



Strategic Plan

2024-2027

November 15, 2023

Mission

The Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society empowers recreation and park professionals and citizen advocates to enhance life-enriching services for all Pennsylvanians.

Vision

The Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society will improve environmental, economic, and social health and wellness for current and future generations.

Plan Purpose

PRPS is uniquely positioned to exert influence on behalf of its members and partners. Rather than focusing on narrow, internal organizational goals (which are separately addressed by governance policies and the annual Administrative Plan), the Board of Directors chooses to address certain broad, external issues that impact the recreation and park industry and its professional practices throughout Pennsylvania.

In addition to the strategies and goals contained in this plan, PRPS is an implementing partner of two other plans, contributing to the action items of:

- **Leadership 2025**, the recommendations of a 7-year plan through 2025 from the 2018 Recreation and Conservation Leadership Summit, and;
- **Pennsylvania Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2020-2024**, an outdoor recreation prescription for all citizens of the Commonwealth

The timing of this PRPS Strategic Plan will coincide and help inform future versions of the above plans, anticipated with the next Recreation and Conservation Leadership Summit in 2026, and a new statewide outdoor recreation plan, effective 2025-2029.

It is within this larger scope that PRPS desires to improve the overall capability of the profession's delivery of its comprehensive, essential services throughout the state, with benefits for all.

Implementation

The PRPS [Constitution](#) contains the fundamental principles that govern its operation. The PRPS [Bylaws](#) establish the specific rules of guidance by which the Society functions.

The PRPS Board of Directors sets policy and direction, ensures and protects resources, engages in outreach, and provides oversight. Much of the Board's attention centers on governance by policy, membership development, and advocacy, with intentional transparency and communication.

The PRPS Board/Executive Partnerships policy establishes and delineates operational responsibilities between the Board, the CEO and administrative staff, and PRPS Committees. Implementing this plan is a cooperative function between the varying positions, roles, and responsibilities of all PRPS members.

Structure

Following the recommended procedure and format of an issues-based strategic plan, the Board of Directors identified four broad issues in which to identify practical strategies to contribute solutions over the following four years. They are:

1. **Public Policy and Advocacy**
2. **Sustainable Funding**
3. **Collaborative Development**
4. **Stakeholder Engagement**

An expanded statement of each issue follows. Each issue is further articulated by identifying pertinent Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges (SWOC). Consulted in this analysis is *Drivers of Change: Summaries of 50 Key Disruptors Identified by ASAE Foresight Works*. These trends are particularly relevant to the challenges association leaders will face in the future, and pertain to the following thematic groups: Content, Learning & Management; Data and Technology; Demographics and Membership; Economic Conditions; Society and Politics; and Workforce and Workplace.

Based on the SWOC analysis, the PRPS Board of Directors and Administration, with input from PRPS members, partners, and stakeholder groups have determined specific Strategies, each with Measureable Outcomes, Prime Agents, Priorities, and Timelines.

Prime Agents abbreviations:

BOD	<i>Board of Directors</i>
CEO	<i>PRPS CEO</i>
COM	<i>Communications Committee</i>
DEI	<i>Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Committee</i>
Districts	<i>PRPS Districts 1,2,3</i>
ED	<i>Education Committee</i>
GA	<i>Governmental Affairs Committee</i>
LN	<i>Learning Networks</i>
MEM	<i>Membership Committee</i>
Members	<i>PRPS Members</i>
PART	<i>Partnerships Team</i>
PPCF	<i>People, Parks & Community Foundation Trustees</i>
R&A	<i>Recognitions & Awards Committee</i>
Staff	<i>PRPS Staff</i>

Priorities are categorized as **1** (top), **2** (intermediary), or **3** (low or tertiary) over the four-year period of the Plan.

After the conclusion of each year's achievements, progress notes will be added to the Strategies matrices to report advancement toward the outcomes.

Issue 1: Public Policy and Advocacy

On behalf of its members and stakeholders, PRPS has an obligation to articulate and communicate its messages well to all segments of its diverse audience, include and mobilize its supporters and partners, and influence decision-makers at all levels of responsibility.

The purpose of PRPS's advocacy program is to actively support, defend, promote, and advance community and life-enhancing solutions through Pennsylvania's park and recreation systems. The audiences and beneficiaries include our elected and appointed officials, our members and their constituents, our partners and collaborators, and the public at large.

Research among elected and appointed officials has shown that the more they perceive park and recreation services contribute to the economy, public health, quality of life, and other indicators of community wellbeing, the greater the importance they place on these services. Such a perception of higher value among decision-makers leads to elevated funding priorities and a greater role for park and recreation systems and the solutions they create for the public good.

PRPS Advocacy is a multi-function responsibility that includes:

Legislative Advancement and Defense

- Monitoring legislation, regulations, other governmental actions, and political willpower to analyze, understand, and communicate opportunities, probabilities, and consequences.
- Initiating, organizing, and promoting grass roots and legislative actions to resolve particular matters that impact the profession and industry.

Public Education and Engagement

- Developing public advocacy platforms, public education campaigns, and their strategies, objectives, and goals, based on issues and trends.
- Educating, enlisting and collaborating with PRPS members and other like-minded individuals and groups throughout the state for public understanding, coordinated messaging, and realized objectives.
- Documenting and promoting the environmental, economic, social, and healthful benefits that personal and community recreation and park services provide.

Such advocacy requires retrospective analysis to identify trends, forward thinking to shape the future, and continuing action to stimulate change and produce results.

