

COMMUNITY PARKS AND RECREATION



An Essential Government Service in Pennsylvania



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Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and
Natural Resources Bureau of Recreation and Conservation and the
Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society, Inc.

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Preface

Imagine the potential for your local economy to flourish, your natural environment to thrive, your community to strengthen, and your residents to enjoy enhanced health and well-being. This is the transformative power of public parks and recreation.

With its distinctive mix of urban and rural areas, Pennsylvania's municipalities, operating under a vast and fragmented local government system, face many challenges in meeting their residents' diverse recreation needs. Our state boasts over 1,000 urban municipalities and one of the largest rural populations in the nation, with municipalities varying in size from less than 100 to more than one million people.

Many municipalities are too small to financially support recreation facilities like swimming pools and community recreation centers. In urban areas, parks and recreation budgets are often insufficient to provide residents with the necessary services. In suburban municipalities, recreation facilities and programs are frequently duplicated in neighboring communities. Sometimes, municipalities provide parks and recreation facilities for neighboring municipalities at a significant cost and without financial help.

Community Parks and Recreation is a comprehensive guide tailored for Pennsylvania municipalities of all sizes to help you initiate or improve your municipality's public parks and recreation services. It is a valuable resource for everyone—elected officials, municipal managers, parks and recreation or school board members, and community organization volunteers. Its purpose is to provide an overview of the basic concepts of public parks and recreation and demonstrate how this essential local government service can significantly enhance your community. This handbook is packed with a wealth of information and resources, including links to detailed material for those seeking more in-depth knowledge. In addition to the comprehensive text, you'll find a list of helpful resources at the end of the handbook in Appendix A.

Read on to learn more about the local government service that plays a fundamental role in making Pennsylvania a wonderful place to live.



CHAPTER 1

The Power of Parks and Recreation

Just as water, roads, police, and fire protection are considered essential public services, parks and recreation services are vitally important to improving a community's quality of life, ensuring the health of its residents, and contributing to its economic and environmental well-being. Pennsylvania communities that pride themselves on being great places to live have safe, equitable, and quality parks, trails, and recreation programs that residents value and enjoy.

This chapter presents the many ways local government parks and recreation services benefit Pennsylvania communities. We consider what community parks and recreation is all about. We also look at Pennsylvania's varied parks and recreation service providers.

So, what is community parks and recreation? A simple definition is the entire range of places, spaces, activities, and experiences offered to meet the recreation needs of your residents.

The pandemic demonstrated what is essential in our lives, and included on that list would be the

ability to connect with others, play, get outside, and enjoy nature. We discovered how vital our parks and recreation services are to our community. At no other time have our outdoor spaces been utilized more daily than during the pandemic. Our parks and trails were some of the only places where people could walk, run, fish, bike, hike, shoot hoops, or hang with friends.

Our local governments' parks and recreation services lead to healthier individuals and, ultimately, healthier communities. Pennsylvania municipalities that invest in park areas and recreation programs create opportunities for personal enrichment, fitness and wellness, economic growth, environmental integrity, and social and community welfare.

Much research supports the following statements that showcase the essential role of parks and recreation in our communities. Start using statements like these when defining the importance of parks and recreation, presenting your budget to your elected officials, and asking for more resources and support to improve your parks and programs.





Parks and recreation is a powerful public health strategy.

- People value the time they spend in parks and natural areas, whether walking their dog, playing basketball, or having a picnic. Along with these activities, time spent at parks and recreation facilities and contact with nature provides measurable health benefits such as lower levels of stress, reduced blood pressure, improved mood and self-esteem, less depression and anxiety, lower obesity rates, faster healing after surgery, reduced risk of substance abuse, and more.
- Parks and recreation provides space for sports, walking and biking trails, swimming pools, playgrounds, and many other recreation activities and programs designed to promote active lifestyles and social interaction. Parks with active amenities and structured programming, such as walking trails or fitness classes, are associated with significant increases in physical activity.
- Far too many Americans suffer from loneliness. Lonely people have lower immune function and are more likely to develop infections. Their mental health suffers, the risk of heart attack and stroke rises, and they can die younger. Parks and green spaces are part of the solution. Structured activities such as community gardening and special events bring people together. Still, even informal encounters such as watching children at a playground or walking on paths can bring much-needed social contact. People have social gatherings in parks, and children make new friends there.
- Parks and recreation provides essential community health services – from partnering with healthcare centers to provide flu shots and medical screenings, working with doctors on walking programs and park prescriptions, and providing healthy meals and nutrition services for children and older adults, to teaming up with local fitness centers to offer outdoor space for exercise classes.

Parks and recreation is critical to childhood development.

- Parks and recreation allows children to explore, discover, and learn about the outdoors. Children engage in health-promoting physical activity at parks and programs through self-directed play and a wide variety of sports activities. This helps children reduce screen time, sleep better, and maintain a healthy weight.
- Many children need alternative, hands-on learning environments to match their varied learning styles. Parks and recreation increases children's concentration and attention capacities and improves academic performance and social skills.
- Children engage in informal, experiential learning through play and shared experiences with peers, promoting creativity and imagination.
- Parks and recreation offers children a sense of place and belonging. The five "C's" of positive youth development – competence, connection, confidence, character, and caring – are each addressed through parks and recreation.

Benefits of Parks and Recreation

- People living near parks are physically and mentally healthier than those who do not.
- Parks and recreation counters social isolation by connecting people with nature and each other.
- Children who spend significant time in nature also experience better emotional stability and improved mental health.
- Parks and recreation boosts home values and property tax bases.
- Employers and employees are more likely to locate near high-quality park and recreation amenities.
- Local park and recreation spending supports economic activity and job creation.

Parks and recreation drives economic opportunity.

- Quality parks and recreation services are a source of positive economic benefits.
- Employers are likelier to locate or expand near high-quality parks and recreation amenities because they attract potential workers. Access to a nearby park, playground, open space, or recreation center is essential in deciding where people want to live.
- Parks and recreation services are often cited as one of the most critical factors in surveys of how livable communities are. Parks enhance property values and increase municipal revenue by attracting homebuyers.
- Recreation aids financial stability in families by providing affordable activities and helping to supplement income through part-time employment opportunities. Parks and recreation is also a leading source of first jobs for youth and young adults.
- A quality parks and recreation system is not just an expense; it's an investment. It serves as a catalyst for tourism, bringing visitors to spend money and time in your community. Parks and recreation programs generate revenue directly from fees but, more importantly, provide significant indirect revenues from sports tournaments and special events such as arts, music, and holiday festivals. Hospitality expenditures, tourism, fuel, and recreational equipment sales are of sustained value to local and regional economies.

Parks and recreation unites people and strengthens communities.

- Providing access for all to meaningful recreation programs and events strengthens your community by encouraging a sense of unity, belonging, and pride. Bringing your residents in touch with each other promotes ethnic and cultural understanding and harmony and enhances community spirit. People meet their neighbors and develop friendships at parks and at recreation programs.
- Parks and recreation provides residents with involvement opportunities that build leadership skills that can be used to tackle community concerns.
- Involving children in constructive, positive activities provides alternatives to self-destructive behavior and helps to keep them out of trouble.
- When parks are adjacent to residential areas, communities have fewer crimes, and neighbors tend to support and protect one another.



Parks and recreation enhances our natural environment and makes our communities resilient despite natural disasters and climate change.

- Parks preserve plant and wildlife habitats, foster community pride in the environment, protect natural resources and open space areas, nurture pollinator habitats, and enhance air, water, and soil quality.
- Areas lacking green space are more prone to flooding since soils and vegetation can capture stormwater before it floods streets and homes. Floods are on the rise due to more frequent and violent rain storms.
- Parks address the impacts of climate change and make communities more resilient by providing much-needed tree shade during extreme heat and absorbing floodwater during heavy rain. Heat waves in the United States have tripled compared to the long-term average. Extreme heat can lead to heat exhaustion, heatstroke, poor mental health, and cardiovascular stress. Pavement and other dark surfaces absorb heat far more than grass, plants, and trees, contributing to the urban heat island effect, which creates exceedingly hot neighborhoods where parks and vegetation are scarce.
- Parks and green spaces improve the environment by other methods, too. They improve air quality, reducing levels of particulate matter and other pollutants. Parks and protected public lands enhance water quality, protect groundwater, and provide vegetative buffers for development.
- Parks and recreation provides essential emergency services during natural disasters, opening facilities to serve as virtual learning centers, health clinics, and emergency shelters and supporting food distribution to children, older adults, and families.

For more statements on the power of parks and recreation, visit:

www.nrpa.org/

www.tpl.org/

The Parks and Recreation Landscape

The scope of parks and recreation services in Pennsylvania is vast. Providers range from family campgrounds, ski resorts, athletic groups, boy and girl scout councils, faith-based organizations and churches, and service clubs to federal, state, and local government. Their roles and responsibilities differ, but the recreation opportunities provided form an interrelated system of parks and recreation services within your community. These providers fall into one of three sectors.

- **The public sector** includes parks and recreation agencies at the national, state, regional, and local levels of government. These agencies provide park areas, recreation facilities, programs, and services supported by tax dollars for the general public's enjoyment.
- **The private for-profit sector** includes commercial recreation, travel, and tourism businesses. Examples include bowling centers, health and fitness clubs, movie theaters, ski resorts, golf courses, and amusement parks.
- **The nonprofit sector** includes social service organizations that focus on areas such as health, the environment, disability, the arts, religion, youth development, or older adults. They typically have a specific mission and rely on membership fees, fundraising, donations, and grants for their operation. Boys and Girls Clubs, Special Olympics, and YMCAs are examples. Organizations such as the Wildlands Conservancy and Natural Lands focus on natural resource protection, land preservation, wildlife habitat restoration, developing trail systems, improving streams, and connecting people to the environment.



The Roles of Government Parks and Recreation Providers

Federal government agencies acquire, develop, and maintain areas often unique in nature with scenic, historic, conservation, or recreation values to the entire nation. The National Park Service oversees 18 units in Pennsylvania, including the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Fort Necessity National Battlefield, and Johnstown Flood National Memorial. The United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service manages the 23,100-acre Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania, which contains national wilderness and scenic areas and two national wild and scenic rivers. The United States Army Corps of Engineers manages 28 locks, dams, and lakes throughout the state. Examples are Kinzua Dam, Loyalhanna Lake, and Raystown Lake.

State government agencies play an essential role in parks and recreation. Pennsylvania is home to 125 state parks managed by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). It is one of the largest state park systems in the country, with over 300,000 acres of property maintained for public enjoyment, with facilities such as campgrounds, lakes, and picnic areas. DCNR also manages over two million acres of state forest lands and administers the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program, which creates cross-sector partnerships that enhance a region's sense of place and strengthen regional economies. Pennsylvania's 12 Heritage Areas are independently established and managed and operate in 57 of our 67 counties throughout the Commonwealth. Five of Pennsylvania's Heritage Areas share a national designation through the National Park Service. The Pennsylvania Game Commission manages 357 state game lands totaling over 1.5 million acres, open to the public for hunting, trapping, fishing, and hiking. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission owns more than 40 lakes and annually stocks streams and lakes in Pennsylvania with fish. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission operates 22 historic sites and museums across the state.

County government agencies in Pennsylvania provide regional park areas, recreation facilities, and recreation programs. County parks offer passive and active use recreational facilities such as hiking trails, picnic areas, playgrounds, and acres of undeveloped open space. Environmental education and special events are the primary programs offered.

City, township, borough, and home rule local governments provide close-to-home public parks, greenways and trails, nature preserves, recreation facilities, and community recreation programs.

What makes one community in Pennsylvania more desirable to live in than another? It's not only the quality of the school system or the safety of the neighborhoods. A significant factor is how easily residents can access community facilities such as walking and biking trails, recreation centers, swimming pools, basketball courts, and athletic fields. Equally as important are the experiences residents have through involvement in community recreation programs.

Local government parks and recreation provides opportunities that guarantee every resident quality recreation experiences by:

- Maintaining park areas and recreation facilities for residents to enjoy, and at the same time, protecting and preserving the environment for future generations.
- Offering recreation programs and services that are consistent with residents' needs and interests and contribute to their health, well-being, and sense of community.

Pennsylvania's 500 **public school districts** have indoor and outdoor recreation facilities constructed with and maintained by tax dollars. The list includes indoor swimming pools, gymnasiums, weight training rooms, auditoriums, wrestling rooms, computer labs, ball fields, tennis courts, football stadiums, soccer fields, running tracks, and playgrounds. School districts may own the only recreation facilities in many rural areas of Pennsylvania. School districts play a vital role in providing local parks and recreation services when they allow community use of their recreation facilities by local government and other recreation providers such as youth sports organizations.



Chapter 2

Resident Involvement in Parks and Recreation

Of course, you want to provide your residents with the best parks and recreation services possible. So, how do you determine what's right for your community, and how do you get started?

This chapter covers three critical strategies for enhancing and expanding community parks and recreation services: increased resident involvement and engagement, understanding your community, and the importance of planning.

Parks and recreation is a people-centered service, so providing it with the active involvement of your residents makes sense. While sometimes contentious, citizen involvement is more often productive and rewarding and is essential to creating a successful park and recreation system. Engaging the community lets you directly involve your residents in parks and recreation design, planning, and management functions. Forming a parks and recreation board is key for Pennsylvania municipalities to get that necessary public involvement.

This chapter explains how your community benefits from having a parks and recreation board and outlines the board's roles and responsibilities. Understanding your community starts with understanding who lives there, and we provide the key ways to gain that understanding. Lastly, we show why planning is essential to building quality parks and recreation systems.

Why Should You Have a Parks and Recreation Board?

When local elected officials recognize a need to provide parks and recreation services for their residents, they often create parks and recreation boards. State municipal codes permit municipalities to appoint board members, acquire and develop park areas and recreation facilities, and offer recreation programs. An ordinance is passed that spells out the board's title, number of members, powers, duties, and responsibilities. Most parks and recreation boards in Pennsylvania are advisory boards, and many don't have the benefit of part-time or full-time staff.

As a function of municipal government, the parks and recreation board oversees and advocates for your community's parks and recreation system. To keep lines of communication open, it's helpful to appoint an elected official as a liaison to the parks and recreation board.



What Do Parks and Recreation Boards Do?

They benefit your community by:

- Advising elected officials and making recommendations on all aspects of parks and recreation.
- Keeping elected officials and residents informed, making them aware of the importance of parks and recreation, and enlisting their help and support.
- Providing input for the parks and recreation budget and raising funds to supplement budgeted funds.
- Soliciting public input to meet your residents' parks and recreation needs.
- Developing the parks and recreation mission and vision for your community.
- Promoting park areas, recreation programs, and services.
- Developing community pride in and support of your parks and recreation system.
- Serving as a buffer between your citizens and elected officials on controversial issues.
- Providing continuity from year to year in your parks and recreation system operation.
- Helping to plan and conduct recreation programs and special events and involve residents as volunteers.
- Conducting the search and interview process to hire full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees if your budget allows.
- Undertaking a comprehensive recreation, park, and open space plan to provide the structure and strategies for your community to develop a quality parks and recreation system.
- Learning about the parks and recreation field by attending meetings, training sessions, and conferences and sharing that knowledge with your community.

The Recreation and Parks Board Handbook contains more detailed information on developing and operating parks and recreation boards:

<https://prps.org/dcnrpublications>



Multi-Municipal Cooperation for Parks and Recreation

As Pennsylvania's smaller municipalities recognize the need to provide parks and recreation services, they realize cooperating with neighboring municipalities to create regional parks and recreation agencies is a win-win situation. Pennsylvania's Intergovernmental Cooperation Act is the foundation for municipalities to form regional agencies by creating an intergovernmental agreement. Another way to provide joint parks and recreation services is to create an authority under the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Act.

The reason for pursuing regional parks and recreation is to assemble a tax base to support a full-time parks and recreation service. This allows smaller municipalities to pool their resources to develop recreation programs, maintain recreation facilities, and hire staff that none could afford to do alone. The cooperating municipalities determine a regional agency's scope, ranging from recreation programming, swimming pool management, and trail development to operating a large regional park complex.

Regional parks and recreation agencies are policymaking boards with implementation powers but no taxing authority. They receive an annual appropriation from their municipal partners, are responsible for policy decisions, and employ and supervise the staff. Partnering local governments control the appointment and removal of board members.

If you're interested in exploring opportunities to work with neighboring municipalities, the Multi-Municipal Cooperation for Recreation and Parks Handbook will be helpful:

<https://prps.org/dcnrpublications>

DCNR has grant money available to help. Contact your DCNR Regional Advisor for information. Advisory parks and recreation and policymaking regional boards are encouraged to join the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Professional activities like attending conferences, working on task forces and committees,

and serving in leadership positions provide valuable networking and learning opportunities.

www.prps.org/

www.nrpa.org/

Understanding Your Community

Many factors affect your municipality's role as a parks and recreation provider. The more you know about your population and community, the better you'll be able to plan and establish a quality parks and recreation system.

Community Characteristics

Factors about your community to understand include:

- **Demographic Data.** Census data are published every 10 years. To be more helpful, they are adjusted annually to reflect population changes accurately. These demographics influence people's demand, need, and preference for recreation opportunities. To best understand your community, you need to know who lives there. A demographic analysis of the total population and its key characteristics, such as age, gender, income levels, race, ethnicity, and disability, is essential.

Mainly Caucasian, native-born Pennsylvanians populate our rural communities. Pennsylvania's cities and suburbs are much more diverse than its rural areas. Urban communities like Allentown, Lancaster, and Reading have substantial Hispanic/Latino populations, while cities such as Philadelphia and Harrisburg have a high percentage of black residents. Across the Commonwealth, municipalities of all sizes are becoming increasingly diverse, as many ethnic groups call Pennsylvania home. It isn't unusual for a larger community to have more than 50 languages spoken.

