—which includes volunteer days, guided tours, seasonal events, and community gatherings—provides a robust foundation for civic engagement and support.



The purpose of this report is to provide a strategic roadmap for expanding and deepening community involvement and financial support. It moves beyond a tactical list of ideas to present a holistic, interconnected framework. The analysis synthesizes lessons from comparable organizations, such as the Central Park Conservancy and the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy, and incorporates general non-profit best practices for donor acquisition and community engagement. The recommendations are designed to be actionable, measurable, and forward-looking, positioning FPG for sustainable, long-term growth in an evolving urban landscape.

Foundational Principles for a Three-Pronged Strategy

The success of a modern non-profit is rooted in its ability to create a self-reinforcing cycle of participation, advocacy, and financial support. This strategy is built on a two-part conceptual model that frames this relationship.

The Engagement-to-Stewardship Funnel

This model illustrates a deliberate, step-by-step process of converting community members into dedicated stewards of the parks. At the wide top of the funnel is broad Community Participation, where individuals engage through activities like attending seasonal events, participating in a guided tour, or following the organization on social media. As these individuals deepen their involvement, they transition into active Supporters and Advocates, defined by actions such as volunteering or sharing FPG's message through peer-to-peer fundraising. At the narrow base of the funnel are Donors, those who make financial contributions, whether through one-time gifts, recurring memberships, or major philanthropic commitments.

A critical, evidence-based connection in this funnel is the powerful link between volunteering and financial support. A notable statistic indicates that 42% of volunteers eventually make a financial donation to the organization they support. This is not a mere correlation but a causal relationship built on psychological investment. When a person dedicates their time and physical effort to a cause, they develop a profound sense of ownership and personal stake in its mission. They are no longer passive consumers of a public space but active contributors to its well-being. The act of raking leaves, painting a fence, or planting bulbs transforms their relationship with the parks. Therefore, FPG's strategy must avoid treating volunteer engagement and donor acquisition as separate silos. Instead, a deliberate "Volunteer-to-Donor Pathway" should be designed with specific touchpoints and messaging to nurture this transition. This could involve personalized thank-you notes, sharing the impact of volunteer work, and inviting volunteers to special "alumni" events.



Cultivating the "Third Space" Identity

The three parks—Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall—serve as a "third space" for urban residents, a vital social and recreational arena distinct from the environments of home and work. By emphasizing the parks' role as a civic hub, FPG can build a deeper sense of community connection and collective identity. This framing elevates the organization beyond a simple park maintenance group to a facilitator of quality of life, well-being, and social cohesion for all Bostonians. The strategy should therefore leverage this "third space" identity in all its communications and programming to build resonant, long-term relationships with a broad cross-section of the population.

Pillar I: Activating Community Engagement through Enhanced Programming

The foundation of a robust support system is a community that feels a genuine sense of belonging and ownership. This requires moving beyond the traditional event-hosting model to a more collaborative and inclusive framework.

Moving Beyond Events to Co-Creation: The Community-Led Co-design Model

The traditional model, where a non-profit organizes an event for the public, represents a one-way communication channel. A far more effective and sustainable approach is to adopt a community-based planning model, where residents and stakeholders are actively involved in designing and implementing programs. This is a strategic shift that transforms FPG from a service provider into a collaborator.

This shift is a direct response to a critical risk facing urban park conservancies: the perception that their funding decisions, which increasingly rely on wealthy donors, may conflict with the needs of the broader community, particularly those with fewer resources. By embracing a co-design model, FPG can proactively address this potential criticism and build a more inclusive and resilient organization. Engaging community residents in the design process gives them a voice and a sense of ownership, which makes them more likely to appreciate the park's role in their daily lives. The research highlights a powerful example from a California park where a collaboration between "professional project managers" and "neighborhood residents" resulted in both sides taking ownership of the project, creating a "win-win for everyone". This process makes inclusivity and local relevance a core value, demonstrating that FPG's decisions are driven by community needs, not solely by funding priorities.



To implement this model, FPG can adopt a phased approach:

- **Phase 1: Listening Sessions:** Host small, accessible meetings in various locations at different times, including evenings and weekends, to ensure a broad representation of residents, from youth to seniors. Use interactive methods, such as photos as a starting point, paper and pens for sketching, and brainstorming lists, to gather feedback and ideas for park beautification and new features.
- **Phase 2: Collaborative Development:** Following the listening sessions, invite key community leaders and residents to join working groups with FPG staff. This process ensures a thoughtful exchange of knowledge and allows the technical expertise of FPG to merge with the on-the-ground needs and experiences of the community.