Strengths

1. **Widespread Platform.** Through its professional members, PRPS touches every aspect of modern society and community livability. The broad expertise of its members, the public they serve, and PRPS's unique position to speak on their collective behalf, creates a powerful platform.
2. **Knowledge and Content Management.** PRPS has access to many research reports and case studies that substantiate recreation, park and conservation issues, policies, and recommended changes, and can utilize their findings for persuasive reasoning. PRPS also utilizes political advocacy software that tracks legislation and empowers constituent engagement and advocacy management.
3. **Collaborative Alliances.** PRPS has many alliances with public and private partners who, with parallel missions and additional resources, collaborate in practical initiatives for education, advocacy and change.
4. **Local Officials' Personal Engagement.** An overwhelming majority of local officials have personally used their local parks (95 percent) and agree their community benefits from local parks (99 percent).

Weaknesses

1. **Lack of Formal Training.** Advocacy training for practicing recreation and park professionals and volunteers often comes through on-the-job experience, rather than any formal prior preparation to attain competency.
2. **Perception of Duties.** Public advocacy is often perceived as a duty of director-level personnel, and commonly avoided by others; or is regarded as inconsequential or unnecessary.

3. **Insufficient Effective Relationships.** Too few PRPS members have a good working relationship with their elected state and local legislators, or are readily willing to contact them and articulate needs and issues.

Opportunities

1. **Grow Professional Competencies.** Basic professional competencies include public advocacy, community leadership, and effective communication skills. PRPS offers professional development programs and scholarships to assist members and partners grow these skills.
2. **Leverage Public Opinion.** Popular public opinion of the value of parks and recreation remains high since pandemic-induced activities for mental and physical health brought many more people to the local parks. PRPS can profit from that popularity to educate and influence decision-makers to favor higher priorities for the kinds of community solutions that park and recreation systems can deliver.
3. **Grow Informational Resources.** Pertinent resources on specific legislative issues, talking points, how to engage with legislative members, etc. can be developed as issues-based toolkits and strategically shared with stakeholders for greater impacts.
4. **Legislators Education.** Many newly elected officials lack sufficient depth in understanding park, recreation, and conservation issues, and can benefit from guidance and briefs from PRPS and its missional partners.

Challenges

1. **A More Powerful Platform.** PRPS has increased its visibility as the state's industry leader for parks and recreation; however, it is not yet commonly recognized or invited as a contributor to solutions for widespread community problems. There remains much potential to expand its relevance, capacity, and influence for the wide-ranging benefits of parks and recreation to its members, profession, and public.
2. **Active Volunteer Engagement.** The PRPS Governmental Affairs Committee consists of interested volunteers, but like many other committees, suffers from a lack of engagement from many of its well-intentioned members, hindering its own effectiveness. PRPS can more closely engage with park-related Friends groups.
3. **Local Priorities and Perceptions.** Local officials do not consistently value creating a passionate community, establishing good working relationships, and contributing to solutions through parks and recreation. Most citizens underestimate the real costs to provide structured programming, and build, service, staff, and maintain lands and facilities.
4. **Shifting Information Channels.** New technologies and new perspectives are giving rise to new channels of information dissemination for both technological and economic reasons. These channels, like TikTok or gaming platforms, are shaped by audiences seeking new forms of contact and expression. Such a fluid transition affects how PRPS can remain a legitimate and trusted information source.

References

- *Local Government Officials' Perceptions of Parks and Recreation: NRPA 2017*
- *Drivers of Change: Summaries and Forecasts; ASAE Foresightworks, 2021, 2022 update*

Strategies

- A. **Public Policy.** Monitoring pertinent legislation, determining legislative priorities, issuing position statements, engaging legislators, and implementing public advocacy actions.
- B. **Advocacy Training and Events.** Planning, hosting, facilitating or collaborating with other entities to network and train current and future advocates on pertinent issues, techniques and resources.
- C. **Advocacy Communications.** Developing and implementing ongoing means of multiple advocacy actions and interactive communications with relevant stakeholders for coordinated messaging and mutual aims.