A more diverse population requires more foresight and planning for parks and recreation. Traditional programming may not be appropriate for a population comprised of more minority groups than in previous history. For example, the Hispanic/Latino population uses passive recreation differently than other groups and for different durations. A picnic shelter for large, typically multigenerational families is important to the Hispanic/Latino population but may not be as significant to the Caucasian population. Recreation programs and service participation can differ based on culture and societal norms.

Which areas of your community have a greater number of foreign-born residents? Answering questions like this helps identify where you have opportunities to shape activities and programs that are inclusive of residents' various cultural backgrounds.

For example, an increase in the Indian population can lead to more use of parks and recreation facilities for weddings and the need for cricket fields. Recreation programs and facilities focused on older adults are more important for communities with an increasingly aging population.

- **Health and Social Concerns.** What health and social concerns are most prevalent in your community? Public parks and recreation, along with other social service agencies, can alleviate community problems such as gang violence and drug and alcohol abuse by offering recreation programs as prevention activities. Parks and recreation facilities and programs provide therapeutic recreation services and improved accessibility to meet the needs of your disabled and growing aging populations.
- **Economic Data.** Is your local economy diversified or dependent on a single industry? Is employment relatively stable? What is the amount of discretionary income? What percentage of your residents are living in poverty? Answers to these questions help you understand your residents' ability to pay for parks and recreation services.
- **Political Atmosphere.** Are your elected officials parks and recreation "friendly?" Do they understand the value of parks and recreation as related to social concerns? Do they support financing of park facilities, recreation programs, and services?



Community Parks and Recreation Inventory

In most communities, citizens have many recreational opportunities to choose from. Local government is part of a complex group of interrelated public, nonprofit, and private agencies contributing to your residents' recreation facility and program opportunities.

Compiling an inventory of all recreation providers, their recreation programs, and their physical resources will help you determine what community needs are being met, what's being duplicated, and what activities and facilities are missing. This information will also help your municipality identify its service role, particularly in providing recreation programs.

Public Outreach

Another critical way to understand your community is to ask your residents what they think about current parks and recreation services and what they'd like to see in the future.

Municipalities can collect public input through various methods, such as:

- **Surveys.** Surveys of citizen interests and preferences are the most common assessment technique. Mailed surveys are generally based on a random sample of households. The survey results estimate the actual preferences of the entire population being studied. The precision of the estimate and the level of confidence placed in it largely depend on the survey response rate. Random sample mailed surveys are time-consuming and expensive to conduct. Online surveys are used more frequently since they give your entire population a chance to respond, automatically provide the results, and are less costly to administer.
- **Forums and Public Meetings.** Forums and public meetings can provide valuable insight into citizen parks and recreation needs. Well-publicized and professionally monitored forums and meetings are most effective.
- **Focus Groups.** Focus groups solicit in-depth input about parks and recreation services. People are selected based on their unique perspectives on specific issues. Focus groups work best with no more than 12 members and a trained facilitator.
- **Key Person Interviews.** Consulting knowledgeable community members enhances your understanding of parks and recreation needs. Interviews can be in person, over the phone, or via email.

Why Should You Plan?

Planning for parks and recreation is necessary for your municipality to:

- Identify your current parks and recreation needs and issues.
- Clarify your direction for park and trail development, open space preservation, and recreation programming.
- Obtain your fair share, make well-informed decisions, and wisely spend local tax dollars.
- Access grant funds.
- Evaluate your parks and recreation services by providing benchmarks for comparison.
- Foster teamwork and collaboration to build trust among elected officials and residents.

The key to successful planning is implementation. You can do all the planning in the world, but not much will change without the necessary time and resources to implement the plans. As long as you commit to implementation, parks and recreation planning is well worth its cost.

Resident involvement is crucial to the success of your plans. Elected officials and parks and recreation board members should be actively involved in the planning process from start to finish.

DCNR Regional Advisors will be the first to tell you that the parks and recreation system of your dreams won't happen unless you plan. They can also give you information on grant sources that are available for planning. See Appendix B for a list of regional offices.

Municipalities are involved in these ten types of planning for community parks and recreation:

- Community comprehensive plans
- Comprehensive recreation, park, and open space plans
- Park master site development plans
- Trail plans
- Swimming pool and indoor recreation facility feasibility studies
- Land conservation and stewardship plans
- Active transportation plans
- Strategic plans
- Technical assistance planning
- Internal operations plans

Community Comprehensive Plans

When undertaking a community comprehensive plan, all community elements are studied. Parks and recreation is only one part of comprehensive planning, along with other systems like public safety, transportation, and public works infrastructure. This plan establishes where parks and recreation fits in the big picture of your community. The comprehensive plan must include a substantial chapter on parks and recreation with in-depth analysis and solid recommendations for improving your services.

In most areas of Pennsylvania, it's better to do community comprehensive planning by studying a regional area like the boundaries of the public school district, rather than a single municipality.

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) encourages regional plans and provides grant funding for them:

<https://dced.pa.gov>



Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plans

A comprehensive recreation, park, and open space plan is an in-depth study that focuses on developing and improving parks, recreation programs, and recreation facilities and preserving natural resources. It's created with significant public input and covers a minimum of 10 years to guide your decisions.

Here are the planning steps your consultant will follow:

1. Inventory and analysis of existing conditions:

- A needs assessment to get public input on community parks and recreation needs
- Government structure and lines of authority for parks and recreation
- A listing of the natural resource areas in your municipality
- Population demographics
- The number, acreage, and distribution of public park areas and recreation facilities
- School, semi-public, and private parks and recreation areas
- Park maintenance operations
- Recreation programs
- Financial resources

2. Recommendations on:

- Parks and recreation mission and vision
- Park areas, trails, and recreation facilities
- Open space, greenways, and natural resource protection
- Recreation programs and services
- Park maintenance
- Safety and security
- Financing and funding sources
- Marketing and public relations
- Partnerships
- Staffing

3. An implementation action plan with:

- Timelines with short-term and long-term priorities
- Responsibility for implementation
- Funding sources
- Operating and capital costs
- A process for annual plan updates

When it's completed, your governing body officially adopts your plan according to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. Smaller municipalities are encouraged to contact neighboring municipalities and develop a regional plan. DCNR provides matching funds to help cover the cost of preparing comprehensive recreation, park, and open space plans.

Park Master Site Development Plans

When creating a new public park or renovating an existing park, the best place to start is with a park master plan before spending time or money.

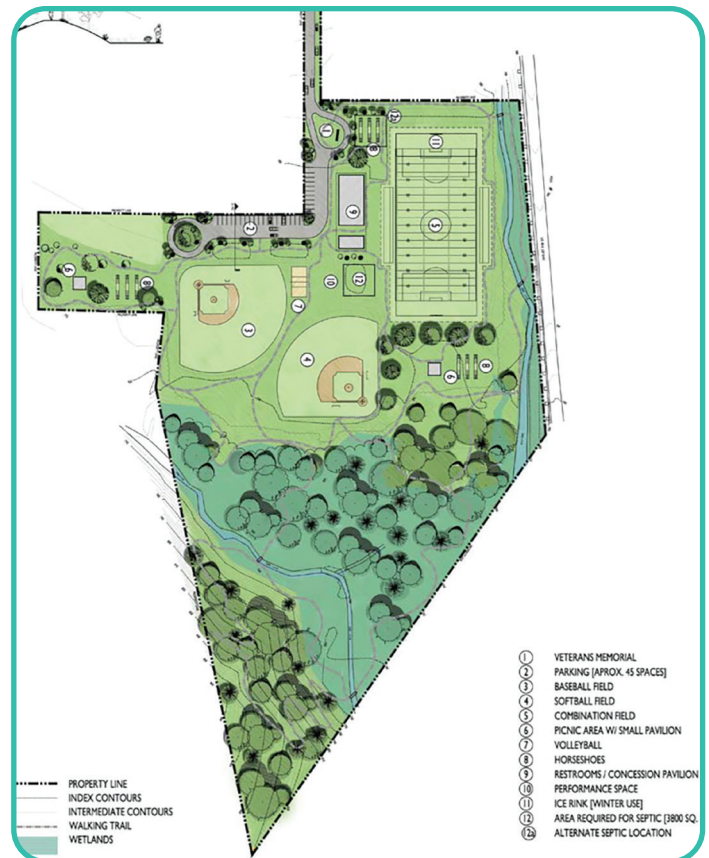
As part of the park master plan process, you'll examine how the park fits into your community's overall park system and existing site conditions, such as adjacent neighbors, topography, site access, utilities, and natural areas to preserve. The plan focuses on balancing protecting natural resources and meeting public recreation needs.

Involving your residents is a must! Determining what recreation areas and facilities your residents need and desire is crucial. Your planning process should include park neighbors, park users, and non-users. Meeting with adjoining property owners early in the planning process is essential to answer their questions and concerns about the proposed park. Public engagement techniques include conducting interviews, convening focus groups, utilizing an online survey, and holding public meetings. These help you identify key needs, issues, and challenges.

This public input is used to prepare a schematic design for your park. Based on the site's natural features, your community priorities for active and passive recreation facilities are placed there. When designing park areas and recreation facilities, keeping future maintenance costs low is a priority. The park master plan includes estimated operating and maintenance costs, projected revenues, and recommended safety and security procedures.

Your consultant prepares a timeline based on your available funds, including the costs to develop each facility. Elected officials, board members, and residents review the park's schematic design, and adjustments are made. Your final product is a phased development plan for your park.

Having this plan increases your chances for public and private funding. Generally, to get park rehabilitation and development funds from DCNR, you need a park master plan. Plus, your presentation to a local business is much more effective when you can show a plan, clearly discuss your funding needs, and explain how the company can be a community partner to make the park a reality.



Trail Plans

Improving community walkability and bikeability is a top priority for Pennsylvania municipalities of all sizes.

DCNR's goal is to have a trail within 10 minutes of every Pennsylvania citizen. To meet this goal, DCNR's Bureau of Recreation and Conservation provides grants to support the planning, enhancement, and expansion of non-motorized (hiking, bicycling, mountain biking, and horseback riding) and motorized trails (snowmobiling, four-wheel driving, and all-terrain vehicle riding).



Trail planning projects examine the feasibility of developing land trails and trail-related facilities and provide a road map to making the trail a reality. A trail study provides local decision-makers with enough information to help them decide whether or not to pursue trail development.

Trail planning efforts target a specific linear corridor of open space that may have been identified in greenways, trails, and open space network plans or other local or regional planning efforts. The plan may study the creation of trail-based greenways, conversion of an abandoned rail corridor to a trail, or development of a motorized trail facility. Trail studies begin with assessing the feasibility of developing and maintaining a trail. Establishing ownership patterns and support of landowners is a key work task. Once determined feasible, effort is spent selecting the physical layout of the trail. The final trail plan recommends protection options, roles, potential cost estimates, and how best to acquire, develop, and maintain the trail corridor.

Swimming Pool and Indoor Recreation Facility Feasibility Studies

A feasibility study is undertaken when your community wants to explore whether a swimming pool or indoor recreation facility project is viable. It's a plan done ahead of time to determine whether to make a significant expense.

These studies assess resident interest and community support, market characteristics, location, physical/structural viability, and the legal and financial capability to acquire, develop, rehabilitate, manage, and sustain a swimming pool complex or indoor recreation facility. A swimming pool complex includes a pool, bathhouse, concession stand, parking, and other site amenities.

Suppose your municipality wants to renovate an existing swimming pool or indoor recreation center or build a new one. In that case, a feasibility study is required to be eligible for DCNR grant funding for future site development or rehabilitation.



Land Conservation and Stewardship Plans

Land conservation and stewardship plans entail substantial research by experts in critical habitat identification and assessment and substantial mapping of your municipality's sensitive environmental and important habitat areas.

In addition to DCNR grants for parks and recreation projects, municipalities are eligible for DCED's Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program grants to plan, acquire, develop, rehabilitate, and improve public parks, recreation areas, greenways, and trails and undertake river conservation projects.

www.dcnr.pa.gov/

<https://dced.pa.gov/programs/greenways-trails-and-recreation-program-gtrp/>

Active Transportation Plans

Active transportation plans provide a roadmap for improved walking and bicycling conditions. The planning process documents existing conditions and includes steps for gathering input and building community support to lay the groundwork for funding and implementing various projects, programs, and policies for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. PennDOT's How-to Guide for Developing Active Transportation Plans provides more details on preparing active transportation plans.

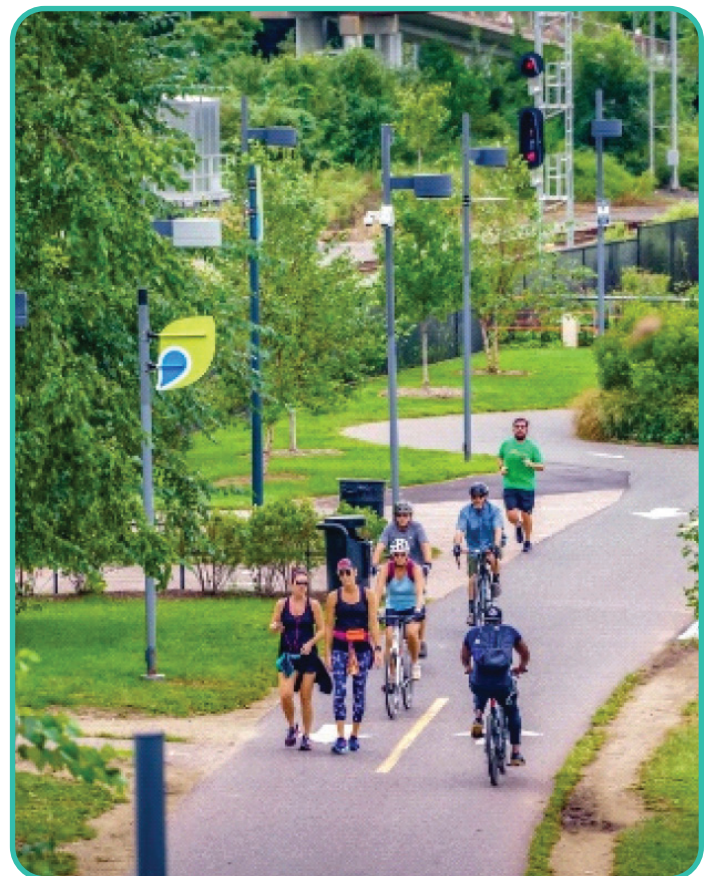
WalkWorks is an initiative between the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Downtown Center that provides funding and supports the development and adoption of active transportation plans or related policies. Its mission is to increase access and opportunities for physical activities, such as walking, biking, wheeling, and using public transit, to guide the establishment of safe, accessible, active routes connecting everyday destinations.

Strategic Plans

Strategic planning is critically important to take your parks and recreation system from where it is today to where it could be. A strategic plan clarifies your mission and vision for parks and recreation, outlines what needs to be accomplished to attain your vision, and establishes a framework to measure your success.

A strategic plan answers three basic questions: Where are you now? Where would you like to be? How do you get there? The plan has a three to five-year time frame and provides direction so everyone associated with your parks and recreation system understands where they're headed and the steps to get there. It gives you a forward-looking, opportunity-seeking approach to providing parks and recreation services for your community.

Once completed, the strategic plan is approved by your governing body and includes timelines, task assignments, and reporting procedures. Its value is measured by improved parks and recreation services and progress toward reaching goals.



Technical Assistance Planning

DCNR funding is available for technical assistance planning projects that help build local and regional capacity to better develop, manage, and promote park and trail facilities and recreation programming.

The Peer Program assists municipalities with hiring a professional consultant to study specialized parks and recreation issues. Funding is available to hire a peer, typically a parks and recreation professional, to collaborate closely with community leaders to develop an action plan.

A peer project to develop a new regional parks and recreation agency is generally held to be eligible for the Circuit Rider Program, which provides grant funds for county or regional organizations to hire a professional, full-time staff person. The program aims to initiate new regional programs and services that position partnering municipalities to meet their recreation, parks, greenways, open space, and natural resource and community conservation needs more efficiently and effectively by working together.

The Recreation and Parks Technical Assistance Program (RecTAP) is a statewide technical assistance program that provides grant funding for municipalities and nonprofits to contract with experts to offer advice and assistance on specific parks and recreation issues. The grant funding supports “start-up” or “stepping stone” projects that lead to the finalization or expansion of more significant work. RecTAP is administered by PRPS and funded by a grant from the DCNR Community Conservation Partnerships Program using the Environmental Stewardship Fund.

www.prps.org/prps-grants

Internal Operations Plans

The most effective municipal governments undertake specific plans to address and improve their operations. Use a specialized consultant if no one on your parks and recreation board or municipal staff has expertise in the operations area you want to study. Internal operations plans are most commonly completed for these areas:

- Board and Staff Development
- Information Technology
- Maintenance Management
- Marketing
- Recreation Programming
- Revenue Development
- Risk Management
- Safety and Security



Chapter 3

Investing in Parks and Recreation

Do you want to save open space, develop walking trails, construct a community recreation center, provide community recreation programs, or hire a parks and recreation director? Or do you just want to improve your parks and recreation services but don't know where or how to start?



DCMR Regional
Advisors Map

Whether you're a full-time parks and recreation director, a municipal manager with this as part of your responsibilities, or a volunteer parks and recreation board chair doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how small or large your community is. DCMR Bureau of Recreation and Conservation

Regional Advisors are available to meet with you, tour your parks, and advise you on all aspects of parks and recreation.

This chapter covers the knowledge needed to provide community parks and recreation services: acquiring, developing, and maintaining park areas, trails, and recreation facilities; offering recreation program opportunities; conserving and protecting natural resources; and addressing indoor recreation needs. We also show you the numerous ways to finance parks and recreation services.