Expanding Programmatic Diversity and Accessibility

To foster broader engagement, FPG's programming must be inclusive and accessible. This involves tailoring programs to different demographics, as the research suggests focusing on specific groups like families, seniors, and youth. Furthermore, programs should offer flexible participation options, allowing people to engage in person or virtually, and provide accommodations like childcare or transportation stipends to remove common barriers to entry. This commitment to accessibility in both physical and digital spaces is paramount to building a truly representative community of supporters.

Pillar II: Expanding the Supporter Base and Volunteer Advocacy

A successful strategy for growth involves formalizing the transition of community members from passive supporters to active advocates. This is achieved by empowering FPG's most passionate champions—its volunteers—and by forging strategic, mission-aligned partnerships with local businesses.

Formalizing the Volunteer-to-Ambassador Pathway

The existing FPG volunteer program is a significant asset. The strategic focus must now shift to creating a formal pathway that nurtures volunteers into long-term ambassadors. An ambassador program for loyal, long-term volunteers and donors can be established, providing them with the necessary tools and resources to become effective promoters of the cause. This includes supplying talking points, branded merchandise, and other informational materials that supporters can use to advocate for the organization.

A highly effective and cost-efficient tactic is to incentivize peer-to-peer engagement. For example, FPG can offer a free branded t-shirt to volunteers who bring a friend to a volunteer day or to donors who invite a loved one to a fundraising event. This tactic leverages the trust people place in their networks over that of an organization, making it a powerful channel for cost-effective expansion. Dedicated supporters, who often have strong social ties with other



donors and view their giving as part of their identity, are the ideal candidates to serve as these ambassadors.

Strategic Corporate Citizenship and Employee Engagement

Corporate partnerships represent a vital source of support, but a successful strategy requires a nuanced, targeted approach. A simple request for funding is often insufficient. Instead, FPG can appeal to a company's commitment to specific values by framing its work as a way for corporations to fulfill their own sustainability and community goals. This transforms the pitch from a simple request for funding into a mutually beneficial partnership.

The research identifies several Boston-area companies with established environmental and social responsibility programs that align perfectly with FPG's mission. For instance, Park Hotels & Resorts has a "Green Park Program", Seaport Boston has "Seaport Saves" and an organic garden, and BSC Group has a history of transforming former industrial sites into parks. The outreach strategy should therefore be highly personalized. Instead of a generic sponsorship proposal, FPG can create a specific partnership plan that shows a company exactly how supporting FPG's urban forestry or park beautification programs directly contributes to its stated corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals. This makes the partnership more compelling and increases the likelihood of a long-term investment.

The following matrix provides a clear, actionable roadmap for corporate and institutional outreach by identifying specific, high-potential partners and the strategic alignment of their missions with FPG's.

Partner Organization	Known CSR/Social Impact Program	Alignment with FPG's Mission	Recommended Engagement Type
BSC Group	Environmental stewardship, social responsibility, community engagement	Expertise in transforming industrial sites into resilient parks; led a project to create a biodiverse park in Everett, MA.	Pro-bono services, project-based sponsorships, employee volunteer days
Park Hotels & Resorts	The "Green Park Program" focuses on environmental sustainability and social impact.	A mission-aligned focus on environmental stewardship and community investment.	Event sponsorship, employee "Day in the Dirt" volunteering, and in-kind donations.



Seaport Boston	"Seaport Saves" eco-friendly program, on-site organic garden, and apiary.	A commitment to sustainability, urban green spaces, and conservation, including pollinator support.	Sponsorship of a specific FPG program (e.g., a horticulture project), volunteer grants, and joint marketing campaigns.
Boston Beer Co.	Commitment to environmental and social impact in the communities where it operates.	Shared goal of positive community presence and environmental stewardship.	Sponsorship of a seasonal FPG event, employee volunteer day, or philanthropic partnership.

A successful model to replicate is the Central Park Conservancy's "Day in the Dirt" program, a structured, half-day volunteering opportunity for corporate partners designed to foster team-building and environmental stewardship. This high-value offering can be a powerful incentive for companies to participate at a higher level of giving.

Pillar III: Diversifying and Scaling Donor Acquisition

To build a sustainable financial future, FPG must expand its donor base beyond simple one-time donations. This requires a sophisticated, multi-faceted approach that leverages a tiered membership model, strategic fundraising campaigns, and targeted grant applications.