1. Public Policy & Advocacy	Outcomes	Agents	Priority	Timeline
Strategy A. Public Policy		<i>key on p.2</i>		
1. Legislative Review. Monitor pertinent state and federal bills, regulations, proposals and political climate to analyze, understand and communicate opportunities, probabilities and consequences.	a. Analyze and share information at GAC meetings; enlist members to engage in advocacy within their networks. Develop, coordinate and disseminate relevant supportive and defensive resources.	GA	ongoing	monthly review
2. Legislative Priorities. Establish priorities of legislative issues on behalf of industry and public stakeholders' needs and concerns.	a. Determine and articulate PRPS Legislative Priorities. Post and update on website; publicize in enewsletter.	GA	ongoing	annually or as needed
3. Position Statements. Articulate PRPS perspectives on parks, recreation, therapy, health, equity, environment, economy, transportation, infrastructure, workforce, etc.	a. Share with elected officials statewide in practical messaging. Incorporate into Op-Eds, media releases, social posts, webpages, and other communication channels.	GA	ongoing	annually
Strategy B. Advocacy Training & Events				
1. Public Advocacy & Networking Events. Collaboratively plan and host meetings and events with other mission-parallel organizations to educate, promote and enlist support on priority causes and issues.	a. Host New Legislator Education sessions on legislative priorities and advocacy issues.	GA, BOD	1	annually or as needed.
	b. Coordinate, contribute to Park and Recreation Caucus mtgs with authoritative resources and expert speakers.	GA	2	as scheduled
	c. Invite key legislators & staff to participate in select PRPS meetings, events. Encourage member agencies to engage, invite local and state officials to their community events.	ED, LNs, GA, BOD, Staff, Members	1	3-4x/yr
	d. Enlist PRPS members to display electronic PRPS marketing and branding, and other advocacy materials at community events.	MEM, GA, Districts	3	Annual Conf, PRP Day, Fall Mtg
2. Advocacy Training. Provide collaborative training to stakeholders in varying methods, forums & audiences on public policies, advocacy methods, research findings, lobbying req., etc.	a. Conduct BOD onboarding training on advocacy and lobbying rules.	BOD, GA	1	annually
	b. Conduct advocacy training for members, volunteers, and their agencies.	ED, LNs, Districts, Members	1	annually
Strategy C. Advocacy				
1. Relationship Building. Establish and sustain two-way communication and good working relationships with key leaders and members of the General Assembly, governmental departments, and other stakeholders who may have significant influence on parks and recreation issues.	a. Conduct legislative calls and visits. Coordinate with mission-parallel organizations with coordinated messaging.	GA, BOD, Members	1	restart in 2024
	b. Invite key legislators and staff to participate in articulating recreation and park-related issues. Provide relevant resources & encourage interaction with their constituents on the issues.	GA, Staff	2	begin in 2025
	c. Establish and develop PRPS District Advocates who will meet and coordinate with local officials to communicate the value of parks and recreation and the recreation economy.	Districts	3	begin by Fall 25
2. Coordinated Messaging. Position PRPS as expert industry authority in preparing and releasing Advocacy Alerts and supportive/defensive resources to members, elected officials and other stakeholder organizations.	a. Provide rationale and talking points to address proposed rules, regulations, decisions, etc., that could benefit or harm community wellness and other park and recreation interests.	GA	1	ongoing as needed
3. Compelling Storytelling. Compile and disseminate regular relevant stories through all media outlets. Coordinate and share with the Good For You campaign.	a. Develop case studies/community stories of innovative funding and other successful investments in parks, recreation and infrastructure from members and partners, RectAP projects, and other sources.	MEM, PART, Staff	1	stories 12x/yr appeals 6x/yr
	b. Create a regular schedule and effective outlets for disseminating stories for their maximum impact with stakeholders, elected officials, park users, and the public.	MEM, PART, Staff	1	by Q4 2024

Issue 2: Sustainable Funding

Ensuring adequate and sustainable funding for public park and recreation systems remains a top priority for Pennsylvania park stewards and recreation providers. Insufficient funding not only prolongs and exacerbates social inequities, environmental harm, and the maintenance of unsafe and poorly maintained facilities, but also hinders economic prospects, innovative solutions, new opportunities, responsive services, and the vocational appeal to new professionals.

Historically, public parks have been freely provided because they enhance the quality of life and improve public health and safety. Despite fees charged for structured recreational services, the overall costs of most park and recreation agencies heavily rely on tax subsidies. When local governments face financial constraints, competition for funding among other public services escalates, often resulting in a lower prioritization for park and recreation funding, particularly during budget deficits. This leads to a gradual decrease in tax support over time. While “doing more with less” may be a short-term expediency, it’s a long-term fallacy.

While governmental sources offer numerous grant programs and allocate hundreds of millions of dollars each year, these funds are distressingly inadequate to meet the demand. On average, the popular DCNR C2P2 Grant program is able to fund only about half of the qualified requests it receives each year.

Moreover, investments required for deferred park maintenance and repairs in Pennsylvania include \$645M for National Park sites, an estimated \$1.4B for state parks and state forests, and hundreds of millions of dollars for the needs of more than 6,250 city, county, township, and borough parks.

The funding crunch is intensified by economic inflation and the increasingly rapid societal changes brought about by COVID-19. Shifting demographics and economies, transforming markets and workplaces, digitizing operations, fluctuating supply chains, and adapting to newly emerging social mores all require additional investments in technologies, infrastructure, training, workforce development, and more.

Developing sufficient funding for parks, recreation, and conservation will include a mix of traditional and new sources and models, which may be best managed through purposeful, dedicated funds protected from political interference. However, for that funding to be sustainable, revenue sources must be reliable in the long term, impose a relatively small cost on the economy, and rely on contributions from all citizens.

Strengths

1. **Popular Support for Public Funding.** A Penn State survey found that 97 percent of Pennsylvanians think that state funds dedicated to preserving open space and farmland, providing parks and trails, and protecting rivers and streams should continue to be used for these purposes; 82 percent support increasing state funds for these purposes. Nationally, voters in 2022 approved a record number of dedicated park bonds.
2. **Federal and State Sources.** The *Land and Water Conservation Fund* provides matching grants to state governments for the acquisition and development of public parks and other outdoor recreation sites. In FY 2022, PA received \$8.5M. The *Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund* leverages 15% of the revenues from PA’s realty transfer tax, much of which goes toward community greenspace and improvement projects. In 2022, the PA General Assembly approved a nearly \$700M in investments for state park and forest infrastructure, community parks, recreation centers, trails, greenways, and similar purposes.
3. **Leveraging Local Funding.** Many sources of governmental funding leverage matching funds for their programs from local collaborators, and generate a many-fold return to the economy. Each dollar of Keystone Fund investment typically leverages \$3.13 in direct local investments in parks, trails, community green spaces, and libraries. A 2012 report by The Trust for Public Land found that every \$1 invested in land conservation through the Keystone Fund returned \$7 in natural goods and services to the PA economy.

Weaknesses

1. **Overwhelming Demand for Governmental Sources.** Despite recent commitments and a diverse portfolio of disbursement programs, governmental sources alone will never meet the enormous demand for recreation, park,

and conservation funding, let alone sustain it indefinitely. Governmental sources remain subject to shortfalls and political interference that threaten their availability and effectiveness.