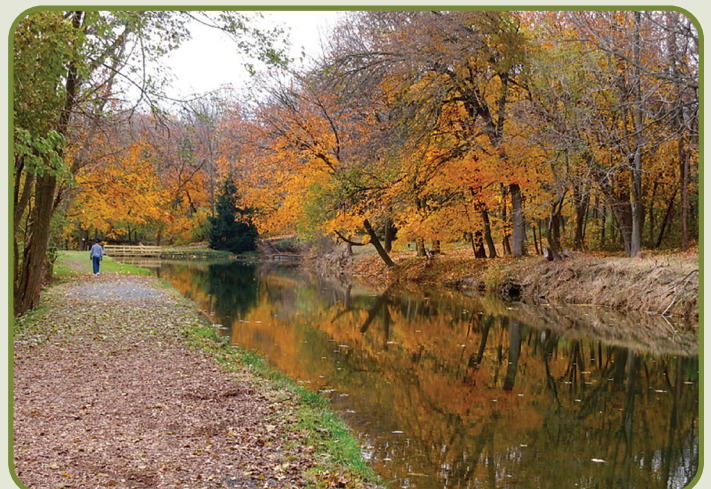
Parkland Acquisition

Municipalities acquire public parkland in a variety of ways.

- **Purchasing Property.** The municipality and seller negotiate and agree on a price. Techniques are often used to close the sale, such as:
 - Option to buy, which gives a municipality the right to purchase the property with no other competition until a set date, allowing them time to raise money for the acquisition and line up support.
 - Retention, which allows the seller to occupy the property for a set time after selling.
 - Life estates, which allow the seller to occupy the property for the rest of their lives.
 - Bargain sale, when sellers reduce the price of a property below fair market value because of tax advantages they may receive.

- Transfer, when one agency purchases a property and then transfers it to another. Organizations such as the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land often hold land until it can be transferred to a public agency.

- **Mandatory Dedication.** Approving residential development increases the demand for parkland while diminishing the supply. With sufficient planning, mandatory dedication is a reliable method to finance needed recreation facilities. This practice requires land developers to dedicate part of their development as parkland or pay fees in lieu of land dedication for public park purposes. Municipalities must adopt a comprehensive recreation, park, and open space plan and pass an ordinance that meets the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requirements.
- **Eminent Domain or Condemnation.** Municipalities can acquire property from an unwilling seller when the acquisition and use of the property are of a more significant public benefit than the continued private ownership of the land. A certified independent appraiser determines the price of the property.
- **Easements.** Easements allow municipalities to use someone's land for a specific purpose. Trails often rely on easements to pass through private property. Easements can be written permanently or for a set time.
- **Leases.** Leases are a common way to acquire use of land or buildings for a specific time. Long-term leases between a municipality and property owner are usually acceptable to receive state funds for property improvements.
- **Gifts.** Property gifts are donations from the owner to a municipality. The owner receives a tax write-off for the value of the property.



Providing Parks, Trails, and Recreation Facilities

Municipal parks and recreation systems contain a variety of park types.

Pocket parks are smaller than one acre and are frequently created on small, irregularly shaped public or private land parcels, such as beside railways, beneath utility lines, or in vacant building lots or parking spots. Facilities found in a pocket park include benches, tables, art installations, and fountains.

Mini parks are less than five acres and provide close-to-home recreation in a ¼-mile service radius. Playgrounds and benches are typical amenities in a mini park.

Neighborhood parks are five to 15 acres in size and are within walking or biking distance of residents, with a ½-mile service radius. They contain facilities such as play equipment, ballfields, game courts, picnic pavilions, and walking paths.

Community parks are generally 30 to 50 acres or larger and include active and passive facilities. Trails, picnic areas, and natural areas complement ball fields and game courts to provide a varied outdoor experience. Comfort facilities such as restrooms, shade, and sitting areas are important features of community parks. In contrast to a small neighborhood playground where you would spend up to an hour, destination playgrounds and spray grounds are being built in community parks that attract visitors from throughout the area to spend a few hours or even a day there. Often, they're boundless playgrounds that serve children of all abilities.

School/community parks adjoin a school and are developed and used for both recreation and education under an agreement between a municipality and school district. This type of park maximizes public resources and contains facilities like youth-oriented game courts and ballfields, playground areas, and walking paths.

Sports complexes consolidate sports fields and related facilities in a centralized location. They're associated with high visitation and revenue generation and contain facilities such as lighted ballfields, spectator areas, restrooms, and concession stands.

Special-use facilities like ice rinks and golf courses are provided for single-purpose recreation. In increasing numbers, municipalities are building community recreation centers. These facilities allow residents to maintain active lifestyles regardless of weather, which is vital in a four-season climate like Pennsylvania's. Instead of small neighborhood centers, communities are developing full-service recreation centers with aquatics facilities, gymnasiums, activity rooms, and fitness centers geared to serve all ages.

Trails are the most preferred recreation facility in Pennsylvania, according to current levels of use and the results of community parks and recreation surveys statewide. Trails connect neighborhoods, parks, schools, and other community destinations. They can be multipurpose for walkers, runners, bicyclists, cross-country skiers, and equestrians or designed for motorized vehicles such as snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles.

Natural resource areas and preserves protect the natural environment, provide wildlife habitat, and often offer opportunities for environmental education. Trails, signage, and support facilities are typical features. Nature centers and areas for environmental education are becoming more important in local parks and recreation.



Conserving and Protecting Natural Resources

Local municipalities increasingly protect open space and sustainably manage it and its natural resources for public use and environmental conservation.

Open space conservation preserves the environment for future generations by preserving and managing natural areas and initiating environmental education programs. Natural areas provide teens and adults with quiet places to reflect and children with opportunities to discover the joys of nature.

Undeveloped recreation areas are open-space sites where the natural environment is of primary importance, and minimal facility development is required. Examples are nature preserves, wetlands, and forests. Natural resource areas require less maintenance but more attention to protect them from visitor impacts.



Conservation and Environmental Stewardship

The benefits of conservation and environmental stewardship of natural resources are many, including:

- Offering all ages access to affordable ways to experience and appreciate nature.
- Providing opportunities for education about the value of conservation to the public.
- Providing carbon-reducing sustainable landscapes that cleanse air and water, replenish aquifers, reduce stormwater runoff, and protect wildlife habitat.
- Contributing to the economic well-being of communities through energy and resource conservation.

The Importance of Parks and Recreation Maintenance

Parks and recreation maintenance aims to provide clean, safe, and attractive areas and facilities for public use. Efficient and effective parks and recreation maintenance operations enhance people's recreation experiences, save money, reduce liability, and foster environmental stewardship.

Park maintenance involves:

- Routine, regularly scheduled tasks to keep a park area in good shape, such as mowing grass, lining athletic fields, weeding, and watering flower beds.
- Preventive repairs to forestall excessive wear and expensive repair of facilities.
- Daily custodial and housekeeping functions such as cleaning restrooms and emptying trash cans.
- Inspections of facilities such as playgrounds and swimming pools for repair needs.
- Set up, tear down, and clean up for recreation programs and special events.
- Steps taken to prepare areas for active use at the beginning and to close them down at the end of each season.
- Scheduled improvements such as repairing a backstop, replacing a roof, and painting a room.
- Emergency repairs that result from vandalism, accidents, and weather damage.

The most important elements of a park maintenance program are planning and scheduling. It doesn't matter how big or small your operation is; a planned maintenance program assures the degree of safety, use, and appearance residents deserve. Scheduling maintenance work consists of using a written checklist of tasks and fitting jobs into a daily format that is flexible enough to be revised when the weather, staff, and equipment changes.

If knowledge of how the work gets done is kept within the heads of maintenance staff, assigning jobs and determining priorities is much more difficult. Preparation of written plans gives you the information you need. To develop a park maintenance plan:

- Involve employees to get their complete understanding and support.
- Inventory the resources to maintain.
- Develop a standard for each resource, which is a short description of what it should look like when the maintenance has been completed.
- List tasks to perform in detail to maintain the resources up to standards.
- Determine the amount of time it takes to do each task.

- Decide how often to do each task. Is the turf mowed once a week or once every two weeks? Are the restrooms to be cleaned daily or only two times a week?
- Divide up the tasks and develop a schedule for each person or crew after you know what to maintain, where it's located, what tasks to do, how long it will take to do the tasks, and how frequently to do them.
- Implement and monitor the work schedules to make adjustments when needed.

Often, municipalities depend on their public works department for park maintenance. When public works is in charge of park maintenance, resources are more consolidated. Equipment can be used for multiple tasks, and staff that plow snow in the winter can mow grass in the summer. Problems arise when public works staff do "their" work first and leave park maintenance as an afterthought. When this happens, there's no systematic routine maintenance or preventive maintenance. It's vital that public works staff be educated about the value of park maintenance and that it be made a priority.

Park maintenance tasks can be contracted out, which may save costs. Advantages include not hiring and supervising the staff or purchasing and maintaining equipment. However, you do lose direct control of work performance, you may be unable to respond to problems quickly, and you spend extra time administering the contract.





THE MAINTENANCE INSTITUTE

The Maintenance Institute (TMI) is a service provided by PRPS with the support of a grant from the Environmental Stewardship Fund under the administration of the DCNR Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. TMI is focused on advancing the capacity of parks and recreation organizations, municipal leadership, public works departments, and other public land stewards. It serves as a hub of best practices for sustainable park and recreation facilities and land management, as well as the latest tools, techniques, and strategies to maintain them effectively and efficiently.

www.themaintenanceinstitute.com

Safety and the Role of Risk Management

Risk management makes park areas and recreation facilities safer by conducting and documenting routine safety inspections, having procedures to correct problems, and performing the necessary work promptly. Implementing risk management pays to protect and conserve municipal assets, make operations more effective and efficient, reduce accidents and injuries, stay out of court, and have a better-prepared defense if sued.

Your parks and recreation risk management plan doesn't need to be complex, but it should cover the range of facilities and services you offer. First, you should know what your recreation facility looks like in its proper condition. Then, each component needs to be thoroughly examined for safety issues. For a baseball field, that would include spectator bleachers, team benches, safety fencing, backstop, infield, outfield, and warm-up areas.

Your municipal general liability carrier can have a loss control specialist review your recreation facilities, programs, and employee safety policies and procedures to determine your risk exposures and offer ways to limit the possibility of liability claims.

Recreation Programming

What types of community recreation programs do your residents want? How can you be sure that your recreation programs provide worthwhile experiences for residents? Why provide recreation programs at all?

These are essential questions. Municipalities generally understand that providing public parkland is vital. Less understood is the role municipalities play in delivering public recreation programs.

Developing and maintaining parks drains the general fund budget, but recreation programs do not. Recreation programs generate revenue to support their costs. They often bring in additional funds to help you offer other parks and recreation services. Recreation programs also bring people into your parks to enjoy them.

Local government recreation programs ensure that recreation opportunities are accessible and available to every citizen, not just those with the money to pay for and travel to expensive privately sponsored activities.

Your municipality will be most effective when it stays closely in touch with all of the recreation providers in your community. Municipal recreation programs are more successful when the programs of all community agencies and groups that deal with the recreation interests of your citizens are interwoven with those of your municipality in a unified way.

Recreation programming is the most people-oriented service your municipality provides. As a result, public support and program success are highest when citizens are involved in the planning and decision-making process.

Classifying activities is an excellent way to build a municipal recreation program schedule. It can also pinpoint gaps and lack of service when it's discovered that specific categories of recreation programs aren't offered to your community. A popular system for classifying programs is by program area. Recreation program areas range from performing arts, which give participants a creative outlet to express ideas and feelings, to volunteering, where serving and helping others is the recreation experience.

Here are the major categories of community recreation programs and some program examples.

- Adventure: Rock climbing, paintball, laser tag
- Aquatics: Swimming lessons, swim team, scuba diving
- Crafts: Ceramics, knitting, tie-dying
- Educational: Volunteering, computer classes, pre-retirement planning
- Fitness and Wellness: Weight training, aerobics, yoga
- Hobbies: Stamp collecting, chess, cooking
- Literary: Poetry, storytelling, debate
- Outdoor Recreation: Archery, orienteering, cross-country skiing
- Performing Arts: Music, dance, theater, puppetry
- Self-Development: Educational classes, computer training
- Social Recreation: Dances, cards, preschool events
- Special Events: Festivals, fairs, parades
- Sports, Games, and Athletics: Volleyball, golf, cross-country running, tennis
- Travel: Day trips, destination trips
- Visual Arts: Drawing, painting, sculpture
- Volunteer: Coaching, special event helpers

In addition to classification categories, there are different formats for presenting a recreational experience and different ways in which an experience can meet a participant's needs. Recreation program format refers to the primary purpose for which a program is designed and how the content is organized and delivered. For example, the program may focus on a learning experience for participants, or competition may be its focus. The most common program formats include:

- Camps
- Clinics, workshops, and classes
- Clubs
- Drop in at an open facility
- Performance
- Special events
- Tournaments, contests, and leagues

Providing recreation programming is hard work.

The planning process begins months before the first participant arrives. Strong leadership is necessary during the activity, and careful evaluation makes your program better the next time it's offered.



Steps to Offer Community Recreation Programs

1. Planning to Meet Community Needs

- Determine your community's recreation needs by conducting surveys, studying population demographics, and analyzing the recreation opportunities that are currently available for residents, regardless of the provider
- Establish which recreation needs your municipality will meet
- Analyze and decide what programs will meet those recreation needs
- Select the recreation programs you want to offer
- Determine the resources needed to offer the selected recreation programs, such as facilities, funding, staff, volunteers, supplies, and maintenance help

2. Producing Recreation Programs

- Select leadership to conduct the recreation programs
- Develop a schedule for the programs with the number of days and weeks, day(s) of the week, and time(s) of day they'll be held
- Determine facility availability and arrange for use
- Consider supplies and equipment needed and place orders
- Establish program costs by doing expense and revenue budgets
- Decide on participant fees and how many participants are needed to break even
- Plan for safety, first aid, and accidents
- Promote programs and invite participants
- Determine how you'll get feedback from participants
- Register the recreation program participants
- Implement and supervise the programs

3. Evaluating Success

- Have participants evaluate the recreation programs after they're over
- Assess participant satisfaction and bottom-line financial figures
- Summarize evaluation results and provide recommendations for recreation program adjustments and improvements

The Municipal Recreation Programming Handbook contains more detailed information on providing public recreation programs:

<https://prps.org/dcnrpublications>

Staffing Parks and Recreation Services

Typically, when municipal populations grow to 10,000 to 15,000 residents, the increased demand for parks and recreation services requires professional staff. Municipalities often start with a part-time parks and recreation director, and as job demands increase, they expand into a full-time position.

Why hire a parks and recreation professional? A parks and recreation professional helps you to:

- Gather input from your residents on parks and recreation needs.
- Acquire and develop parkland and recreation facilities.
- Provide a wide variety of recreation programs.
- Ensure your park areas and recreation facilities are well-maintained and safe.
- Promote and market your parks and recreation services.
- Develop and manage the parks and recreation budget.
- Obtain grant funds and resources to supplement municipal funds.
- Stay informed about parks and recreation trends.
- Make diversity, equity, and inclusion a top priority.
- Tap the vital resource of volunteers.
- Recruit, train, and supervise part-time staff.
- Work with board members, residents, and organizations to improve your parks and recreation services.

Colleges and universities offer four-year degree programs that prepare individuals for administrative positions in parks and recreation. To help you find qualified staff, PRPS and NRPA operate job vacancy listings. When hiring a full-time parks and recreation director, look for candidates who are Certified Park and Recreation Professionals (CPRP). This certification program is recognized nationwide and guarantees your municipality that the candidate has attained the education and experience to be a parks and recreation professional.

www.prps.org/jobs

www.nrpa.org/careers-education/careers/

Part-time and seasonal employees are a significant part of the parks and recreation workforce. Because of this, community parks and recreation faces some unique staff recruitment and retention challenges not

The Hiring Municipal Recreation and Parks Personnel Handbook provides more in-depth park and recreation staffing resources:

<https://prps.org/dcnrpublications>

experienced by other fields. Many part-time recreation positions require specialized skills. Dance, baton, and karate instructors are examples. Finding qualified staff willing to work the few hours needed each week after school, evenings, and weekends can be difficult. Part-time positions often don't offer benefits, and keeping hourly wages competitive with the marketplace is a struggle. People tend to commit less to part-time jobs, calling off work with little notice. Other issues community parks and recreation faces are constant training of new staff and inadequate time and resources to recruit staff.

Financial problems confronting many municipalities mean adequate staff can often not be hired. Regardless of the number of staff, the volunteer force remains an important resource and an integral part of any parks and recreation system.



Financing Parks and Recreation

The funds to provide public parks and recreation services come from tax and non-tax support. Tax funds are typically directed toward parkland and recreation facilities that benefit the entire community. User fees typically cover services, recreation programs, and facilities that benefit specific users, not the whole community. Non-tax support also includes sponsorships by the private sector, park friends groups who raise money for particular purposes, and private capital campaign fundraising for special-use facilities.

Parks and recreation is transitioning from a government service funded mainly by tax dollars into a much more dynamic field that is a vital part of the local economy, is increasingly more self-supported financially, and offers a wide variety of services to meet the changing needs and desires of the public.

The traditional way to operate parks and recreation systems has been public operation, where public employees manage all the components, from maintenance and security to recreation facility operation and programming. The municipality's budget funds all costs associated with public management. Any revenue generated by parks and recreation services is funneled into an annual general fund.

Many local governments now use hybrid public/private approaches, where local government funds parks and recreation services while contracting certain operations to private management. For example, while the government generates revenue through events or other forms of programming, private contractors oversee park maintenance, from landscaping to facilities maintenance, or operate concession stands at public swimming pools.

Private operation is sometimes used, in which a private organization oversees a park or recreation facility's operations and generates all the revenue to support the public space. A private model commonly involves an agreement between an organization and a municipal government.