Adopting a Tiered Membership and Donor Recognition Model

While the FPG website currently features a basic donation page, a more sophisticated, tiered system is essential to scale and cultivate major donors. The Central Park Conservancy's (CPC) model serves as a highly successful and adaptable blueprint. The effectiveness of the CPC model lies not just in its tiered pricing but in the psychological power of tangible recognition. A donor is not merely making a financial transaction; they are becoming a "Gardener" or a "Belvedere Knight," each name conveying a distinct identity and status within the community.

This approach works by creating a sense of community and personal identity for donors, a factor that the research notes is a key characteristic of an organization's most dedicated donors. By offering benefits such as invitations to "members-only in-person programs" or "behind-the-scenes tours with Park professionals", FPG can transform a simple financial contribution into an entry point into a community of like-minded individuals. The tiers can be named to evoke a sense of connection to the parks, reinforcing this shared identity.



The following table presents a concrete framework for a new FPG membership program, adapted from the proven CPC model.

Proposed Tier Name	Annual Donation Amount	Proposed Benefits
Gardener	\$50	Access to virtual programs, 10% discount at gift shops, subscription to newsletters, and membership card.
Arborist	\$100	All benefits of Gardener, plus access to members-only in-person programs, and advanced notice of events.
Protector	\$250	All benefits of Arborist, plus invitations to behind-the-scenes tours with FPG staff, invitation to a special annual event.
Contributor	\$500	All benefits of Protector, plus invitations to exclusive receptions and tours, and a first-time member gift.
Belvedere Knight	\$1,000	All benefits of Contributor, plus preferred seating at select FPG events, 20% discount at gift shops.
Bethesda Angel	\$2,500	All benefits of Belvedere Knight, plus a special edition photograph, invitation to a virtual discussion series with FPG leadership.
Patron's Circle	\$5,000	All benefits of Bethesda Angel, plus listing in the FPG Annual Report, and a private tour for a small group.
President's Circle	\$10,000	All benefits of Patron's Circle, plus pre-performance reception and preferred seating at events.
Chairman's Circle	\$25,000+	All benefits of the President's Circle, plus invitations to unique programming and an exclusive annual cocktail party.



Strategic Fundraising Campaigns and Events

FPG's fundraising efforts can be enhanced by implementing a more diversified approach. In addition to leveraging existing events like the Frederick Law Olmsted Awards Luncheon, FPG should consider:

- **Crowdfunding Campaigns:** Launch targeted online campaigns with a clear goal, a deadline, and a "fundraising thermometer" to visualize progress. This creates a sense of momentum and social proof that encourages broader participation.
- **Prospect Research:** Utilize prospect research and wealth screening to identify potential major donors. This involves looking at existing donor databases, annual reports of similar organizations, and external resources to create detailed donor profiles.
- **Corporate Matching:** Promote employer matching gift programs to increase the impact of individual donations.

Securing Grants and Institutional Funding

FPG's mission to beautify and enhance Boston's public spaces aligns with several grant opportunities. The organization should actively apply for mission-aligned grants, such as the City of Boston's "Small Community Grants Trust Program," which funds projects that "adorn and embellish" public spaces. Additionally, FPG can explore resources from the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network for a listing of grant and award opportunities. The organization can also seek to collaborate with public agencies, as urban parks often require "collaborative assistance" to achieve their goals.

Integrating a Multi-Channel Digital and Communications Strategy

To effectively implement these strategic pillars, FPG requires a cohesive and optimized multi-channel digital communications plan. This plan should leverage the organization's digital assets to create a unified and compelling narrative.

Building a Cohesive Digital Ecosystem

The FPG website is the central hub for all online engagement. A robust digital strategy must prioritize a mobile-first design, as over half of all nonprofit website traffic comes from mobile devices, and a significant portion of the population is "smartphone-only." This is not merely a design choice; it is a matter of equity and accessibility. A clunky, slow-loading mobile site with small buttons and friction points can be a significant barrier to engagement, particularly for communities with limited access to desktop computers. The website must be optimized with clear calls-to-action to guide visitors to the next step, whether it's making a donation, volunteering, or learning more.



Strategic Social Media Engagement

While FPG's existing social media presence features high-quality visual content, the strategy must move beyond static imagery to leverage more dynamic and interactive content.