2. **Unstable local funding.** In a 2022 PRPS Study on budgeting among competing community services, local officials showed a distinct preference to cut park and recreation funding the most during a budget deficit, although they would grant it the greatest increase during a surplus.
3. **Insufficient NGO Sources.** While nongovernmental funding sources can help to bridge the large gap in funding for parks and recreation needs, they remain inadequate to fill that niche. Additionally, many NGOs have specific limitations on eligible recipients, geographic service areas, projects and scopes, and do not provide ongoing operational support.
4. **Uncertain Philanthropic and Charitable Giving.** Philanthropy is facing years of flux in the 2020s, as the giving infrastructure expands in new directions, regulations change, controversy grows over the rising influence of wealthy mega-donors, and public-private partnerships multiply. Giving may become even more politicized, driving distrust in the sector as new channels cloak the transparency of donor agendas.

Opportunities

1. **People, Parks and Community Foundation.** Outside of governmental programs, no other statewide funding source directly supports recreational and educational opportunities, creates and sustains local parks, and promotes vibrant, livable communities. The growth of the new Foundation, expressly created by PRPS for these purposes, can help to fill that niche and close the funding gap.
2. **Philanthropic trends.** More giving will occur through public-private partnerships between the philanthropic sector, governments, and businesses; more corporate giving will serve as demonstrations of their social values. These shifts present PRPS with new opportunities to connect with donors, as well as new challenges.
3. **Working Relationships.** Local officials' working relationships with park and recreation directors strongly correlate to their perceptions of parks as being important to the community, as well as to the amount of funding they direct to these services.
4. **Public Officials' Engagement.** Public officials who personally use local parks tend to increase budgets for park and recreation services by a greater percentage than those who do not personally use parks. Public officials who agree that parks and recreation enhance the economy are more likely to push for increased investments for park and rec services.

Challenges

1. **Competition.** Competition for corporate dollars, foundation investments, and partnering collaborations is intense among many other worthy causes and organizations. In addition, Pennsylvania's nonprofit landscape is a mosaic of organizations working to fulfill similar missions.
2. **New Funding Sources and Models.** Developing sufficient and sustainable funding will likely include a combination of user fees, licensing, public-private partnerships, philanthropy, and innovative new models, with a reduced reliance on public funding.
3. **Tax-based Entities.** While municipalities may legally receive donations (which are tax-deductible by the donor if the gift is made for exclusively public purposes), many actively avoid soliciting monetary gifts for public projects. Moreover, many taxpayers are disinclined to give toward projects they believe should be funded through governmental sources.
4. **Continual Advocacy.** Park and recreation professionals must work personally and collectively to document, communicate, and advance the industry's tangible worth, and unite to protect vital funding sources at all levels.

References

- *Pennsylvania Park and Recreation Provider Study: Funding, COVID-19 Impacts, and Systemic Racism in Parks*; PRPS, 2022
- *PRPS Legislative Priority: Permanent and Stable Funding for Parks and Recreation*; PRPS, 2023
- *PRPS Statement on Parks and Recreation Investment in PA*; PRPS, 2023
- *Drivers of Change: Summaries and Forecasts*; ASAE Foresightworks, 2021, 2022 update
- *Economic Impact of Local Parks: An examination of the economic impacts of operations and capital spending by local park and recreation agencies on the United States Economy*; NRPA 2018
- *Local Government Officials' Perceptions of Parks and Recreation*; NRPA, 2017
- *Financing the Future: The Critical Role of Parks in Urban and Metropolitan Infrastructure*; NRPA, Urban Institute, National League of Cities, National Association of Counties
- *Summary of Key Findings from Pennsylvania Statewide Public Opinion Survey*; Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg, 2015
- Keystone Recreation, Park & Conservation Fund keystonefund.org/
- nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/upload/PA-State-Fact-Sheet_122022_508-2.pdf
- nrpa.org/blog/new-study-shows-benefits-exceed-park-costs/

Strategies

- Funds Development.** Initiate and support efforts to increase and diversify funding sources for parks, recreation, conservation, wellness, equity, and community connections throughout the state.
- Advocacy & Education.** Promote funding sources and conduct capacity-building training programs to educate stakeholders on funding strategies, revenue development and fiscal management.

2. Sustainable Funding	Outcomes	Agents	Priority	Timeline
Strategy A. Funds Development		<i>key on p.2</i>		
1. People, Parks & Community Foundation. Diversify and grow the Foundation. Offer grantmaking services to eligible agencies and organizations.	a. Develop customized case statements for revenue generation for each target audience, with key messages, support rationales and clear goals.	BOD, PPCF, Staff	1	begin Jan 24
	b. Make and manage grants for capacity and community development, recreational and education development, and PRPS organizational development.	BOD, PPCF, Staff	2	initially 1-2 grant periods/yr
2. Public Funding. Develop and contribute to coalitions working to increase public funding of park and recreation systems on local, state, and national levels.	a. Align with stakeholders to advocate for expansion and protection of dedicated funds for recreation, parks, conservation. Promote benefits and leveraged value of the P&R industry to local, regional, statewide and national economies.	GA	1	ongoing
	b. Petition DCNR to increase grant funding to expand RecTAP Grant projects.	Staff	1	Fall 23
3. Marketing Partnerships & Sponsorships. Expand to businesses not formerly aligned with the industry, such as real estate, health care, insurance, banking, etc.	a. Connect potential partners with statewide issues/causes they can support such as wellness, livability, green infrastructure, nature play, etc. Secure short- and long-term agreements.	Staff, PART	2	start Jan 25
Strategy B. Funding Education				
1. Funding Promotion. Compile and promote all sources and types of funding for recreation, parks, trails, conservation, research, health, transportation, community dev., etc.	a. Post on website, publish updates and alerts in SCOOP, share with missional partners.	Staff	1	monthly
2. Funding Training. Collaborate to educate stakeholders on fund development, grantsmanship, business planning and fiscal management.	a. Plan and conduct rotating series on funding basics, grantwriting, fundraising, public-private partnerships, tax/levied sources, capital development sources, operational fees, crowdfunding, sponsorships, planned giving, etc.	Staff, ED, LNs, Districts	1	annually
	b. Host a Funders Open Dialog with and among major foundations, philanthropists, corporations whose planned giving strategies align with P&R-related solutions.	Staff, BOD, PART	2	annually
	c. Advance an entrepreneurial approach for agencies via niche-filling possibilities & revenues that business-related activities can deliver. See <i>High Performance Agencies</i> by P.A. Gilbert	ED, LNs	3	by 2027