Unlike most elements of local government, parks and recreation agencies can earn more funds than are provided by tax dollars. To successfully offer parks and recreation services today, you need to become less dependent on traditional sources of tax revenue and look to entrepreneurial approaches to funding—new revenue sources, new financing options, new programming opportunities, and new marketing methods to drive your revenue up.

Public and Private Funding Strategies

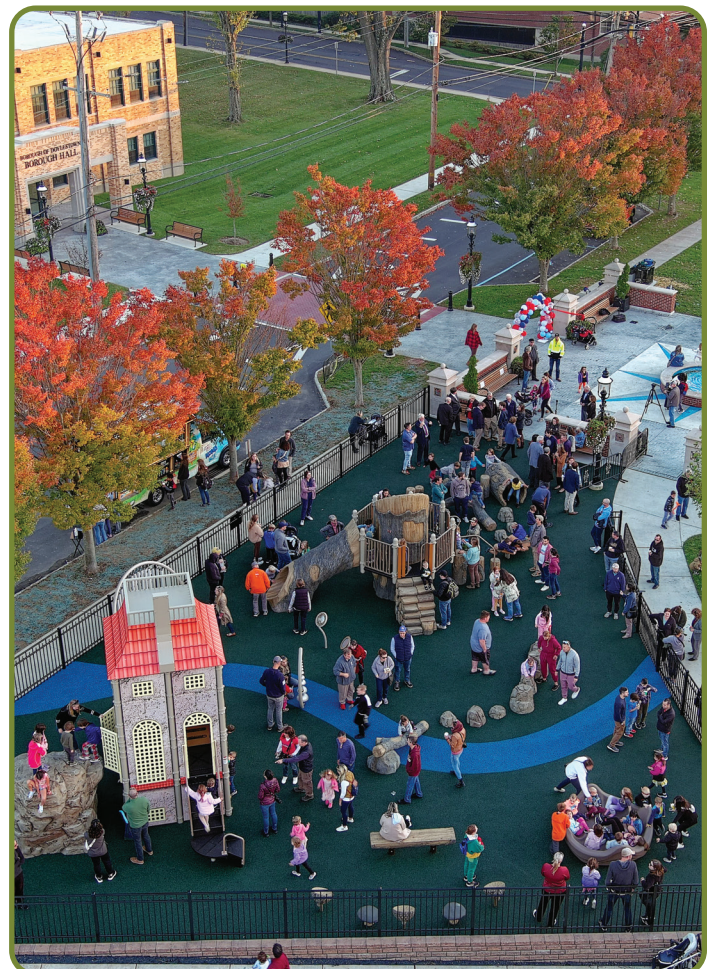
Parks are increasingly benefiting from innovative approaches to partnerships and financing. Multi-sector alliances with real estate, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and the public sector, among others, are proving essential to developing and operating parks.

Expanding and diversifying your funding sources is the key. Over-reliance on one method of funding is no longer viable. Your programs and services should be priced and marketed to create revenue that will help to fund other aspects of your operations. For example, generating money from adult sports leagues over and above the cost of providing them can fund youth sports opportunities at more affordable costs.

Parks and recreation financing methods include:

- **Tax Support.** In Pennsylvania, most funding for parks and recreation comes from the municipal general fund, supported primarily by taxes. Municipal taxes provide recreation amenities that serve all residents, such as walking trails and playgrounds. Parks and recreation competes with every other municipal service for its share of tax dollars.
- **Bonds.** Often, financing the purchase of land or constructing a significant recreation facility can't be done using current municipal revenue. Municipalities issue long-term debt to fund capital projects. Bonds are promissory notes that spread the cost of large-scale capital projects over many years. The bonds are guaranteed by the governing body's full faith and credit and backed by property tax revenues. The municipality can use income generated from the sale of the general obligation bonds to fund park projects and repay the bonds and interest with property tax revenue. The two types of bonds used by the public sector are general obligation bonds and revenue bonds.

- **Dedicated Taxes.** To leverage state funding to acquire land, counties and municipalities are dedicating taxes to preserve open space. Particularly in highly populated southeastern Pennsylvania, municipalities are enacting taxes for open space preservation that include dedicated portions of the earned income tax and property tax.
- **Business Improvement Districts (BID).** This public-private partnership collects additional taxes from businesses within a designated area. The fees are used for public improvement projects based on the notion that a well-maintained public space will increase traffic to local businesses. Generally used in downtown areas, a BID is a valuable strategy for generating revenue to support parks and recreation.
- **Tax Increment Financing Districts (TIF).** A TIF captures increases in property tax revenue within a designated geographic area and allocates it for a specific public improvement purpose. TIF revenue has been used for park acquisition, maintenance, and city improvements.
- **Zoning Strategies.** Zoning techniques allow you to benefit from the real estate industry and use the funds for capital development or park maintenance. Zoning strategies include:
 - **Zoning incentives and bonuses.** Zoning incentive programs offer developers and property owners incentives to either a) incorporate specific public amenities into their development plan or b) contribute to a park endowment or public improvement fund. By doing so, developers or property owners can bypass certain zoning limitations.
 - **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR).** TDR allows property owners in designated areas to sell the development rights from their land for use on another site. The property owner's land is then protected as open space under a conservation easement and can be used by the public.
- **Sales and Use Taxes.** Some cities and states allocate a percentage of local or statewide sales taxes specifically for parks and recreation. A general sales tax applies to a broad base of goods, meaning substantial revenue can be generated with a relatively low tax rate. This keeps the burden on households low.
- **Advertising.** Parks and recreation can raise funds through advertising. For instance, if your municipality owns land along a busy highway, setting up a private billboard with advertising can generate revenue.
- **Parking Fees.** Parks and recreation systems can generate revenue from parking fees. In some municipalities, parking meters and parking lot fees are collected and placed in the general fund. The municipality may dedicate some of this revenue directly to parks and recreation.
- **Contractual Fees.** When events are hosted on park property, whether public events like concerts or private events like weddings, you can generate revenue through the contracts.
- **Mandatory Dedication Fees.** A mandatory dedication fee requires that a portion of any housing or commercial/industrial development be dedicated to public use in the form of park areas and recreation facilities. Alternatively, the developer may pay cash in lieu of a land dedication, which is put into a special fund and used for future park acquisition and development. Mandatory dedication funds can also be used for park maintenance.
- **Concessions.** Concessions can provide a substantial revenue source for your municipality. You may manage park concessions or contract with an individual or a community group. When you want to provide services but can't afford to, another alternative is for private contractors to establish businesses within public park systems. This generates revenues for your municipality while creating profit-making situations for private enterprises. Examples of concessions are horseback riding facilities, restaurants, and boat rentals. The land, and in some cases, the actual facilities, are publicly owned. Your municipality maintains control over some aspects of the private operations, such as rates charged and operating hours, and generates revenue through a leasing agreement or a percentage of sales.



- **Fees.** Fees play a significant role in financing public parks and recreation services in Pennsylvania. With the increasing strain on municipal budgets for public services, using fees is a practical technique for maintaining and expanding your parks and recreation system. The construction of specialized recreation facilities like ice rinks, swimming pools, golf courses, and community recreation centers is partly justified by participant fees. Recreation programs can be financed on a break-even basis through **program registration fees** paid by participants. You can also charge **entrance fees** to facilities, **admission fees** to performances, **rental fees** for building use, and **permit fees** for picnic pavilions. **Membership fees** are used in parks and recreation to offset a facility's operating costs. Examples are season passes sold for swimming pools or yearly memberships to a community recreation center.

Municipalities often charge higher fees for non-resident use of community recreation facilities and programs since your residents pay taxes for these services, but non-residents do not. If you accept state or federal funds for facility construction or improvements, the fees charged to non-residents may not exceed twice that charged to residents.

- **Capitalizing Maintenance Costs.** Levies and bonds for new projects don't always account for the ongoing maintenance and operations funding needed. By capitalizing maintenance costs, you can include those anticipated costs in the specific levy or bond proposal and then set the funding aside in an endowment to cover future expenses.
- **Gifts and Donations.** For large capital projects, individuals, businesses, or foundations can donate significant land gifts or money for parks and recreation purposes.
- **Fundraising.** Parks and recreation fundraising takes many forms. Boys and girls sell candy and cookies to help fund basketball leagues, older adults hold raffles to support their club, and capital campaigns help fund community recreation center construction.
- **Corporate Sponsorships.** Businesses are offered different levels of sponsorship, each with appropriate levels of visibility and involvement, in return for their financial investment in park facilities, recreation programs, and special events. Events such as tournaments, races, or concerts serve as income-generating activities. The sponsoring company covers the cost of the event, and proceeds go to the parks and recreation system. Sponsorships benefit the business by providing public recognition and advertising.

Benefits of Charging Fees

Fees benefit your municipality by:

- Offsetting operation and maintenance costs. When funding from other sources isn't increasing, fees can help you keep pace with rising operation and maintenance costs. Also, if funding from other sources decreases, fees can provide revenue to maintain necessary services that you would otherwise eliminate.
- Expanding services and facilities. Fees can help you develop new facilities and offer new recreation programs that are responsive to the changing needs of your community. Sometimes, fees may be the only way to finance proposed expansion.
- Funding specialized opportunities. Through fees, the support for specialized recreation opportunities comes from the user rather than the general tax dollar, giving your municipality the funds to help justify providing the opportunities.
- Controlling facility use. Fees can help control the number of people who use a facility, increase security through admission areas, and promote respect for your services, which will help decrease vandalism.
- Projecting an image of fiscal responsibility. Fees help show that you manage your revenues and resources well.
- Projecting an image of quality. Residents perceive recreation programs as of better quality and as having more value when a fee is charged. Fees can increase program participation versus free programs.

Sponsorships can take different shapes:

- Sponsored event in exchange for advertising rights
- Sponsored facility by selling bricks imprinted with donors' names
- Advertising, such as a sporting goods company paying for new basketball backboards in exchange for a logo on each backboard
- Naming rights donations for specific park facilities
- Exclusive product placement with companies buying the right for their products to be exclusively sold at kiosks and concession stands in the park

- **Public-Public Partnerships.** While public funding for parks and recreation is limited, increasing public funding is available for other sectors, including stormwater control, climate resiliency, transportation, affordable housing, and public health. These municipal agencies can partner to fund park acquisition, improvement, and maintenance.
- **Philanthropy.** Philanthropy has become increasingly important as municipal budgets face cuts. Local governments are turning to philanthropy to bridge the funding gaps. Nonprofit organizations, such as park conservancies, foundations, and friends groups, are taking the lead in fundraising and fund management.

○ **Park Conservancies.** Park conservancies are private, non-profit, non-political organizations that partner with local governments to support one or more parks in the community. Conservancies usually have a formal agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the local government entities. The MOU defines the scope and limitations of the conservancy’s responsibilities pertaining to the park property or properties. Park conservancies operate in more than 50% of major United States cities. Conservancies also exist in smaller communities and at the state park level.

These organizations receive their funding mostly from donations and engage in activities ranging from the construction of capital improvement projects to the operation of special activities and programs in parks to advocacy and lobbying on behalf of parks. In a handful of cases, they’re responsible for ongoing operations and maintenance.

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy was founded in 1996 by a group of citizens concerned with the deteriorating conditions of Pittsburgh’s historic city parks. A non-profit organization, it works closely with the City of Pittsburgh under an official public-private partnership agreement. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy has raised nearly \$145 million and completed 23 major park improvement projects. The organization works with thousands of volunteers, hosts hundreds of events, and provides programming for over 7,500 children annually.

The Fairmount Park Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that leads and supports efforts to improve Philadelphia’s parks in partnership with the City of Philadelphia. The Fairmount Park Conservancy helps restore and maintain Philadelphia’s parks by engaging the public and activating parks with innovative programs and amenities that unite people.

Park conservancies employ a donation-based approach to managing public spaces. A heavy reliance on philanthropy to fund parks has drawbacks:

- A donations-based approach can lead to underfunding because people can enjoy the park’s benefits without contributing to its costs.
- Voluntary donations are uncertain, which makes it difficult to rely on them for ongoing operational expenses.
- As the private sector steps in with more significant funding, the public sector tends to withdraw and use its limited dollars for other purposes.
- Conservancies incur significant costs to raise money, such as executive salaries, proposal writing, and other expenses involved in securing donations.
- Park amenities may target selective groups or areas rather than the entire community.

○ **Foundations.** Park foundations support parks and recreation systems by generating private funding, obtaining grants, and building strategic partnerships to supplement tax dollars to better meet community needs for parkland, facilities, and recreation services. PRPS founded the People, Parks, and Community Foundation to support recreational and educational opportunities, create and sustain local parks, and envision and promote vibrant, livable communities across the Commonwealth. The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF) works closely with DCNR to build a volunteer base of chapter friends groups, fund innovative educational and recreational programs, and advocate for our state parks and forests. During PA Healthy Lands Week, PPFF, along with PRPS, WeConserve PA, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, and DCNR invites municipalities and organizations to hold outdoor recreation adventures and volunteer stewardship opportunities in which the public can get involved, such as organizing hikes, invasive species removal projects, tree plantings, and litter pickups.



○ **Friends Groups.** Every year, friends groups provide tens of thousands of volunteer hours working to improve and enhance parks and recreation systems throughout Pennsylvania. A park friends group is an independent group of volunteers with a direct connection to your park who are committed to preserving and enhancing it. These citizen groups help you do more, providing a meaningful solution to support park needs. The list of needs that friends groups can help to address is extensive. Many groups support invasive plant removal, plant and maintain pollinator gardens, maintain trails, host park clean-up days, sponsor special events, hold fundraisers, purchase park equipment, develop partnerships with community organizations and businesses, build financial support for park enhancements, promote parks at public events, and apply for grants.

To embrace the pool of talent and resources within a park friends group:

- Hold regular meetings to discuss the status of projects, upcoming activities, and specific issues. Some friends groups include a municipal staff representative as a non-voting member of their board, which is a great way to signify the partnership.

- Make a list of needs and share it with your friends group. Organize the list according to those needs requiring only time and those with additional financial costs. Discuss what can be realistically accomplished and what will require additional volunteers, money, or political support from the friends group.

- **Government Grant Programs.** Government grants help finance the planning, acquisition, and development of park areas and recreation facilities. Pennsylvania has responded to decreasing federal support by establishing funding sources to provide financial assistance to local municipalities for capital projects. Government and private foundation funding for park and recreation technical assistance projects is also available.

The Financing Municipal Parks and Recreation Handbook provides more information on innovative ways to fund parks and recreation services:

<https://prps.org/dcnrpublications>



Chapter 4

Parks and Recreation for All

The very philosophy of public parks and recreation is that all people—regardless of race, ethnicity, age, income level, physical ability, mental ability, sexual orientation, gender, or religion—can take advantage of quality programs, facilities, places, and spaces that make their lives and communities great.

Championing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is critically important to provide parks and recreation for everyone in your community.

In this chapter, we discuss serving all residents equitably with parks, trails, recreation facilities, and green spaces by removing barriers to access and participation and using data. We also give you strategies for providing park areas and recreation programming that are inclusive, culturally relevant, and welcoming to everyone.



Serving Residents Equitably by Removing Barriers to Access and Participation

Do all residents have easy access to parks and recreation services in your community? Are parks and programs inclusive for all citizens? Are you allowing new and emerging communities to recreate in a way that fosters their cultural identity? By asking the right questions and being open to change, you can successfully serve your diverse population with parks and recreation services.

Local parks saw dramatic increases in usage during the pandemic, with people seeking exercise, safe social connections, and the therapeutic benefits of nature.

The pandemic also exposed inequities in parks and recreation systems. If you lived within walking distance of a park, you could safely get outside, gather with friends, exercise, and maintain your mental health. But if you were one of the 100 million Americans who don't have a park close to home, you were vying for the same outdoor space as many of your neighbors. The data around park access confirms this was often the case for low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.

The outdoors is essential to our well-being, but access to green spaces isn't equal. Thousands of Pennsylvanians don't have a park close to home. What's more, parks located in communities of color are half the size of parks in predominantly white neighborhoods and serve five times more people per acre. Others live near unwelcoming parks that are in disrepair, lack culturally relevant programming, or don't meet their needs for other reasons.

Disparities in park access and quality often reflect patterns of segregation based on income level and demographics.

Parks and recreation access is defined as just and fair quantity, proximity, and connections to parks, green spaces, recreation facilities, and recreation programs. Lack of access in one shape or another is the number one thing that prevents people from being physically active. It could be financial access or physical access; it's not affordable or not close enough to home. Working to eliminate both barriers is an essential goal for parks and recreation so everyone has safe access and an equal opportunity to enjoy quality park and recreation facilities and programming.

Park equity isn't only the right thing to do; it's a sound public health strategy. That's because access to parks and green spaces offers powerful health benefits for low-income people, who are more likely to be in poor health.

People with easy access to green spaces, such as parks and trails, tend to walk and be more physically active than those with limited access. The closer people live to a park and the safer they feel, the more likely they are to walk or bike to those places and use the park for physical activity. However, less than half of people in the United States live within a 10-minute walk (about a half mile) of a park. Fewer people live in a community with safe streets and roads for walking and biking.



Fostering Inclusivity in Parks and Programs

Many youth are at risk of being left without physical activity, particularly youth of color, those in low-income households, girls, and those with disabilities. Significant disparities exist in who has access to youth sports and recreation activities.