- **Embrace Video Content:** The research indicates that video content receives significantly higher engagement and shares than text and image posts combined. FPG should create short, compelling videos for platforms like Instagram Reels and TikTok, offering "behind-the-scenes" looks at park maintenance or sharing volunteer testimonials
- **Leverage User-Generated Content (UGC):** Encourage visitors to share their photos and stories of the parks with a specific hashtag. This creates a cycle of community-led marketing and social proof, cost-effectively amplifying FPG's reach.
- **Use Interactive Tools:** Integrate polls, quizzes, and live Q&A sessions on social media platforms to involve followers in the decision-making process and make them feel a part of the community.

Email Marketing and Donor Nurturing

Email marketing is a tried-and-true channel for donor cultivation. The strategy must move beyond a generic newsletter to a more sophisticated, segmented, and personalized approach.

- **Audience Segmentation:** The mailing list should be segmented into distinct groups, such as one-time donors, event attendees, volunteers, and lapsed donors. This allows for tailored messaging that is more relevant and impactful to each group.
- **Personalization and Automation:** Automate personalized welcome emails for new subscribers and thank-you notes that reference a donor's giving history. Tailor messages based on a supporter's location or past engagement to boost relevance and open rates, as personalized subject lines are 26% more likely to be opened.
- **Brevity and Clarity:** Email design should prioritize short, scannable content, a single clear call-to-action, and motion-based elements like GIFs to improve readability and engagement.

The following table provides a strategic overview of how different messages and campaigns can be deployed across these digital channels to ensure a cohesive and impactful narrative.

Channel	Primary Goal	Content Type	Target Audience	Example of a Call-to-Action
Website	Donor Acquisition, Information Hub	Impact stories, online donation forms, event calendars, and volunteer applications	All audiences	"Renew, care, and advocate for Boston's parks. Donate today."



Social Media	Awareness, Community Engagement, Volunteer Recruitment	Short-form videos, user-generated content, interactive polls, event announcements	New supporters, existing community members	"Show us your favorite park view with #FriendsOfThePublicGarden"
Email Marketing	Donor Nurturing, Volunteer Activation	Personalized thank-you notes, appeals, success stories, and event reminders	Existing donors, volunteers, and event attendees	"See the impact you created" or "Join us for our next volunteer day"
In-Person Events	Relationship Building, Supporter Activation	Guided tours, volunteer workdays, community gatherings	New and existing supporters, corporate partners	"Bring a friend and get a free tote bag."

Implementation Plan and Metrics for Success

The proposed strategy is designed for a phased, multi-year implementation to ensure a smooth transition and long-term success.

- **Phase I (6-12 months): Laying the Foundation:** This phase focuses on the organizational and digital infrastructure. Key initiatives include a comprehensive digital audit, a mobile-first website redesign, and the launch of a community-led co-design pilot project for a single park. [highlighted in our Website Redesign Proposal]
- **Phase II (12-24 months): Building the Funnel:** With a solid foundation, this phase focuses on formalizing the new pathways. This includes launching the tiered membership program, establishing a formal ambassador program for volunteers, and initiating targeted, personalized outreach to corporate partners based on the matrix provided in this report.
- **Phase III (24+ months): Scaling and Maturing:** In this final phase, FPG will refine its programs based on data, scale successful initiatives across all three parks, and expand its efforts in major donor prospecting and grant applications.

Success will be measured by a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that track progress across all strategic pillars.

- **Donor-Related KPIs:** Donor retention rate, average donation size, number of new recurring donors, and revenue from specific campaigns.



- **Volunteer-Related KPIs:** Number of new volunteers recruited, total volunteer hours logged, and the percentage of volunteers who transition to financial donors.
- **Community-Related KPIs:** Attendance rates at events, the number of participants in co-design programs, and social media engagement rates (e.g., shares, comments, likes).

Conclusion: The Future of the Friends of the Public Garden

The Friends of the Public Garden has a rich history as a steward of Boston's most cherished public spaces. The strategic blueprint outlined in this report is designed to honor this legacy while ensuring the organization's relevance and sustainability for generations to come. By adopting a community-led co-design model, formalizing the volunteer-to-advocate pathway, and implementing a sophisticated tiered donor acquisition system, FPG can cultivate deeper relationships and a more resilient support system.

This approach addresses the core challenges of modern non-profit management by creating an interconnected ecosystem where community participation fuels advocacy, and advocacy, in turn, drives financial support. The strategy transforms community engagement from a simple tactic into a core value, thereby building trust and proactively positioning FPG as an organization that is genuinely for the people and by the people. By leveraging the proven models of successful urban park conservancies and focusing on data-informed decisions, FPG is poised to become a leading national example of inclusive, community-driven, and sustainable urban park stewardship.