Issue 3: Collaborative Development

Much of what constitutes the appeal and livability of communities is a direct connection to public spaces and natural and cultural assets. Their facilities and features build a strong and resilient infrastructure. Their recreational opportunities bolster wellness and life satisfaction. Together, park and recreation systems contribute expansively to a healthy economy, environment, and society in dozens of documented, tangible ways.

Park and recreation professionals are among the highest enablers of personal and community wellness, yet are often hindered by a lack of full interagency and interdisciplinary awareness, cooperation, and integrated services. Their public effectiveness in enabling community solutions improves with more interaction with their counterparts in public health, social services, community development, public works, transportation, food distribution, and other services.

Studies show that most organizations, businesses, and government agencies fail to collaborate across business functions when implementing customer-facing strategies. Moreover, many governmental agencies and other public organizations do not readily identify parks and recreation as a go-to industry to help meet pressing community issues. While they may be willing to work toward positive change, they are often hampered by politics and/or bureaucratic structures that simply cannot move quickly on opportunities, make timely and productive decisions, or efficiently contribute to innovation.

Despite differences of goals, mandates and constraints, PRPS needs the contributions of governments and NGOs to be most effective in its mission. Governments can set policies and furnish funding. NGOs can invest their resources and accomplish things governments can't. Governments need the dynamism of NGOs to take risks and innovate. And NGOs need governments to provide scope and capacity.

Representing the industry and its diverse community connections, PRPS is ideally positioned to initiate and facilitate collaborations that "enhance life-enriching services for all Pennsylvanians." By empowering our partners' abilities to share expertise and resources across disciplines and jurisdictions, PRPS can help bring comprehensive solutions to complex public issues. Accessing a wider array of professional tools, resources, capabilities, and systems, and combining savvy specialists with the best resources for the job, our integration of services can spawn innovation, reduce costs, add value, and improve the quality of life.

Strengths

1. **Statewide Niche.** Through its members and partners, PRPS represents the full scope of park and recreation services, and is uniquely placed to initiate problem-solving solutions among all major stakeholders, regardless of the issue, through the networking of expertise, information, and resources.
2. **Connective Adaptability.** As a small nonprofit association with an entrepreneurial and connective leadership bent, PRPS is able to be flexible and quickly responsive to change, adopt the best management/leadership approaches, and seek innovative solutions to complex community problems and issues.
3. **Expert Authority.** Over the past several years, PRPS has developed into a much stronger and viable presence throughout the state. It has renewed its relevance to its members and partners, expanded its capacity to provide valued services, and enhanced its influence to achieve change in public policy and community wellness.

Weaknesses

1. **Organizational Inertia.** While many governmental partners and member agencies are often willing to work toward positive change, they are often hampered by organizational culture, leadership, or bureaucracy that cannot move quickly on opportunities, make timely and productive decisions, or efficiently contribute or embrace innovation.
2. **Collaborative Awareness.** The park and recreation industry includes many diverse disciplines and related fields, but a lack of full and continual interagency and interdisciplinary awareness, cooperation, and integrated services impedes the highest effectiveness and influence of the entire profession.

Opportunities

1. **Outdoor Economy.** The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis has documented that Pennsylvania’s outdoor recreation economy grew 22 percent from 2020-2021, with an additional 4,000+ jobs in the field added in the same time span. As the industry grows in its contributions to the economy, so does its public influence.
2. **Economic Pressure.** As economic pressures and societal changes force federal, state and local governments to re-evaluate public policies and funding priorities, many agencies may be more open to sharing services and partnering to do “more with more.”
3. **Empowering a New Workforce.** Pennsylvania society and workplaces continue to grow more diverse, equitable, and inclusive as values evolve and younger generations increase their share in the multigenerational demographic mix. New initiatives are emerging to dismantle systemic racism and support workers’ rights and protections in the face of social and economic change.

Challenges

1. **Declining Trust.** Trust in institutions and experts—including government, media, science, and health—is dropping, with important social, political, and economic implications. This decline in trust could fuel deeper political polarization, further erode social cohesion, and inhibit the formation of cooperative collaborations.
2. **Rejection of Expertise.** Public skepticism toward credentialed experts and institutions is growing. Expert advice has a reduced impact on public perception, with the public turning instead to non-credentialed and “unofficial” sources for guidance and information. At the same time, misinformation is increasingly able to route around authoritative information gatekeepers.
3. **Change Leadership.** The park and recreation industry in the public, private, and nonprofit segments of our economy are undergoing a great deal of change, due to political and economic cycles, technological advances, a changing society, and other factors. PRPS must stay abreast of industry and societal trends, and stay efficient and nimble enough to adapt and remain relevant to its members, partners, and the public.
4. **Universal Value Recognition.** Until PRPS and all its members and partners can fully educate our communities and our elected decision-makers on the indispensable value of parks and recreation, the profession must energetically combat public indifference that leads to declining resources and support.