To create more equitable and inclusive sports and recreation programs and facilities that welcome all children to participate:

- Help families afford to get their children involved in youth sports and recreation programs by offering scholarships.
- Provide inclusion training for coaches, volunteers, and staff.
- Determine children's accessibility requirements by conducting a needs assessment to identify any physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities that may require accommodations.
- Adapt activities by modifying rules or equipment to make them more accessible or develop alternative activities for children with various abilities.
- Use language and imagery in your program brochures and materials that are inclusive and respectful of all cultures and identities.
- Provide marketing materials and promotions in multiple languages.
- Utilize diverse and culturally relevant media sources for marketing.
- Communicate with families, parents, and caregivers and ask questions about each child's strengths and needs.
- Offer suggested donations to use a recreation facility so that those who can afford the donation can contribute, but those who can't afford it aren't obligated to do so.
- Invest in inclusive play equipment – including wide ramps, accessible swings, sand tables that children in wheelchairs can access, sensory play opportunities, and braille panels. Contrasting bands on rubber play surfaces define, connect, and organize play stations for neurodivergent children and those with visual impairments who need visual cues to guide their play journey.
- Offer the opportunity for residents to work or volunteer in exchange for recreation program and facility access without paying fees.
- Raise funds from corporate and individual donors to offer programming at low or no cost.
- Partner with local organizations to bring inclusive programs to your parks, trails, and green spaces.

The need for quality parks and recreation opportunities can also be great for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ+) individuals. Research suggests LGBTQ+ individuals face physical and mental health disparities. The refugee and immigrant community is another segment of the population facing a growing need for parks and recreation opportunities. Park and recreation facilities and programs have an opportunity to foster community relationships, create employment opportunities, deliver English-language education, and serve as venues for physical activity opportunities that are respectful of cultural differences.

The Role of Data in Equitable Park Planning

Data brings current park use and recreation needs into sharp focus.

The process of planning where and how many parks a community needs has relied mainly on census data, conducting in-person counts and surveys at parks, and simple formulas based on population density in a given area. The result was often an uneven distribution of resources.

Data can answer questions like: How many people use public transit, walk, or bike to work? How many people live below 200 percent of the poverty line? Answers to these questions help identify areas where people are less likely to have a car or other means to access recreation facilities and programs throughout the community.

The Trust for Public Land has two mapping tools available to help you with park equity planning:

- **ParkServe.** This platform shows park-related data for 14,000 United States cities and towns. Users can see the location of parks in a community, neighborhoods within a 10-minute walk to a park, and areas that don't currently have access to a park. The 10-Minute Walk Program was launched in 2017 through a partnership with NRPA and the Urban Land Institute. Ensuring that all people have access to a park within a 10-minute walk of home and adequate park space in all neighborhoods is essential to creating an equitable park system. The 10-minute walk metric – equivalent to approximately a half-mile for a non-disabled person – is the average distance most people are willing to walk to reach a destination. This standard helps to examine the number of opportunities and resources a person has close to home. www.tpl.org/parkserve

- **ParkScore.** This index ranks park systems in the 100 most populated US cities. The total score is based on five categories: access, investment, amenities, acreage, and equity. The ParkScore index helps larger municipalities with park planning in many ways. It can make a case for more funding, highlight neighborhoods with park equity gaps, benchmark against other cities, celebrate innovations and creative approaches to solving community challenges, and reveal potential partnerships. www.tpl.org/parkscore

Providing Equitable Access to Parks

Strategies to provide more equitable access to parks include:

- Protecting and sustaining existing parks and ensuring that parks are built in new housing developments or redeveloped areas to help meet the goal of everyone living within a 10-minute walk of a park.
- Prioritizing park capital improvements toward areas with historically underserved populations that lack access to parks and green spaces.
- Bringing people to your parks through transit connections and guided trips.
- Working closely with local planning and transportation departments to build and maintain sidewalks, crosswalks, bike racks, bike paths and lanes, and routes within and between parks, trails, and other key destinations.
- Reaching out to underserved communities for input on how to create or improve local park areas and green spaces.
- Working with community partners to set up shared-use agreements to increase public access to school property, municipal building grounds, and college and university facilities.
- Closing parks to motor vehicles and opening streets to pedestrians in and around parks.
- Re-purposing vacant areas for recreation and dedicating funds to convert unused space into green space.
- Providing wayfinding signs to help people find safe places to be active and including information about accessibility for people with mobility or other limitations.

Community Benchmarking

The purpose of benchmarking is to explore comparable municipalities' parks and recreation systems so you can assess and plan your future park facilities and programs in a measurable context. Benchmark data helps you identify best practices to serve your community.

The benchmarking tool, NRPA Park Metrics, is the most comprehensive source of data standards and insights for parks and recreation. Parks and recreation professionals can use this benchmark data to gain funding support, improve operations, and better serve their communities.

Municipalities share information about their budgets, staffing, the assets and infrastructure they manage, acreage of land, playground equipment, swimming pools, trail mileage, programs they offer, and more. Park Metrics is a reporting tool that builds customized reports to benchmark and compare municipalities to other municipalities of similar size, demographics, and budget.

www.nrpa.org/publications-research/parkmetrics/



Some data isn't available through the NRPA Park Metrics database. Benchmarking data can be acquired from park agency websites, comprehensive recreation, park and open space plans, phone conversations, or municipal budgets. Items to benchmark include population and population projections, total parkland acres and total conservation land acres, miles of trails, total indoor recreation space, total operating revenues and expenditures, and number of full-time employees.

Resources to help you offer equitable and inclusive parks and recreation services include:

- **The Toolkit for Health, Arts, Parks, and Equity.** This toolkit can help local health advocates use place-based arts and culture approaches to promote health equity. It includes case studies, principles, and guidelines on using arts and culture, parks, and public space to celebrate communities and promote challenging discussions that can help build a more just world.
www.tpl.org/the-toolkit-for-health-arts-parks-and-equity
- **Successful Partnerships for Parks: Collaborative Approaches to Advance Equitable Access to Open Space.** This report explores case studies and examples of successful partnerships for equitable parks.
<https://knowledge.uli.org>
- **Parks and an Equitable Recovery.** This report examines the park equity gap in America and the evolving relationship with our parks and public land during the pandemic.
www.tpl.org/
- **Community Engagement Resource Guide.** This guide provides a roadmap for using equitable and inclusive strategies to plan, design, build, and maintain park projects and plans. It includes an internal assessment tool, community engagement strategies, and an evaluation framework.
www.nrpa.org/publications-research/best-practice-resources/community-engagement-resource-guide/
- **Complete Parks Playbook.** This is a comprehensive guide for assessing a community's parks system. It can be used by anyone interested in using parks to promote health. It briefly explains the elements of a complete parks system, provides additional resources for implementing each aspect, and highlights community examples.
www.changelabsolutions.org/product/complete-parks-playbook

- **Creating Equity-Based System Master Plans.** This website helps park and recreation professionals, planners, and others create a systemwide park master plan grounded in equity. It can help users focus on multiple benefits and gain support from partners and stakeholders across different sectors. www.nrpa.org/publications-research/
- **Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages: A Step-by-Step Guide.** This guide can help local leaders, policymakers, community advocates, and neighborhood residents collect data, evaluate opportunities, and generate ideas about increasing the quality and quantity of parks and outdoor spaces nationwide. <https://afphs.org/>
- **Parks for Inclusion Policy Guide.** This set of resources can help local municipalities create formal inclusion policies that emphasize reaching historically marginalized groups. Such policies help ensure that spaces are open, welcoming, and engaging to community members from racial and ethnic minority groups, people with physical and cognitive disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, and new Americans. www.nrpa.org/our-work/partnerships/initiatives/parks-for-inclusion/policy-guide/
- **Connecting People to Parks: A Toolkit to Increase Safe and Equitable Access to Local Parks and Green Spaces.** This toolkit guides municipalities that want to work with community partners to promote local change. It helps agencies use the Safe Routes to Parks framework to create safe, inclusive, and equitable routes to parks. www.saferoutespartnership.org/resources/toolkit/connecting-people-parks
- **Putting the “Safe” in Safe Routes to Parks: Improving Personal Safety from Crime and Violence to Promote Park Access.** This fact sheet highlights the importance of reducing threats to personal safety related to crime and violence in and around parks. It includes examples of ways communities have successfully improved park safety. <https://saferoutespartnership.org>



Building Community Support for Parks and Recreation

The parks and recreation field has moved from communicating what we do to focusing on our impact. This chapter covers the vital role of public relations and marketing and effective ways to inform and involve the public to make your services the most successful.

We outline ways to position parks and recreation as essential, including the importance of building a network of strategic partners. Pennsylvania's most common partner for municipal parks and recreation is the public school district. We address why that partnership needs to expand. We also show how healthcare institutions incorporate parks and recreation into their health promotion strategies and how to make your parks as health-promoting as possible.

Lastly, we look at the role of integrating arts and culture in parks to create a sense of togetherness, belonging, and community.

Positioning Parks and Recreation as an Essential Service

Budgets for parks and recreation are often cut back when municipal finances are tight. Yet residents look to their local parks, recreation programs, and open spaces as having great value and with great expectations.

Taxpayer support is necessary to provide, maintain, and expand community parks and recreation services. The more involved and aware your residents are of your parks and recreation services, the more support you'll gain. Residents will support what they value and communicate their support to your elected officials.

You must actively work on making parks and recreation as indispensable in the public's minds. If your services aren't considered essential, your funding and resources will decline. Consequently, if you communicate why parks and recreation is a fundamental and valuable asset for your community, you'll gain more funding and resources. To position parks and recreation as necessary, you must define it

as important and work hard to let your community know why it's essential.

Support for your parks and recreation system is built over time in every aspect of your work. Building a solid base of vocal citizens who value parks and recreation will put it near the top of the list of essential municipal functions. The following strategies will help to get you there:

- **Serve More People.** Extend a helping hand to youth sports groups, especially in securing playing fields and training coaches. Offer special events to get more people into your parks. Seek partnerships and work on building alliances with community groups and businesses.
- **Expand Your Recreation Program Schedule.** Develop a robust series of innovative, exciting recreation programs that people participate in, read about, and know about. Successful programs create happy residents who tell their neighbors, families, and friends about your excellent services.
- **Keep Your Park Areas and Recreation Facilities Well Maintained.** Show the public that you care about making their stay in your parks comfortable and enjoyable by keeping restrooms clean, litter picked up, grass cut, weeds pulled, and trees trimmed.
- **Brand Your Parks and Recreation System.** Develop a logo to brand your parks and recreation services. Marking park signs, program flyers, and recreation facilities with a logo helps build your identity and helps your residents realize whose facility or program they're in.
- **Expand Marketing Efforts in New Ways.** Use testimonials and reviews by residents and partners to stamp your parks and recreation services in people's minds as necessary. There's a lot of power in people sharing why they value what you do.
- **Promote Your Park and Program Benefits.** Sell your services in terms of the benefits people seek, not in terms of descriptions of facilities or programs. Promote the benefits of involvement in your programs and services so your residents understand the value of parks and recreation.
- **Be Responsive.** Respond promptly to your residents' questions, complaints, and problems. This shows that you put residents first. Offer money-back guarantees, such as refunding fees paid, if people aren't satisfied for any reason.
- **Ask for Input.** Ask for participant input to identify what your residents want. Then, make the changes they requested, letting residents know you've listened.

- **Keep Residents Informed.** Note any updates to projects currently being worked on at your park facilities, the date and time when planned maintenance occurs, and who to contact with questions or concerns.
- **Be Active in Your Community.** Join groups such as service and civic clubs. This is an excellent way for the community to learn about your parks and recreation services.
- **Engage Residents and Community Groups as Volunteers.** As a parks and recreation volunteer, it's gratifying to see people enjoying your parks and programs and know you helped to make that happen. Your parks and recreation system is strengthened when you involve volunteers. First of all, you get more help, and you always need more help! Most importantly, when it's budget time, you'll have residents who value parks and recreation and will support providing funds to expand your services. These types of volunteer activities lend themselves well to parks and recreation work:

- School students completing community service work hours
- One-day opportunities such as the United Way's Day of Caring
- Utilizing school classes, clubs, and sports teams as volunteers
- Short-term assignment projects that have a start and a finish
- Families volunteering together
- Adopt-a-park programs matching community groups and businesses with parks to help with maintenance and programming
- Eagle Scout projects and troop activities
- Virtual volunteering done online, such as research projects, social media help, surveying, designing web pages, translating flyers, and more

- **Develop a Caring Philosophy.** Treat everyone with the same degree of courtesy, friendliness, and kindness to make them feel welcome at your parks and programs.
- **Keep Political Leaders Informed and Involved.** Involve your elected officials in recreation activities and get them out to your parks and programs. Elected officials can't fully support what they've never seen or don't understand. Allow your elected officials to be the spokespersons when the media is at your special events or programs. Politicians like positive publicity, and parks and recreation can provide it better and more often than any other government service. Share positive feedback, awards, and praise with your elected officials so they see that your parks and recreation services are appreciated.



- **Address Community Issues.** Be a part of the solution to community problems. Economic development, crime, low rates of home ownership, rising taxes, declining downtown business sections, and struggling families are on the problem lists of many Pennsylvania communities, small and large. Parks and recreation can play an essential role in addressing community issues. For example, you can expand the number of lower-cost recreation programs for children, offer scholarships for programs, open your school gyms in the evening, promote your downtown area with special events, provide nutritious meals for children and older adults, and much more. Positioning parks and recreation as an essential service means getting out of the business of offering only traditional recreation programming and into new services that your community needs.

Marketing Parks and Recreation

How can residents enjoy your parks when they don't know where they are? How can they experience your recreation programs if they've never heard of them? A lack of information is a top barrier to residents enjoying your local recreation facilities and programs. Spending resources on marketing and promotion is time and money well spent.

The key to effective parks and recreation marketing is to communicate to residents the value of your services and inform potential participants how your program or facility meets their needs. You're not marketing recreation programs or park areas. You're marketing services that provide recreation experiences and benefits. People enroll in your programs or visit your parks to improve health, escape from stress, or just for the fun or excitement of the recreation experience. For example, when you promote a fitness program, people don't want to hear about exercise. Instead, they want to hear that they'll feel better, increase strength, and have more energy.

What's the best way to communicate with your residents? While traditional methods of printed flyers and mailed newsletters are tried-and-true, modern marketing tactics increase that reach. People today are exposed to a massive number of marketing messages daily, and parks and recreation needs to keep up.

Here are ways to be on top of your parks and recreation marketing today:

Social Media Marketing

Social media has become one of the most popular ways to engage with the public. With nearly five billion social media users, there's no doubt the majority of your residents are on a social platform.

However, social media shouldn't be the anchor of your online presence. Ultimately, your website is your most stable communication tool, and social media should be used in tandem with your website for effective communication and marketing.

Parks and recreation has a considerable advantage in social media marketing. Thousands of people visit your parks and participate in your recreation programs; almost everyone is armed with cell phones and cameras. That's a lot of people who can share their experiences on social media.

If you don't already have social media accounts, it's time to start. Social media is a great way to showcase park facilities and advertise upcoming recreation programs. Most popular platforms are free to use except for paid ads and posts. However, you don't want a social media account on every platform. Focusing on a few social media outlets and engaging your residents is more effective than spreading yourself too thin.



Social media is a customer service tool just as much as a marketing tool. It requires a commitment to interact with and respond to users. And like the need to be aware of park maintenance issues, you need to be mindful of any problems or discussions happening on social media. Engaging in social media allows you to respond quickly to news and rumors, especially as people rely more and more on social media. With how rapidly social media tools change, an organizational policy may be necessary about what type of comments you will and won't allow to avert potential communication problems.

Today, the vast majority of people own smartphones with internet capabilities. So, it's essential that any digital content you create can also be accessed easily on a mobile device.

What platform to use depends on what you want to achieve. You may want to increase awareness about your park areas and recreation facilities, engage with residents by providing resources and answering questions, recruit employees, or fundraise to support operations. With goals and audiences in mind, you can focus on the best platforms to meet your needs.

Find the most relevant social networks for your target audience. For many, the top three will be Facebook, X, and Instagram. Want to reach a younger audience? You may want to incorporate Snapchat or TikTok. Are you looking for professionals of an older demographic? LinkedIn might be best.

Facebook and Instagram are great ways to engage with residents and the community. By leveraging the Instagram grid, you can highlight a park's beauty and benefits through the seasons, while Instagram stories can showcase more behind-the-scenes work and live-event updates. LinkedIn can also help achieve specific goals. You can engage directly with business leaders, potential employees, donors, and other partners by maintaining a professional profile. X is relevant for news, engaging in expert conversations, and being a channel where people can ask questions or complain. YouTube is great to house longer-form, higher-quality videos. These social media tools create a powerful arsenal for conveying public information, policy, and programmatic changes and connecting people with parks and programs.

On social media, there are several ways to measure success, depending on your goals. If you're interested in awareness, pay attention to impressions and reach. Impressions refer to the number of times content has appeared on people's screens, while reach is the unique number of screens the content has appeared on. On the other hand, if you're interested in more interactions with the community, look at engagements. Engagement is people's interaction with any post, whether by "liking" or reacting to the content, commenting on a post, sharing it with friends, or clicking on a link.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search engines index traffic to your website. SEO is the effort to get your website ranked well, which helps people find you more easily when searching. Of course, it's pretty easy to find you when someone Googles your municipality name. But how often do you come up when they're searching for other terms? Residents can find your park facilities and recreation programs more easily when you follow SEO, which makes your content rank higher. You need recent, relevant blogs and social media posts with popular search keywords to rank highly.

Blogs

Blogs are meant to engage and inform your residents by sharing information consistently online. Blogs create relevant content to get people to visit your website, which can increase park use, program participation, and revenue. Using a blog allows you to share news about your parks and programs. You can spotlight volunteers, announce registration periods, post your recreation guide, and highlight new programs and park facilities. It's hard to do on a typical static website.



Email and Text Marketing

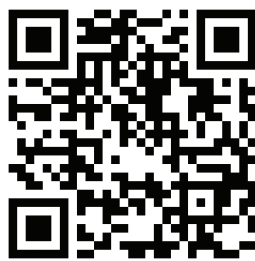
Email marketing is a powerful tool for informing residents about parks and recreation services. It's one of the most effective and least complicated things to manage. You can send newsletters via email to residents who opt-in to receive them and send targeted emails to inform residents about upcoming programs and events. A newsletter aims to engage readers and encourage them to click links in the email content to take them to your website. Text marketing can also be used to communicate with your residents. Messages should be short and have a call to action.

