

POL.A.04.04 - Sponsorship Policy

In an effort to utilize and maximize the community's resources, it is in the best interest of the Park District to create and enhance relationship-based sponsorships. This may be accomplished by providing local, regional, and national commercial businesses and non-profit groups a method for becoming involved with the many opportunities provided by the Park District. The Park District delivers quality, life-enriching activities to the broadest base of the community. This translates into exceptional visibility for sponsors and supporters. The goal of this policy is to create relationships and partnerships with sponsors for the financial benefit of the Park District.

Sponsorships vs. Donations

There is an important difference between a sponsorship and a donation. In general, a sponsorship is cash, products, or services offered by a sponsor with the clear expectation that an obligation is created. The Park District will be obliged to return something of value to the sponsor. The value is typically public recognition and publicity or advertising highlighting the contribution of the sponsor and/or the sponsor's name, logo, message, products or services. The sponsor usually has clear marketing objectives that it is trying to achieve, including but not limited to the ability to drive sales directly based on the sponsorship and, quite often, the right to be the exclusive sponsor in a specific category of sales. The arrangement is typically consummated by a letter of agreement or contractual arrangement that details the particulars of the exchange.

In contrast, a donation comes with no restrictions on how the money or in-kind resources are used. Because donations or gifts are given without restrictions or expected benefits for the donor, a policy is generally not needed. Notably, donations are eligible for a governmental donation receipt for tax deduction purposes. Also notably, the Park District reserves the right to refuse any donation, whether because of restrictions or expectations related to it or for other sound reasons.

This Policy specifically addresses sponsorships, the terms of sponsorship agreements, and the benefits provided to the Park District in return for the resources provided by the sponsors.

Guidelines for Acceptable Sponsorships

Sponsors should be businesses, non-profit groups, or individuals that promote mutually beneficial relationships for the Park District. All potentially sponsored properties (facilities, events or programs) should be reviewed in terms of creating synergistic working relationships with regards to benefits, community contributions, knowledge, and political sensitivity. All sponsored properties should promote the Park District's Mission, Vision and Values.

The first major criterion for the Park District when determining whether to accept a sponsorship is the appropriate relationship of a sponsorship to the Park District's Mission, Vision and Values outlined above. That determination of appropriateness is based in large part on objective analysis, but ultimately is vested in the sound exercise of the Park District's discretion, considering all of the many factors that may be involved. The following questions are the major guiding components of this policy and will be addressed prior to soliciting potential sponsors:

- Is the sponsorship related to the purpose of the facility or programs and does it help promote the Park District's Mission, Vision and Values?
- Will the sponsorship help generate more revenue and/or less cost per participant than the Park District can provide without it?

- What are the real costs, including staff time, to the Park District in accepting the sponsorship and the cash, products, and services resources that come with the sponsorship?

Some potential sponsorships are inappropriate and will not be considered by the Park District. A partial list of categories of such sponsorships includes:

- Sponsorships that involve or promote environmental, work, or other practices that violate or threaten international, federal, State or local law or that promote or encourage drugs, pornography, alcohol, tobacco, or firearms.
- Sponsorships that duplicate, mimic, or create confusion regarding the nature or identity of any program of the Park District.
- Sponsorships that may exploit participants or staff members of the Park District.
- Sponsorship that offer benefits or opportunities that may violate laws or Park District policies.

Sponsorship Plan and Approval Levels

Each project or program that involves solicitation or acceptance of sponsors must have a Sponsorship Plan developed by staff prior to any such solicitation or acceptance that is specific to that project or program and that is consistent with the terms and sponsorship levels of this Sponsorship Policy. The Sponsorship Plan must be approved by the Marketing & Customer Service Department. In addition, each sponsorship will need separate approval if it exceeds pre-specified limits. The approval levels are outlined below:

Under \$1,000: The program or project staff may approve this level of sponsorship, with review by the supervising Manager.

\$1,000 to \$10,000: This level of sponsorship requires approval of the Superintendent of the department seeking the sponsorship, with review by the Executive Director.

Over \$10,000: This level of sponsorship requires approval of the Executive Director (the Executive Director may recommend a Board of Commissioners review).

Non-Commercial Forums Prohibited

When entering into a sponsorship that includes commercial advertising on behalf of the sponsor, the Park District intends to create only a specifically limited forum for that advertising. The Park District does not intend by this Sponsorship Policy or by approval of any sponsorship to create any public forum for any message or advertising apart from the specifically approved commercial advertising, and this Sponsorship Policy shall not be construed or applied in any manner to create any such public forum at any facility or related to any program or event. Also, although non-commercial community organizations or individuals may wish to sponsor a Park District facility, program, or event, no non-commercial speech or message shall be permitted as a part of such a sponsorship and this Sponsorship Policy shall not be construed or applied in any manner to allow any such speech or message.

In furtherance of this strict policy, any commercial advertisement incidental to a sponsorship shall be limited to the promotion of a commercial transaction, whether directly or indirectly, through the association of the sponsor's name with the commercial transaction of purchasing the commercial goods or services that the sponsor sells.

Also in furtherance of this strict policy, the Park District states the following standards underlying this policy:

- The Park District desires to avoid the delivery and exposure of all non-commercial messages to the “captive” audiences at Park District events;
- The Park District seeks to avoid all entanglement with constitutional questions related to “viewpoint-related” decisions and with the danger that the Park District will be associated with any non-commercial messages;
- The Park District desires to maximize income from sponsorship by allowing commercial advertising when appropriate, and seeks to avoid dissuading potential sponsors and the residents and others who participate in its programs by allowing any non-commercial messages, some of which could be inappropriate or offensive to the public;
- The Park District desires to maintain a position of neutrality on political and religious issues; and
- The Park District seeks to avoid the danger of “excessive entanglement” with any religion or political organization or point of view.