References

- *Drivers of Change: Summaries and Forecasts*; ASAE Foresightworks, 2021, 2022 update
- *U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis*
- *The Gen Z Equation*; McKinsey Quarterly

Strategies

- A. **Interagency Collaboration.** Developing closer working relations within governmental agencies and NGOs, whose missions coincide with PRPS, by facilitating cooperation in shared opportunities.
- B. **Stakeholder Education.** Educating decision-makers, collaborators, and other stakeholders on the many ways park and recreation services bring solutions to specific community issues; and on effective advocacy, relationship building, and community leadership.
- C. **Workforce Development.** Developing the future workforce through better industry recruitment, enhancing workplace culture, and building workforce readiness.

3. Collaborative Development Outcomes		Agents	Priority	Timeline
Strategy A. Interagency Collaboration		<i>key on p.2</i>		
1. Integrative Professionals Forum. Host exchange of news and opportunities among working professionals in recreation, parks, trails, health, social services, therapy, planning, transit, conservation, economic dev., etc.	a. Build and maintain working relationships across professional disciplines and political boundaries. Conduct regional/statewide opportunities to share perspectives, expertise, and resources on specific community issues for real-life solutions.	ED, LNs, Districts	1	start Q2 2024
2. Business Council. Host R&P industry trends, updates, and networking with government, business, partner, and member stakeholders to share plans and progress for mutual opportunities.	a. Initiate and collaborate in developing surveys and opportunities; build meeting agendas from real world examples and cases of need. Follow-up with practical actions and resolutions.	BOD, Districts, LNs, DEI, PART	3	start 2025, then semi-annually
Strategy B. Stakeholder Education				
1. Public Leadership Series. Develop a series of learning modules/workshops on such practical How-To topics as building trust, fostering civil discourse, leading change, managing risk, planning contingencies, and other public leadership abilities.	a. Work with municipal associations to prepare, promote, and deliver such training programs to mutually-targeted audiences of local officials and decision-makers, who generally are not in the R&P industry, but have public leadership and management responsibilities over it.	ED, LNs, Districts	2	start 2025
2. Community Exchanges. Conduct regional workshops for municipal managers, elected officials, recreation boards, Friends groups, volunteers & park champions to impart & share knowledge, resources, assistance.	a. Collaborate with local municipalities to host interactive workshops on best practices of administration, planning, budgeting and operations, including local site tours to highlight and share management ideas.	ED, LNs, Districts, Staff	1	3/year, one in each District
Strategy C. Workforce Development				
1. Careers of Choice. Promote R&P as a viable career choice offering dozens of vocations in 8 broad categories, via multiple avenues targeting HS & college students, career changers, career advisors.	a. Develop, distribute and promote a short PA-based video on P&R careers to raise awareness among highschoolers and seasonal staff.	Staff, ED, LNs, Districts, DEI, COM	1	2024
	b. Coordinate with Learning Networks and members to visit classrooms and conduct other personal interactions with potential future practitioners.	ED, LNs, Districts, DEI	1	by Fall 2024, then ongoing
2. Credentialing Incentives. Advocate for employer adoption of industry-wide worker incentives & benefits for earning professional and trade certifications, agency accreditation, other learning programs for improving employee skills and increasing agency/client/customer/community value.	a. Develop and implement an ongoing campaign to promote the economic, social, cultural, and vocational values of tangibly investing in our human assets to benefit the organization, the workforce members, and those they serve. Target legislators and governmental, nonprofit and business employers.	GA, COM, ED, LNs	3	by 2027
3. Career Coaching. Invest in structured, professional coaching exercises and programs to assist members in need of job retraining, resume writing, leadership skills, career advancement advice, etc.	a. Establish Career Coaching advice into the Mentor Program. Assist members with specific career development and advancement goals.	ED, LNs, Mentors, Staff	1	Q1, 2024
	b. Contract with consultants to provide general & customized career coaching opportunities. Coordinate where possible with the Mentor Program, Leadership Development Academy, various scholarships, potential PPC Foundation grants.	ED, Staff	3	by 2027
4. Workforce Recruiting, Training & Retaining. Proactively respond to trends in work, technologies, and student and worker expectations as traditional education models yield to demands for new curricula, certificate programs, new modes of instruction, and related business skills development.	a. Expand the PRPS Job Center from merely a job posting service to an interactive hub for sharing tips and strategies for recruiting, onboarding, training and retaining valuable employees and gig workers.	ED, LNs, Districts, Staff, DEI, COM	1	start 2024
	b. Collaborate with 2- and 4-year PA colleges and other organizations to increase the relevance and availability of CEU and other niche training programs and modules to better prepare future workers in an evolving workplace.	ED, LNs, Districts, MEM	3	by 2027
	c. Partner with the PA Outdoor Recreation Office, Center for the Outdoor Recreation Economy, and others to assist in promoting awareness, research, standard-setting and curriculum development.	ED, DEI, Staff, COM	3	by 2026

Issue 4: Stakeholder Engagement

The culture of an organization is expressed in the behavior of its people, and how their collective actions are perceived and received by others. That group dynamic, in turn, influences its associated value.

A healthy organizational culture stimulates high stakeholder engagement and supports strong communications, which in turn helps solve problems, meet challenges, and fuel innovation and growth. Where quality is valued over quantity, creativity is prized above conformity, and cooperation outmaneuvers competition, all aspects of the organization thrive.

The range of an organization's stakeholder engagement can be depicted as a pyramid: At its base are many individuals who don't initiate or actively participate; they are simply followers and observers. At the peak are leaders who have a deep sense of personal duty, and who are self-motivated to advance the mission in their daily lives. They consistently add value to the organization, and others look to them as role models.