PA Parks and Rec – GOOD for You

GOOD for You is an advocacy channel sponsored by PRPS and DCNR to highlight all of the benefits available in Pennsylvania's local parks and recreation systems and encourage people to get outdoors and use our Commonwealth's many parks and trails. The campaign's mission is inspired by the belief that local parks and recreation services are essential to improve the lives of Pennsylvanians.

The website links to a PA Park Finder map from DCNR, which contains more than 6,500 parks around the state. Citizens can search by park type, amenity, and distance from their homes to find the best place to get outdoors. The GOOD blog and newsletter share parks and recreation news and stories from across the state. Municipalities can use GOOD campaign resources to highlight local parks and recreation services and promote their importance to community life. Municipalities can also request a customized park finder to offer direct links to their parks on their website.

www.goodforpa.com



Building a Network of Strategic Partners

Your residents expect more and better parks and recreation services. At the same time, you have fewer financial resources, staff, and volunteers, and technology is becoming increasingly complex. Partnerships offer opportunities to gain resources you don't have to better meet your community's parks and recreation needs.

You may want to offer recreation programs but don't have the indoor facilities to do so. Shared use of facilities such as schools, churches, and fire company social halls allows this to happen. Grants are easier to obtain when several partners are involved in your project. Partnering with others to provide recreation programs and special events brings volunteers, funding, promotion, and more. Special events also offer opportunities to work with businesses to obtain financial support in exchange for visibility.

Traditional partners for parks and recreation, like youth sports groups, are very important. However, the potential for other partnerships is vast. Commercial businesses of all types, healthcare agencies, school districts, and other parks and recreation providers are potential partners for you to improve your parks and recreation services.

Partnering with School Districts

School district facilities in many Pennsylvania communities are the largest publicly owned spaces and are underused. Recreational facilities used exclusively by a school district represent less than 20 percent of their potential overall use. If school district recreation facilities are available for community use, then usage could increase to over 60 percent.

In rural Pennsylvania, thousands of acres of state forests, game lands, and state parks are nearby. However, these facilities provide only a limited scope of activities. Places to hunt, fish, and hike can't meet people's needs for sports, cultural, and social activities. Since school districts are often the only providers of recreation facilities in rural Pennsylvania,

community use of school facilities outside of school hours is critical. Schools incorporate multiple recreation facilities, particularly indoor facilities, that residents want to use: sports fields, libraries, theaters, art facilities, gymnasiums, weight training areas, tennis courts, swimming pools, craft studios, music rooms, classrooms, and vocational training labs. In addition, recreation programming using school facilities can foster a sense of community in Pennsylvania areas with no such identity.

Because local government represents the interests of all residents, it's best positioned to work with school districts to use school recreation facilities for community recreation. The tricky part of making these partnerships a reality is that sharing school facilities creates additional challenges school administrators would rather not address. However, it's the taxpayers' money. And what's best for the community is for school districts to work with municipalities to use their recreation facilities for community use.

An outstanding example of rural municipalities partnering with a school district is the Blue Mountain Recreation Commission in Schuylkill County. It runs multiple programs on school campuses, such as youth basketball and wrestling, swimming lessons, open gyms and swims, and before and after-school child care.

Public schools and municipal parks and recreation facilities belong to the same taxpayers in Pennsylvania. This suggests no school district's construction or renovation of recreation facilities should be considered in isolation from community use. Regarding capital costs, probably 80 percent of the investment in community recreation facilities has already been made by school districts at a substantial cost to taxpayers. Adapting schools to allow community access would be much more cost-effective than building independent municipal recreation facilities. Providing one set of recreational facilities that both the school district and the community can share means using the same tax dollar twice. Shared use results in savings from reduced capital development costs and operating expenses.



Assets the Private Sector Can Bring to Parks and Recreation

Most residents don't care who builds or operates their parks. However, they care about having quality green spaces that are safe, accessible, and welcoming. Partnerships can help bridge the gap between citizen's needs and public resources for parks and recreation. Communities are looking outside traditional public budgets to sustain their commitment to parks and recreation by considering and implementing park-supportive partnerships.

Advantages the private sector can offer include:

- **Access to Private Capital.** The most apparent contribution the private sector can bring to municipal parks and recreation is an ability to invest funds for operation, maintenance, and capital development. The private sector can act quickly once it knows a venture will likely receive a desired return on investment. In contrast, for a municipality to secure capital, it must solicit broad public participation and input and go through lengthy legislative approval procedures and budget hearings.
- **Specialized Management and Technical Expertise.** Sometimes, municipalities don't have personnel with the training and experience to manage specialized facilities such as skate parks or concessions effectively. Businesses specializing in these areas have the marketing skills, resources, and other systems that have proven effective in similar facilities and a workforce with experience and strong technical expertise. Today, the recreation preferences of many individuals lean toward escapism, fantasy, or role-

playing through esports, computer games, virtual reality simulation, spectator sports, and resorts. Management of these types of services isn't necessarily within the skill set of municipalities, but the private sector can develop and operate facilities that offer these kinds of benefits.

- **Adaptability to Seasons and Economies of Scale.** Private partners are often better equipped to deliver services that require many part-time employees for short periods. Municipal procedures for hiring and paying part-time staff are usually cumbersome, but it's generally easier for businesses. Sometimes, municipalities find it difficult to justify expenditures on specialized equipment. A business serving multiple organizations will likely be able to purchase state-of-the-art equipment at a lower price. Private partners can also take advantage of federal business tax laws, which allow faster equipment depreciation and investment tax credits for purchase.

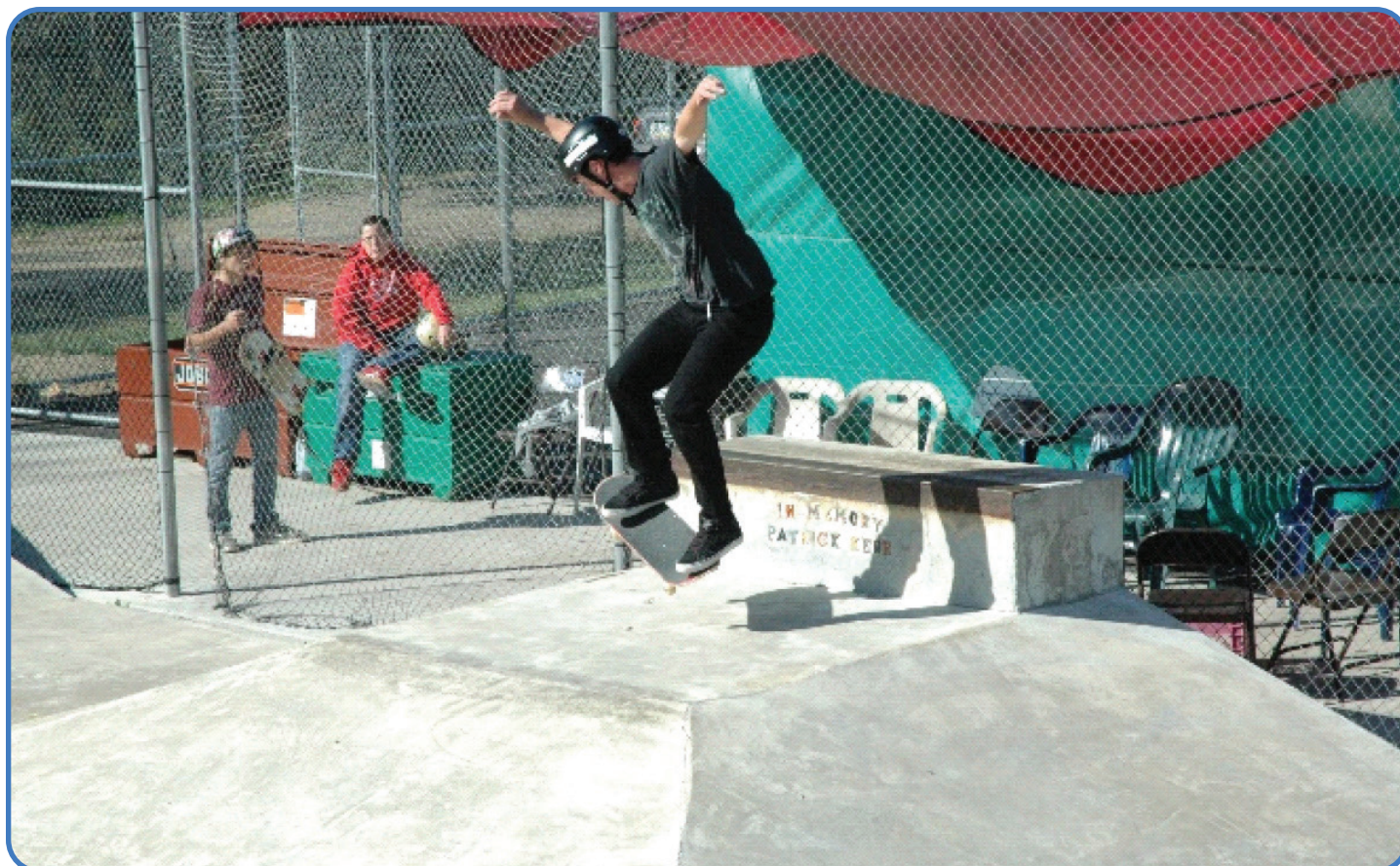
Partnerships for Parks: Lessons from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Urban Parks Program is an excellent resource for developing park partnerships. This report shares lessons and considerations for real estate and other sectors, including public, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations, on jointly creating and sustaining successful park partnerships.
<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/>

Integrating Arts and Culture in Parks and Recreation

Parks and outdoor environments are used to create and foster a love of art. Public art is conceived and mainly designed to be in an outdoor area, accessible by all. One place where public art is regularly found is in parks.

The oldest form of public art in parks is monuments and memorials. These works often mark public giving and sacrifice, whether memorializing a distinguished person or the efforts of thousands of service people. They provide an opportunity to appreciate a work of art and acts of human courage in an accessible park environment.

The use of parks for sculpture and other outdoor installations also has a long history. Philadelphia's Fairmount Park Art Association, founded in 1872, was the first organization in the United States to support artwork placement in urban parks. In the late 1950s, again led by Philadelphia, cities created "Percent for Art" programs, which mandated that a certain percentage of the budget for capital projects be spent on public art, and much of that work found its way to parks.



Public art and cultural arts events are integral for community building, connecting people with arts and culture, and serving as a catalyst for creativity within the community. Parks and recreation has the opportunity to make arts and culture attainable for the community as a whole.

The location of art in parks can bring people to parks who wouldn't normally or regularly visit and connect people to art who wouldn't usually have access to it. Connecting people to art is valuable as it can help educate, open minds, and inspire. Art in a park environment doesn't have the trappings of art in a museum or gallery. It's accessible and free.

The arts provide an ideal tool to create community involvement. Arts activity can attract large numbers of people to a park. Parks host a wide range of artistic events and activities, such as concerts, arts festivals, and theater performances. Publicly showing movies in parks is easy and cost-effective, providing the modern equivalent of the drive-in theater. Parks, especially indoor recreation facilities within parks, offer an excellent location for arts education activities. Drumming instruction, painting classes, dance lessons, and other similar activities fill parks with structured activity.

The arts can play an essential role in revitalizing a park, and parks, in turn, can help arts organizations develop new audiences and provide rehearsal and performance space.

The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA) strengthens Pennsylvania communities' cultural, educational, and economic vitality through the arts. PCA supports a range of arts and cultural activities through several grant programs available to municipalities. For example, the Creative Communities Initiative provides multi-year funding for place-based, community-driven arts projects to address community needs, challenges, and opportunities.

<https://pa.gov/agencies.coa.html>



Healthcare Sector Partnerships in Parks and Recreation

The movement towards holistic healthcare provides an excellent opportunity to collaborate with healthcare providers and payers.

Hospitals, public health agencies, and even insurance companies are incorporating parks and recreation into their health promotion strategies by funding, staffing, or referring patients to parks and programs to improve patient and community health.

For residents intimidated by trying something new, a prescription from their doctor to spend more time outdoors can be surprisingly motivating. For others, a healthcare professional offering to lead a walk or fitness program can be the incentive to get outside. The Walk with a Doc organization provides guidance for municipalities to develop health provider-led walking groups. www.walkwithadoc.org/

Parks and green spaces are ideal places for physical activity and are associated with improved health in young people and adults. To capitalize on that connection, parks install walking trails, courts for various sports, skate parks, climbing boulders, and fitness zones with equipment replicating what is found in health clubs. More and more, these facilities are being provided with the help of the healthcare sector.

Ways to Partner with Healthcare Agencies

Partnering with healthcare organizations dramatically enhances your ability to influence residents' health and well-being. Ways to partner include:

- Expanding recreation programming to reach groups that benefit from improved health, such as older adults, people living alone, and people with disabilities.
- Partnering with hospitals and health insurers to provide, promote, and pay for fitness classes, both indoors and out.
- Working with healthcare institutions to evaluate which types of programming and park investments drive the most significant gains in health outcomes.
- Investing in capital improvements in parks as community health investments to address the underlying social determinants of better health.
- Offering health screenings and services such as health education and awareness classes.

Partnering with Hospitals and Health Insurers to Provide Health-Promoting Recreation Programs and Park Improvements

Across the country, healthcare institutions are elevating local parks and recreation facilities and programs as a frontline strategy to help their patients struggling with chronic challenges such as obesity, loneliness, trauma, stress, or anxiety. Today, we see parks and recreation services adopted by many insurance companies and physicians as a critical strategy for delivering evidence-based approaches to address chronic public health concerns.

As part of the Affordable Care Act, all nonprofit hospitals must conduct Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs) every three years. Many CHNAs identify mental health or obesity as critical health needs facing their communities. Where parks have been identified as a community health priority, the hospitals can use community benefit funds to invest in health programming or park facilities.

Making Parks as Health-Promoting as Possible

We know parks are good for our health, but they deliver health benefits only when people visit and use them. To reach new people, it's essential to re-imagine your park facilities and recreation programs by:

- Promoting the intergenerational use of parks by adding walking trails around playgrounds and ballfields so parents can watch their kids while getting some exercise for themselves.
- Making your parks and activities appealing and inviting to everyone by offering free fitness classes, amenities that get people moving, and features such as water fountains and bathrooms to encourage park use.
- Offering programs to beginners and those who haven't been physically active to address the barriers to participating in fitness classes.
- Addressing another common barrier, affordability, by finding sponsors such as health insurers or grants to fund program registration costs.

- Encouraging people to try something new with low-commitment programs such as drop-in sports.
- Partnering with groups such as Girls on the Run or the Special Olympics to build connections and community use of park facilities.
- Installing and maintaining the park amenities most strongly associated with increased physical activity, including sports fields and courts, walking trails, fitness zones, playgrounds, and splash pads.

Resources to help you develop and strengthen partnerships with the healthcare sector include:

- **Community Wellness Hubs.** This publication outlines opportunities for parks and recreation and healthcare organizations to partner to support food access and reduce barriers to the social determinants of health across communities. The resource guides you through five key building blocks when creating partnerships, including preparing to partner, coordinating the partnership, developing an implementation plan, assessing the impact of the partnership, and identifying how to sustain the partnership.
www.nrpa.org/publications-research/best-practice-resources/parks-recreation-and-healthcare-partnerships-to-advance-community-wellness-hubs/
- **Guide to Implementing Play Streets in Rural Communities.** This guide describes how rural communities can create Play Streets by temporarily closing streets to develop safe, publicly accessible spaces where children and families can be active and connect with neighbors. It provides information about the planning process, case studies, successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
<https://voicesforhealthykids.org>
- **National Physical Activity Plan: Community Recreation, Fitness, and Parks Sector.** The National Physical Activity Plan provides policy and programmatic recommendations to increase physical activity. It includes strategies and tactics that communities, organizations, and individuals in the community recreation, fitness, and parks sectors can use to support physically active lifestyles.
www.physicalactivityplan.org/theplan.php
- **Parks, Trails, and Health Workbook.** This workbook provides an outline and quick guide for including public health factors in developing a park or trail.
www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/upload/Parks-Trails-and-Health-Workbook_2020.pdf



Other Partnership Opportunities for Parks and Recreation

Entity	Partnership Possibilities
Community development corporations	Providing programs and services that leverage park development and access
Neighborhood and community groups	Advocating for new or improved parks, working with partners to ensure that parks reflect community needs, organizing cleanups
Youth sports organizations	Maintaining athletic fields in exchange for use
Business improvement districts	Activating public spaces, contributing new sources of revenue to offset operation and maintenance costs
Real estate developers	Creating and operating parks alongside development projects, contributing funding for nearby parks
Private foundations and individual donors	Contributing funding for parks, spearheading park-related cross-sector collaboration, advancing health, resilience, and social equity priorities
Landscape architects and other designers	Incorporating sustainable and resilient design into new and renovated parks, designing parks to meet community needs
Building owners, businesses, and corporations	Contributing funding for parks, sponsoring events and programs
Other municipal departments and agencies (planning, economic development, housing authorities)	Facilitating community engagement, issuing bonds for park development, coordinating park and affordable housing development, identifying partnership opportunities, making capital investments

Chapter 6

Innovation in Parks and Recreation

This chapter addresses how technology impacts all aspects of parks and recreation management. The Internet, credit cards, e-mail, and text messaging have made parks and recreation a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week service. Computer software programs for parks and recreation simplify program registration, sports league scheduling, facility reservations, and maintenance scheduling.

In addition to our changing demographics in Pennsylvania, the way people want to spend their free time is changing, in large part due to competition with technology. We must implement new ways of doing things, embrace technology, and make our parks and recreation facilities places of the future.

This chapter covers offering smart parks with free Wi-Fi, using smart infrastructure technology, and how technology can help address parks and recreation needs and inequities within your parks and recreation system.

We also cover the basics of artificial intelligence (AI), evaluate the pros and cons of this rapidly developing technology, explore numerous ways AI can benefit parks and recreation, and consider how it may change your work in the future.

Lastly, we outline how to prepare parks for climate change and how to incorporate green infrastructure strategies in your parks.



How Technology Impacts Parks and Recreation Management

Technology is redefining how local governments interact and connect with the public. Ironically, the expanded use of technology may allow you to focus on the more human parts of your job.

It's essential to familiarize yourself with the technology advancements impacting municipal parks and recreation and consider where you may be able to adopt these tools.

Technology makes parks and recreation management more efficient, from self-cleaning toilets to automated mowing equipment and semi-autonomous inspection drones. Sensors can detect when water sprinklers should be activated, saving water and money. Generative artificial intelligence platforms can draft recreation program descriptions. Technology can automate your administrative work by allowing people to register and pay online, sending out emails triggered by bookings and payments, blocking booking conflicts before they happen, managing program waitlists and adding people automatically when a space opens, and collecting fees for late cancellations and no-shows. Software that gathers participant waivers and participant shirt sizes saves time.

Technology is also an excellent way to bring social equity to your parks and recreation system. Computer banks in youth or senior centers teach valuable skills to underserved populations. App-based gaming systems are available in multiple languages and can put physically or emotionally challenged children at the center of play.

Wi-Fi in neighborhood parks can provide free internet connection in parts of your community where it's otherwise scarce.

The Wi-Fi Enabled Smart Park

Some believe that technology doesn't belong in parks. Instead, they should be places to escape from the fast pace of our technology-driven lives.

However, parks give children and adults places to socialize, exercise, and spend time outdoors, but only if they're used. Free Wi-Fi and charging stations can get people to visit parks.

Smart parks allow people to remain connected by Wi-Fi to their devices and their friends, families, and work responsibilities as they enjoy the outdoors. Smartphone apps enable park users to learn about and register for park events and activities. Children play longer on smart playgrounds linked to gaming apps on their parents' phones. Apps that use geo-triggered content allow children to learn about the outdoors while developing a lifelong love of parks and nature as they play.

While this may seem like it requires a significant investment, smart parks are popping up in municipalities of all sizes, and they're benefiting from higher park attendance and community engagement. Smart parks remove barriers for those who want and need to become more physically active but don't want to be without access to their messaging apps and social media platforms. As a bonus, connected people share and post photos, videos, and messages from their time at the park to social followers, serving as free marketing.

Traditional information-gathering tools, like surveys, can be more effective and generate a higher response rate through an app or interactive digital platform accessed at your parks.

Another benefit of smart parks for the public is safety and security. Free Wi-Fi and phone service allow residents to access emergency services, quick weather updates, and connect to friends and family if they are separated at a park.



Technology Uses in Parks and Recreation

Technology is playing an increasing role in parks and recreation management. Uses of technology include:

- **Drones.** Drone technology can be utilized for public safety. These aerial vehicles use a ground-based controller, often including live video or still photography capabilities.
- **Beacon Counters.** Another safety technology is the beacon counter, a Bluetooth-enabled device. Parents can rent a wristband embedded with a beacon, link it to their smartphone, and set a maximum radius for their child to roam and explore in a park. A warning alert sounds if the child exceeds the maximum distance, notifying the parent and child to reconnect.
- **Digital Kiosks and Mobile Apps.** Smart parks can offer on-site digital displays and mobile apps that promote park and facility features and allow people to register for upcoming events and activities quickly. Park kiosks and apps can also serve as education tools and help people learn about your community's history, provide facts about local flora and fauna, offer interactive games and quizzes, and educate visitors about the park's natural resources, biodiversity, and conservation efforts. Apps are available to locate trails, water access points, and hunting areas.
- **Phone Charging Benches.** Municipalities are adding solar-powered charging benches to parks to allow people to keep their smart devices running. Instead of sitting at their office desk while they eat lunch and scroll through social media accounts, they can keep their phone charged while taking their lunch break at the park.
- **Citizen Request Applications.** These tools allow the public to report park maintenance needs using apps, text messages, email, or social media from any connected device. Your residents can take geotagged photos and submit them with their requests, making the maintenance and repair process for park staff more efficient.

- **Esports Competitions.** Esports leagues and events are expanding in communities nationwide. Esports brings virtual activities into your recreation program schedule that unite gamers of all physical ability levels through technology.
- **Parks and Recreation Management Software.** While it's possible to conduct and promote programs and events manually, your best bet for success is to invest in parks and recreation management software. This way, registrations, program planning, participant communications, and more can all be accessed in one easy-to-use platform.

Your software should have the following capabilities:

- **Segmentation.** By utilizing all your data within your software system, your email tool should segment recipients based on different data points and create targeted emails just for them.
- **Advance scheduling.** If you're sending out reminder emails for an upcoming program, your email tool should be able to schedule them in advance.
- **Automation.** Studies show personalized emails deliver six times higher transaction rates. By automating specific data points in your email content, such as name, recipients know the email is tailored to them.
- **Text messaging.** Your software should be able to deliver text messages since most people will see a text message before an email message.



Sustainability and Smart Infrastructure Technology

Technology can be employed to develop sustainable infrastructure solutions within parks. Smart infrastructure, including energy-efficient lighting, water-saving technologies, and waste management systems, reduces environmental impact and leads to cost savings. Smart infrastructure uses include:

- **Solar-powered lights** reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions while improving safety.
- **Electric vehicle charging stations** encourage the use of electric vehicles, promoting cleaner transportation and reducing our carbon footprint.
- **Light schedule software** helps reduce energy use, cut energy bills, and save on maintenance costs by turning the lights on when needed and automatically shutting them off when they're not.
- **Remotely controlled software** can automatically open and lock park restroom doors, turn on sprinkler systems, open and close gates, and activate signage.
- **Solar-powered trash receptacles** compact trash, reducing the frequency of pick up.
- **Sustainable public restrooms** with water-efficient fixtures, renewable energy systems, and greywater recycling can significantly reduce water and energy consumption.
- **Microgrid systems** in community recreation centers ensure continuous power supply during outages.



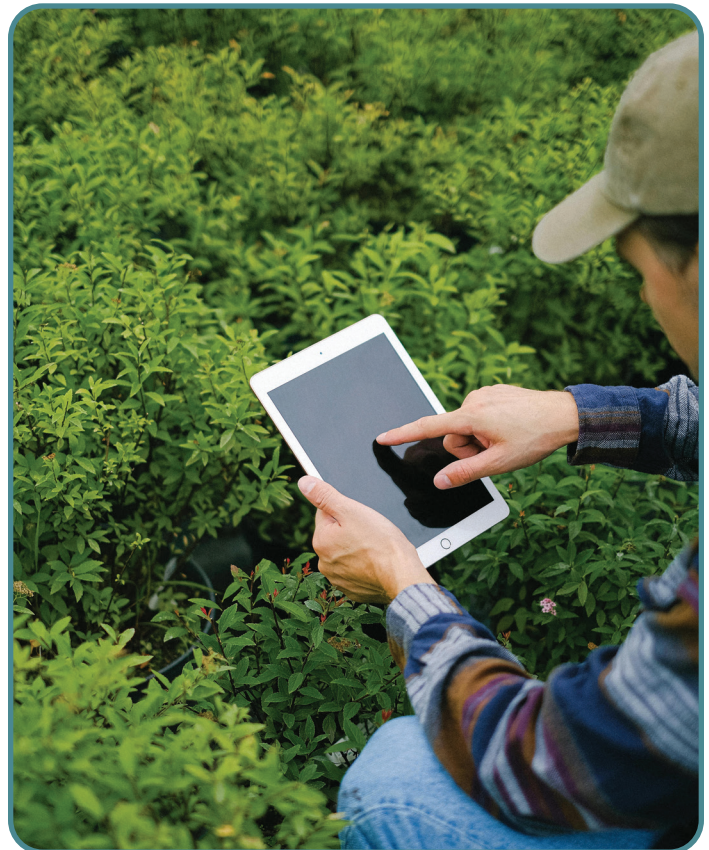
Data-Driven Decision-Making Using Technology

Data helps to improve parks and recreation services and make them more responsive to community needs. Data is also highly beneficial in quantifying and addressing inequities within your parks and recreation system.

Technology-based data analytics tools like those below provide insights into park visitor behavior, facility usage, and program effectiveness.

- **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** help manage, analyze, and visualize spatial data for site selection, map trails and facilities, monitor environmental changes, aid in conservation planning and management, and more.
- **Visitor experience analytics tools** provide insights into visitor behavior and preferences to improve services, enhance park layouts, and improve marketing efforts.
- **Camera vision technology** on light poles along park paths documents and distinguishes between walkers, runners, and cyclists, which is data not easily accessed.
- **Sensors and Bluetooth capability on park benches** gather data on visitor traffic and allow people to provide feedback on park facilities through surveys. This information can provide insights into what aspects of the park are being used and what facilities are not. This can help justify costs in upgrading park areas people frequently use, adding new features they want, and transforming underutilized facilities.
- **Trail counters** identify low and heavy use times on trails and what times of day and months they occur.
- **Remote sensing, satellite imagery, and drone technology** monitor and collect data on aspects of a park's ecosystems, such as tracking wildlife populations, studying vegetation patterns, and assessing ecosystem health.
- **Asset management software platforms** help track and maintain park assets such as playgrounds, benches, and picnic pavilions.
- **Reservation and booking systems** offer analytics to maximize park facility reservations, program scheduling, and capacity planning.
- **Security and surveillance analytics** enhance park security by identifying unusual behaviors or potential threats.

- **Budget and financial analysis tools** from recreation management software help to manage budgets, track expenses, and make data-driven financial decisions.
- **Weather and environmental monitoring systems** provide real-time weather and air quality data to adjust programming and make safety-related decisions.
- **Social media management tools** monitor social media comments and archive content.
- **Volunteer and staff management tools** schedule staff and volunteers to help you improve staffing decisions and optimize productivity.



Uses for Artificial Intelligence (AI) Technology in Parks and Recreation

AI is the development of computer systems that can perform tasks that usually require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages.

AI technology can change how parks are managed, making maintenance easier and more efficient, improving accessibility, and enhancing recreation experiences. Although there are some problems and restrictions regarding using this technology for parks and recreation management, the advantages can be very beneficial.

The AI can change maintenance schedules by analyzing data such as park usage and weather patterns. For example, by studying park use, it can figure out the best time to mow grass or trim trees. The AI can also consider weather data to determine when plants need watering to help prevent water waste. By looking at data on the age and mobility of park visitors, the AI can decide where it's best to put new ramps, paths, or other accessibility features. By studying how people use your park and what kind of people visit, AI can suggest better ways to develop the park's amenities and activities by deciding where to put new features like exercise equipment or nature trails.

Generative AI is a subset of the technology that can create stories, essays, images, audio, video, and more by learning from existing content and interacting with it using natural language. AI platforms such as ChatGPT can assist with a range of writing tasks, such as developing rules and regulations, creating social media content, and drafting recreation program descriptions, saving time and effort. Microsoft's AI, Copilot, uses the entire Office suite. It can record an online meeting, write a meeting summary in Word, create charts and tables in Excel, use the data to create a PowerPoint, and send it to your contacts using Copilot's help to draft the email.

Another generative AI platform at the forefront for parks and recreation is Placer.ai. It uses location analytics to provide data on people's movement, such as where they travel to and from and how long they stay at your parks, to understand who your users are and how they're interacting within your park system.

Potential Problems with the Use of AI Technology

Using AI can have benefits, but there are things to be cautious about. The AI model needs loads of data to learn from; sometimes, this data doesn't exist. Using AI-generated content as a starting point for writing can be a great timesaver, but the accuracy of the information could be a problem. Plus, there can be ethical concerns like potential biases in the information or generated content. Computer programs that use generative AI for managing parks can be expensive.

AI is shaped by data collected from its users and others, which raises privacy concerns. In addition, there's worry about intellectual property and copyright infringement since generative AI learns and draws from information originating from people. While using AI can be a quick way to develop the structure of an idea, review and revision are necessary.

The landscape of AI is changing so rapidly that it's challenging to anticipate issues, and many outcomes of the widespread use of AI remain to be seen. Creating policies and norms around AI can help reduce some of its risks. However, this task isn't easy when the target is constantly moving.

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) in Parks and Recreation

VR and AR are powerful technology tools to enrich park experiences. Consider these possible applications for your parks:

- **Create self-guided park tours** with people using their smartphones or AR glasses to access additional information, historical facts, and interactive elements as they explore the area.
- **Provide video or text instruction** on exercises at each fitness trail station.
- **Display facility hours and rules and regulations** throughout the park.
- **Overlay facility rental information** to show availability and allow users to click to rent a facility.
- **Display schedules of upcoming games and show results of games** at ballfields.
- **Digitize walking paths** with augmented reality, where visitors scan stations across the park with an app, allowing for family-friendly activities that combine fitness and education into a unique outdoor experience.
- **Offer educational content** like interactive wildlife and plant identification, where people can point their devices at plants or animals and receive information about them in their natural environment.



- **Help people find their way** around a park by overlaying digital directions.
- **Raise environmental awareness** by letting people visualize how an area might look after reforestation efforts or learn about climate change's impacts.
- **Entice children to outdoor areas** through augmented reality apps that present mobile-based interactive games such as Pokemon Go and other geocache and digital treasure-hunting applications that encourage learning and physical activity.
- **Recreate historical events or scenes** in the location where they initially occurred, allowing people to experience history in a more immersive way.
- **Highlight public art installations** where people scan the artwork to learn about the artist, its inspiration, and its significance to the area.
- **Encourage physical activity** in parks with activities such as scavenger hunts and fitness challenges.
- **Promote upcoming events and activities** by creating interactive posters or virtual flyers.
- **Provide real-time information on the environmental impact of humans**, such as littering or pollution.
- **Create geo-tagged stories or historical narratives** that people can access at specific locations within a park.

Preparing Parks for Climate Change

Walking and biking trails, skate parks, and ballfields help people exercise safely and comfortably. Studies show that being outdoors helps reduce stress hormones, which can help ease chronic illness. But escalating heat and other extreme weather threaten the spaces that help us cope.

Scientific evidence overwhelmingly indicates that Pennsylvania's climate is changing along with the planet's overall climate. Climate change impacts how we grow food, get around, and build homes. Our parks are affected, too. Climate-driven heat waves, heavy rain, intense drought, and more powerful hurricanes increase stress on parks.

Atmospheric gases such as water vapor and carbon dioxide trap heat that the earth radiates after it's been warmed by the sun. This conversion of sunlight into trapped warmth is similar in principle to what happens in a closed car or a greenhouse and is called the "greenhouse effect," which is causing climate change and shifting our global, regional, and local weather patterns.

Scientists and local governments are working to study how climate change unfolds in green spaces and devise ways to make parks more resilient. Ensuring parks can provide significant climate resilience benefits means changing how we design and maintain green spaces, so they adapt to a changing climate.

Parkland helps protect people from the effects of a changing climate. Pools and splash pads offer places to cool off on dangerously hot days. Healthy trees are a huge part of protecting parks and people from climate change by providing shade, pulling carbon dioxide out of the air, and lowering nearby neighborhoods' temperatures. Marshes, ponds, and meadows soak up water when it rains to help keep roads and homes dry.

Parks and recreation can reduce greenhouse gases by making facilities more energy efficient, relying more on solar power, and switching to lower-emission vehicles. A diversity of plants helps keep spaces cooler than a grass lawn. Increased naturalization by shifting some lawn areas to low-mow meadows also results in less need for mowing, which reduces emissions from mowing equipment. Things that could be damaged by water, such as playgrounds and restrooms, can be located on higher ground, and grassy areas can be in places most likely to be flooded after a storm. Parks can also be designed to absorb and control water and reduce flooding in nearby neighborhoods.

Shifting to more naturalized landscapes requires engaging the public. We've created an expectation that mown grass will be everywhere in parks. It's difficult for people who are used to a different aesthetic. For some, it's messy in comparison, but that's what naturally managed areas look like.

Simple signs may help. You can create pathways through the meadows, placing signage that welcomes people and educates them about the new meadows and why they may look different than other park landscapes.

Small actions in small spaces can have far-reaching impacts. Initiatives to plant trees in parks, distribute rain barrels in a neighborhood, or restore a small wetland are essential in engaging people and raising awareness about climate change. Other local actions include:

- **Green roofs** on park structures help regulate temperature, reduce energy consumption, and provide habitat for wildlife.
- **Rain gardens** capture and filter stormwater runoff, reducing the load on municipal stormwater systems and improving water quality.
- **Bike lanes and bike racks** encourage active transportation, reduce traffic congestion, and promote physical fitness.
- **Community gardens** allow residents to grow food, promote local agriculture, and enhance community engagement.
- **Tree planting** along waterways helps reduce flooding and erosion.

What Climate Change Means for Parks

- To survive the warming temperatures, many plants and animals are shifting their ranges northward or to higher elevations.
- Drought is decreasing water in reservoirs, reducing summer recreation opportunities.
- A hotter, drier planet also means more wildfire risk here in Pennsylvania.
- Reduced mountain snowpacks are curtailing traditional winter sports.
- More winter precipitation falls as rain instead of snow, increasing seasonal flooding and making rivers more destructive and dangerous.
- Severe floods damage park buildings, courts, playgrounds, walking paths, and other infrastructure.
- More erratic runoff threatens dams and impacts water quality.
- Spring wildflowers bloom one to two weeks earlier than usual, disrupting vital relationships with pollinators.