To instill a culture to reach the highest level of engagement among its stakeholders, PRPS must consistently invest in opportunities to merge practical action and service with developing long term, meaningful relationships. To achieve it, our leaders must work to transform people, programs, processes, and technologies.

Those who engage most with PRPS are often those who are also well engaged in their employment. They find fulfillment in tasks that offer emotional connection and commitment, bestow and require personal responsibility, and result in personal satisfaction and discretionary time and energy for other life-enriching experiences.

Not only are the nature and context of work changing—workers' needs are shifting too. Only one in four strongly agree they feel connected to their culture, and only about one in three strongly agree they belong at their organization.

The following positive statements, developed by Gallup, epitomize the most important elements of employee engagement, and can be equally applied to engagement with PRPS. To the degree the leadership of PRPS can elicit the following responses from its volunteer members and partners, so goes their engagement with PRPS.

1. I know what's expected of me.
2. I have the materials I need to do my job right.
3. I have the opportunity to do what I do best.
4. I've received recognition for good work in the past 7 days.
5. My supervisor cares about me as a person.
6. My opinions count.
7. My coworkers are committed to doing quality work.
8. I have a best friend at work [within PRPS].
9. My job is important to the success of the company [Society].
10. Someone encourages my development.
11. Someone has talked with me about my progress in the last six months.
12. I've had opportunities to learn and grow in the past year.

PRPS maintains separate administrative plans for Membership Development and Strategic Partnerships, which are annually revised, updated, and implemented for relevant results. This plan for Stakeholder Engagement focuses less on developing technical skills and more on ways to encourage deeper relationships and more engaged participation.

As stakeholder engagement rises, so does PRPS's organizational vitality. Its most valuable resources are its members and partners, and The Society must empower them as the assets they are.

Strengths

1. **Relevance.** To remain relevant in a changing society and a changing world, PRPS has made significant, strategic changes to its organizational and leadership structure and operational policies. These changes reflect a commitment by the Board of Directors to be responsive to the needs and preferences of its membership, to increase flexibility and efficiency, and to enhance its value to all stakeholders.

2. **Niche Dominance.** Specific industry-wide competition for professional membership among our target audience is low. Apart from a few small regional associations (often allied with PRPS), the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA), and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), there are no other viable associations seeking to serve the comprehensive needs of practicing recreation and park professionals in the state.

Weaknesses

1. **Outmoded Perceptions.** The traditional organizational operating model, dependent on direction and decision-making by autocratic volunteer leaders is no longer the PRPS practice. However, it is still a commonly accepted model in many members' familiar experience and remains a dominant concept among many emerging leaders and their perceptions of how they ought to act.
2. **Time Commitment.** Members and partners are often extremely busy, constraining their abilities to participate and be involved. Volunteer committees often lack informed input from their own members, due to competing time and work commitments, and are often slow to make decisions and drive progress.
3. **Employer Incentive.** Many prospective members who work for the state government, private care institutions, and other agencies receive no workplace benefit for professional memberships, development, or engagement, and must invest in such with their personal funds or time apart from their jobs.

Opportunities

1. **Next-Gen Professionals.** Millennials (b. 1981-1996) are now the largest generational cohort in the workforce, and generation Z (b. 1997-2012) is right behind them. But these generations are showing significant differences between them in their outlooks and priorities. PRPS will need to provide the kinds of training, mentoring, content, and other services that each value most, encouraging engagement that leads to loyalty.
2. **Volunteers.** Volunteers have an extremely wide range of skills, abilities, and experiences, but must understand that their positional roles and expectations between their employment and volunteer commitments are very different. Cultural, demographic, and technological changes are altering volunteer expectations and experiences.
3. **Marketplace Realities.** According to the book *Race to Relevance*, there are six marketplace realities that did not exist 25 years ago that have irreversibly changed for membership organizations. Each provide opportunities to create new ways of engaging with members and partners. They are: time, value expectations, market structure, generational differences, competition, and technology.
4. **Human-centered Approach.** In the face of expanding AI, the relative value of human skills, like empathy, intuition, flexibility, thinking, listening, relating, and collaboration, will increase markedly. PRPS leaders must take a human-centered approach to building its stakeholders' experience, demonstrating they are valued by recognizing their contributions. The extent to which PRPS adopts structures and leadership models to leverage these uniquely human strengths will drive its competitive distinction and stakeholder loyalty.

Challenges

1. **Socializing Trends.** Social media, telecommuting, and shifting social norms are reshaping patterns of socialization, both online and in person. Work life and social life are increasingly occurring in the context of online tribes and communities. The line between work and personal life will continue to blur as technologies allow activities associated with either sphere to be accomplished from anywhere.
2. **Personalized Artificial Intelligence.** Machine learning is combining with data analysis to enable software equipped with increasingly accurate pictures of consumers' and clients' lives and preferences (along with the perceived intrusions of privacy). The technology can support personalized microtargeting of current and potential members and partners; however, AI systems may be misused or become ineffective.

3. **Spectrum of Abilities.** An evolving recognition of disability requires greater accessibility and inclusivity in the workplace. Gaining ground is the concept that disability and ability are not binary but instead a spectrum, with each individual's physical, behavioral, and cognitive traits falling on multiple points along that spectrum. The number of members and partners who are aligned along such a spectrum will increase and broaden expectations for accessible solutions and environments. PRPS will need to navigate a complex and evolving terrain of expectations and rules in meeting the diverse needs of its stakeholders.
4. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.** Our society and workplaces will continue to grow more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. But this occurs against a backdrop of social and political polarization—with the workplace as a primary arena in which contending views collide and issues are worked out. To meet these challenges, inclusion and equity efforts should be treated as a systemic priority, supported by a new generation of tools and processes.
5. **Career Transitions.** Careers for life have given way to careers for life stage as workers and employers realize that time in a job or industry is a finite thing due to changing skills, interests, technologies and market needs. New resources and structures are needed to support a workforce that retrains or shifts careers regularly, resulting in generally looser ties or allegiances to PRPS than in the past.

References

- *Race to Relevance: 5 Radical Changes for Associations*, by Harrison Coerver and Mary Byers
- *Drivers of Change: Summaries and Forecasts*; ASAE Foresightworks, 2021, 2022 update
- *Unleashing the Human Element at Work: Transforming Workplaces Through Recognition*; Gallup, 2022

Strategies

- A. **Stakeholder Investment and Relations.** Recruiting, engaging, training, and equipping members and partners in the missional work of PRPS and expanding their industry influence.
- B. **Creating Great Workplaces.** Engaging expert partners to assess local workplace conditions and capabilities, assisting in employer and leadership training, and developing customized improvement plans for healthy, diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces.
- C. **Organizational Culture and Investment.** Investing in Board, Committee, and Staff development in ways to express, promote, and enforce PRPS organizational culture, and enable the highest capabilities of association governance and operations.

4. Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes		Agents	Priority	Timeline
Strategy A. Stakeholder Investment & Relations		<i>key on p.2</i>		
1. Empower & Celebrate Volunteers. Enlist, empower, and reward volunteers and working partners for specific, term-limited projects. Recruit from interested members and nonmembers for competencies and connections as needed. Publicly celebrate member and partner achievements, in and out of PRPS involvements.	a. Promote tangible benefits and prestige, and reward with public gratitude each quarter-year. Solicit and share first-person testimonials. Promote Level-Up engagement recognition system.	MEM, COM	2	quarterly
	b. Create Board-appointed Member Engagement coordinator to help support needs, positions, connections among Learning Networks, all volunteers, with direct recognition from BOD.	Member-at-Large Dir, Staff	2	monthly
	c. Incorporate a concise, meaningful recognition to all PRPS member and partner volunteers during the Annual Recognition & Awards Banquet. Highlight outstanding accomplishments, recognize volunteer leaders, distribute email badges, etc. Share recognitions in PRPS publications, social media channels, and to the volunteers' workplaces.	R&A, COM	1	annually
	d. Create and publicize monthly Member Profiles in The SCOOP, and 3x/yr Member Spotlights in the magazine, along with social media channels.	MEM, COM	1	monthly, 3x/yr
2. Member and Partner Development. Conduct purposeful networking actions to invite input and engagement among all stakeholders to gauge current interests, trends, preferences, needs, satisfaction, etc. Create actions to build member and partner relevance, capacity and influence.	a. Collaborate among various committees to create concise surveys and in-person exchanges at PRPS events to solicit usable opinions, perceptions & data. Analyze to take practical actions in providing future benefits, services, trainings, etc.	all PRPS Committees, LNs, PART	1	semiannually
	b. Invest in annual operational strategies to expand number of active members, partners & sponsors, and their respective influence and capacity. Incorporate ways to build relationships and promote interactions into every PRPS activity.	MEM, COM, PART, Staff	1	annually
	c. All PRPS leaders personally seek to build relationships and interactions, especially among those with lesser experience or contributions; in conjunction with the Mentorship Program.	BOD, Districts, all Comte members	1	ongoing
Strategy B. Creating Great Workplaces				
1. Great Workplaces Workshops. Conduct employee engagement workshops in agency workplaces. Upon endorsement from agency leaders & decision-makers, assess workplace needs and make recommendations for	a. Contract or partner with expert(s) to conduct interactive workshops, assess workplace culture, trust, health, security and safety for discussion, instruction, recommendations and actions. Funded by scholarships, sponsorships or grants.	BOD, Staff, ED, DEI	3	by 2027
2. P&R Professionals Day. Plan, conduct annual statewide recognition campaign, fostering positive cultures, volunteer and employee engagement, and reducing worker turnover.	a. Coordinate recognitions among agencies, members, stakeholders and the public. Model and advocate 5 Pillars of Recognition: fulfilling, authentic, equitable, embedded in the culture, personalized. Assist in planning and promoting Spotlight Celebrations. Publicly present Good Job Award.	COM, LNs, Districts, BOD, Staff	1	annually
Strategy C. Organizational Culture & Investment				
1. Board of Directors Development and Culture. Invest in the means, methods, and resources to enable the highest levels of individual and corporate effectiveness in best practices for association governance.	a. Plan, conduct annual whole-Board training on association governance, advocacy, member development, etc.	BOD	1	annually
	b. Update and conduct annual new member orientation within one month of installation of new members.	BOD	1	annually
	c. Conduct, analyze, discuss annual Board Performance Assessment. Make plans for personal, Board improvements.	BOD	1	annually
	d. 100% participation in Board members' annual personal giving to PRPS, and in active expressions of the Board's Culture of Giving.	BOD	1	annually
2. PRPS Organizational Culture. Create, promote, model and enforce visible expressions of PRPS Mission, Vision, Org. Culture, Volunteer Responsibilities, Code of Ethics, other professional standards.	a. Develop memes, reminders, illustrations, stories and other creative means for a constant presence and reminder. Attach brief mentions or hyperlinks in member messaging to create a modeled, pervasive, and enforced PRPS culture.	BOD, COM, DEI, Staff	1	ongoing
3. PRPS Administrative Staff. Invest in developing the PRPS Administrative Staff as frontline reps of PRPS and facilitators of all ideals and initiatives of this Plan.	a. Empower and enable ongoing professional staff development needs specific to nonprofit professional association management, and individual position responsibilities.	BOD, CEO	1	annually