Incorporating Green Infrastructure Strategies in Parks

Just as communities need to upgrade and expand their built infrastructure of roads, sewers, and utilities, they also need to upgrade and expand their green infrastructure, the interconnected system of green spaces that conserves natural ecosystem functions, sustains clear air and water, and provides a wide array of benefits to people and wildlife. Green infrastructure is a community's natural life support system, the ecological framework for environmental and economic sustainability.

The development of green infrastructure in parks requires collaboration between various stakeholders, including planners, landscape architects, environmental engineers, and water management agencies. By building strong green infrastructure partnerships, municipalities can improve parkland, better manage stormwater, increase community resiliency to shifting weather patterns, and provide funding to implement and maintain park enhancements that benefit the community.

By incorporating sustainable practices, you reduce carbon footprint and emissions, conserve resources, and reduce waste. Additionally, these practices improve public health through increased access to clean air, green space, and improved water quality. You can reduce long-term maintenance costs and reliance on energy sources like fossil fuels by utilizing green infrastructure, such as rain gardens, green roofs, and bioswales.

Parks already contain open space areas that absorb stormwater and offer water quality, habitat, and aesthetic benefits. Park infrastructure – parking lots, roads, buildings, playing fields, courts, and other man-made surfaces – can be built or retrofitted to treat stormwater or drain to pervious surfaces. Parking lots and paved trails can include trees and permeable pavement. Wetlands can be constructed in existing drainage areas, and recreation centers can treat stormwater with pollinator gardens, green roofs, rainwater barrels and cisterns, and planter boxes in space-limited areas.

Ways to Implement Green Infrastructure in Parks

Green Infrastructure Actions	Environmental Benefits
Installing cisterns or rain barrels to collect roof runoff for irrigation	Reduces potable or recycled water use
Installing permeable pavement or pavers	Reduces runoff, erosion, pavement maintenance, and use of deicers
Unearthing and restoring buried streams and springs	Provides interactive water features such as wetlands, ponds, and creeks for public use
Removing unnecessary impervious surfaces	Reduces runoff and decreases erosion
Installing green roofs	Increases roof lifespans, lowers energy cost, and manages stormwater
Installing bioretention in underutilized perimeter areas	Reduces runoff and flooding and beautifies low-use landscaped areas.
Including educational signage describing BMPs (best management practices) and stormwater impacts	Creates opportunities for environmental education
Converting turf areas with high maintenance requirements to bioretention areas or other naturalized areas	Reduces maintenance and other costs associated with the management of turf
Infiltrating runoff designs for native plants and locally adapted plants	Attracts wildlife such as birds, butterflies, and other pollinators and provides pathways and benches, picnicking and play areas, and areas for meditation or wildlife viewing
Converting high-maintenance vegetation such as turf to lower-maintenance native vegetation	Reduces the need for supplemental water, fertilizers, and pesticides and reduces mowing and weeding frequency
Installing green infrastructure	Earns stormwater utility credits in stormwater fee areas, and the parks could receive funds from such programs
Improving the drainage of turf fields	Results in fewer field closures after rain storms and reduces the need for seasonal turf maintenance, re-tilling, and aeration
Amending soils to improve water filtration, eliminating standing water on pavement or in low-lying areas	Eliminates standing water in low-lying areas and helps to eliminate mosquito breeding habitat
Reducing stormwater volume and pollutants	Helps local municipalities meet regulatory requirements
Incorporating vegetation, especially trees, where pavement or conventional turf landscapes existed before	Helps reduce greenhouse gases

Monitoring Trends

Where is parks and recreation heading?

We can't predict the future, but we can use social, environmental, and participation trends to help us plan for the changes to come in the way people play. Your ability to monitor community trends enables you to anticipate and respond to your residents' changing needs and expectations and is essential to make the best use of your resources.

Good trend information allows you to plan effectively and efficiently to provide a high level of public service. You can monitor parks and recreation trends by reading publications, listening to podcasts, reading blogs, attending parks and recreation workshops and conferences, and tracking participation statistics.

Parks and Recreation Technical Assistance

Three primary agencies provide essential resources for local government parks and recreation:



Pennsylvania
**Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources**
Bureau of Recreation and Conservation

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. The Bureau's mission is to serve as a leader in establishing community conservation partnerships for advancing the greening of Pennsylvania, protecting the Commonwealth's natural and heritage resources, and providing recreational opportunities for all Pennsylvanians and visitors to enjoy. While its central office is in Harrisburg, the Bureau operates regional offices throughout Pennsylvania. www.dcnr.pa.gov/



Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS). PRPS is the principal state organization promoting recreation and park training, networking, and leadership opportunities for those working and volunteering in the parks and recreation field. Members include professionals who manage municipal parks and recreation systems and state parks, citizen members of parks and recreation boards, therapeutic recreation professionals working in healthcare settings, and college and university students majoring in parks and recreation. The benefits of PRPS membership include professional development opportunities, networking with other professionals, advocacy training, and access to numerous resources for managing and maintaining parks and recreation systems. www.prps.org/



NATIONAL
RECREATION AND PARK
ASSOCIATION

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). NRPA is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to building strong, vibrant, and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation.

NRPA places immense importance on research and data to raise the status of parks and recreation. It conducts research with two goals: 1) to help park and recreation agencies make optimal decisions on operations, programming, and spending, and 2) to support park and recreation professionals in making the case for more significant and more stable funding to policymakers, stakeholders, the media, and the general public. Benefits of NRPA membership include member rates for the annual National Conference, access to in-person and online training, professional certification, the Parks and Recreation monthly magazine, information on grant opportunities, and access to Park Metrics, best practice resources, research papers, and toolkits.

www.nrpa.org/

Summary

The chances are excellent that your efforts to improve your parks and recreation system will make your community a better place. You'll see the results daily in the smiles of the young, old, and everyone in between, telling you how essential parks and recreation is in their lives.

Those municipalities that get the results they hope for share a variety of traits. To achieve the level of award-winning parks and recreation systems in Pennsylvania:

- Plan your parks and recreation system, develop action steps to achieve your vision, move projects forward, and show results.
- Promote your parks and recreation services as essential to your community.
- Encourage and listen to public input.
- Involve your residents as volunteers.
- Get your elected officials and community leaders out to parks and programs.
- Embrace technology innovations.
- Work with a wide variety of partners.
- Adopt practices that ensure accountability of tax dollars and other resources.

Building a comprehensive community parks and recreation system takes years and decades. Along the way, celebrate each success you have, share it with your community, and, above all, enjoy yourself.



Appendix A
Community Parks and Recreation Resource Directory

State Agencies and Organizations

Resource	Description
Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS) 814-234-4272 www.prps.org	The principal state organization promoting recreation and park training, networking, and leadership opportunities for those working and volunteering in the field.
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) 717-787-7672 www.dcnr.pa.gov	Directs the establishment of community conservation partnerships through grants and technical assistance to benefit local parks and recreation, rivers, trails, greenways, heritage areas, open space, and natural areas.
Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) 800-379-7448 https://dced.pa.gov	Fosters opportunities for communities to succeed and thrive in a global economy, enabling Pennsylvania to achieve a superior quality of life. Provides grants for community revitalization and economic development activities on the local level.
Governor's Center for Local Government Services 888-223-6837 https://dced.pa.gov	Offers a full range of technical and financial assistance to local governments. Part of DCED.
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) 717-787-2838 www.penndot.pa.gov	Supports the preparation of active transportation plans for improved walking and bicycling conditions.
Penn State Extension 877-345-0691 www.extension.psu.edu	Offers courses, workshops, publications, and consultations on various topics, such as agriculture, nutrition, the environment, and business.
Pennsylvania Department of Health 717-787-6436 www.health.pa.gov	Promotes healthy behaviors, prevents injury and disease, and assures the safe delivery of quality health care for all Pennsylvanians through community-based strategies.
Pennsylvania Department of Aging 717-783-1550 www.aging.pa.gov	Oversees benefits, services, and programs available through its 52 local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) network, covering the commonwealth's 67 counties. Services include home-delivered and congregate meals, health and wellness services, senior community centers, and transportation.
Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection 800-541-2050 www.dep.pa.gov	Protects Pennsylvania's air, land, and water from pollution and provides for citizen health and safety through a cleaner environment.

<p>Pennsylvania Department of Education 717-783-6788 www.education.pa.gov</p>	<p>Oversees 500 public school districts, public charter schools, public cyber charter schools, Career and Technology Centers/Vocational Technical schools, public Intermediate Units, youth education in State Juvenile Correctional Institutions, Head Starts, publicly funded preschools, and community colleges.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Game Commission 717-787-4250 www.pgc.pa.gov</p>	<p>Manages the state's wildlife resources through land management, law enforcement, public information, and education.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission 717-705-7800 www.fishandboat.com</p>	<p>Provides fishing and boating opportunities through the protection and management of aquatic resources.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission 717-787-3362 www.phmc.pa.gov</p>	<p>Promotes the conservation of Pennsylvania's historical heritage, oversees the care of historical manuscripts, public records, objects of historical interest, museums, archaeology, publications, historic sites and properties, historic preservation, geographic names, and the promotion of public interest in Pennsylvania history.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Council on the Arts 717-787-6883 www.arts.pa.gov</p>	<p>Fosters the excellence, diversity, and vitality of the arts in Pennsylvania and broadens their availability and appreciation throughout the state.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Humanities Council 800-462-0442 www.pahumanities.org</p>	<p>Empowers non-profit groups across Pennsylvania to develop and offer programs for lifelong learning through history, literature, religious studies, philosophy, and the social sciences.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts 717-238-7223 www.pacd.org</p>	<p>Works to enhance efforts that support the wise use of the state's natural resources by serving as the collective voice for Pennsylvania's 66 county conservation districts. Provides advocacy, education and training, program coordination, and facilitation to districts and their constituents.</p>
<p>Center for Rural Pennsylvania 717-787-9555 www.ruralpa.org</p>	<p>Promotes and sustains the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities by awarding grants for research and model projects, disseminating information on trends and conditions, and sponsoring forums on rural issues.</p>
<p>Keystone Athletic Field Managers Association 717-497-4154 www.kafmo.org</p>	<p>Provides promotion, education, and training to advance sports turf management in Pennsylvania.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) 800-322-9214 888-590-7844 www.pecpa.org</p>	<p>Promotes sustainable use of our land and natural resources, protection of watersheds, and innovative solutions to long-standing land use issues from brownfield clean-up to air quality. It also promotes the establishment of new municipal environmental advisory councils and assists existing EACs.</p>
<p>The Maintenance Institute 814-234-4272 www.themaintenanceinstitute.com</p>	<p>Creates, researches, and identifies best practices and education on grounds operations, land management, and maintenance.</p>

<p>Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers 717-234-7910 www.pawatersheds.org</p>	<p>Protects and promotes sound management and enhancement of the Commonwealth's rivers and watersheds and empowers local organizations.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania State Snowmobile Association (PSSA) 888-411-PSSA www.pasnow.org</p>	<p>Maintains a continuing effort to provide high-quality trails throughout the Commonwealth by promoting the proper recreational uses of snowmobiles, maintaining environment-friendly relationships, and sponsoring safety classes to encourage safe, courteous, and lawful use of snowmobiles.</p>
<p>Keystone Trails Association 717-766-9690 www.kta-hike.org</p>	<p>Promotes trail advocacy, protection, care, club support, and trail promotion throughout Pennsylvania.</p>
<p>Keystone State Games 570-760-0352 www.keystonegames.org</p>	<p>Provides annual multi-sport competitions for amateur athletes to compete against athletes from the Commonwealth to promote physical fitness, sports activity, and sportsmanship as a health improvement and disease prevention strategy.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Municipal League 717-236-9469 www.pml.org</p>	<p>Represents participating Pennsylvania cities, boroughs, townships, and home rule communities that all share municipal policy interests. Oversees a wide array of municipal services, including legislative advocacy, publications, education, training certification programs, membership research and inquiries, consulting-based programs, and group insurance trusts.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation 717-236-7644 www.paparksandforests.org</p>	<p>Supports the Commonwealth's 125 state parks and 2.2 million acres of forest land for citizens to donate or bequeath money to state parks and forests and become active and involved volunteers in the park and forest system.</p>
<p>Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful 724-836-4121 www.keppabeautiful.org</p>	<p>Empowers Pennsylvanians to keep communities clean and beautiful through programs such as Pick Up PA, Illegal Dump Free PA, Community Greening and Beautification, PA Waterways Stewards, Land Stewards, and special events and training.</p>
<p>Audubon Mid-Atlantic 610-990-3431 https://paaudubon.org</p>	<p>Provides local conservation education and engagement initiatives at four nature centers and protects and restores critical bird habitats within coastal Maryland, the Delaware Watershed, and the forests of the Pennsylvania Wilds through conservation and advocacy work.</p>
<p>Preservation PA 717-234-2310 www.preservationpa.org</p>	<p>Assists Pennsylvania communities to protect and utilize historic resources through creative partnerships, targeted educational and advocacy programs, advisory assistance, and special projects.</p>

<p>WeConservePA 717-230-8560 www.weconservepa.org</p>	<p>Helps organizations and individuals conserve land, protect and restore waterways, implement sustainable practices, connect people to the outdoors, and advocate for pro-conservation governmental policy. Sponsors an online hub for the greenway and trail community. Manages the environmental advisory council network.</p>
<p>Pennsylvania Off-Highway Vehicle Association 866-314-2079 www.paohv.org</p>	<p>Promotes off-highway motorized recreation, rider education, safety training, and environmentally sensitive trail development, maintenance, and use.</p>
<p>PA Chapter of the American Planning Association 717-671-4510 www.planningpa.org</p>	<p>Promotes planning through training, an annual conference, legislative monitoring, and public awareness efforts for the Commonwealth's professional planners and planning officials. It partners with the PA State Association of Boroughs to fund and administer the PA Municipal Planning Education Institute.</p>
<p>People, Parks and Community Foundation 814-234-8803 www.peopleparks.org</p>	<p>Provides grants to municipalities and nonprofit organizations for recreational, educational, community, and capacity development projects.</p>

National Agencies and Organizations


<p>National Park Service 215-597-7013 www.nps.gov</p>	<p>Preserves the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations; guards diverse cultural, historical, and recreational resources; and protects America's open space. Rivers, trails, and conservation assistance program staff are available for technical assistance.</p>
<p>National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) 703-858-0784 www.nrpa.org</p>	<p>Advances parks, recreation, environmental, and conservation efforts nationally. Provides publications, training programs, and an annual conference.</p>
<p>Nature Conservancy PA Office 610-832-1323 www.nature.org</p>	<p>Works closely with communities and businesses to preserve plants, animals, and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.</p>
<p>Rails-to-Trails Conservancy 202-331-9696 www.railstotrails.org</p>	<p>Enriches communities and countryside by creating a network of public trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Provides technical assistance to help build trails. Supports the TrailLink trail finder app.</p>
<p>President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (PCPFS) 202-690-9000 www.fitness.gov</p>	<p>Promotes, encourages, and motivates Americans of all ages to become physically active and participate in sports. Initiates and administers programs that reach people in schools, homes, workplaces, and communities.</p>

<p>Safe Routes Partnership 812-335-1844 www.saferoutespartnership.org</p>	<p>Works with nationwide partners to create neighborhoods where streets, schools, and public spaces invite walking, bicycling, physical activity, and play. Promotes Safe Routes to School, active transportation initiatives, Complete Streets, Safe Routes to Parks, and Safe Routes to Healthy Food.</p>
<p>National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) 800-688-5437 www.nays.org</p>	<p>Develops training courses, membership tools, programs, guiding documents, and resources for volunteer coaches, officials, parents, and volunteer administrators to ensure quality youth sports experiences and sponsors the Academy for Youth Sports Administrators, a certification program for professional administrators.</p>
<p>National Council of Youth Sports 470-719-9091 www.ncys.org</p>	<p>Promotes the importance of youth sports and enhances the experience by advocating for full access to sports participation and ensuring that games are played in safe environments. It focuses on background screening, athlete protection and safety, coaching education, social and emotional skill development, and parent education.</p>
<p>PeopleForBikes 303-449-4893 www.peopleforbikes.org</p>	<p>Accelerates the construction of fun, safe, and connected places to ride, advances pro-bike and pro-bike business policy at all levels of government, reduces barriers to access, and welcomes more people to the joys of bicycling.</p>
<p>ChangeLab Solutions 510-302-3380 www.changelabsolutions.org</p>	<p>Advances health equity by partnering with communities nationwide to improve health and opportunity by changing harmful laws, policies, and systems.</p>
<p>Healthy Places by Design 919-843-2523 www.healthyplacesbydesign.org</p>	<p>Provides technical assistance, support, training, and tools to community coalitions and leaders to advance health equity and create healthy communities through policy, systems, and environmental changes.</p>
<p>America Walks 206-941-4414 www.americawalks.org</p>	<p>Advances safe, equitable, accessible, and enjoyable places to walk and move by giving people and communities the resources to advocate for change effectively.</p>
<p>USDA National Resources Conservation Service PA Office 717-237-2100 https://ncaonline.org</p>	<p>Helps producers, soil and water conservation districts, and other partners protect and conserve natural resources on private lands. Offers conservation innovation grants and helps state and tribal governments improve public access to private lands for recreation.</p>
<p>U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 800-232-4636 www.cdc.gov</p>	<p>Increases our nation's health security by conducting critical science and providing health information to protect against expensive and dangerous health threats and respond when they arise.</p>

Sierra Club PA Chapter 717-232-0101 www.sierraclub.org	Explores and protects the wild places on Earth, promotes responsible use of ecosystems and resources, and educates and enlists people to preserve and restore the quality of the natural and human environment.
Trust for Public Land 212-677-7171 www.tpl.org	Helps conserve land for recreation and spiritual nourishment and improves American communities' health and quality of life.
City Parks Alliance 202-930-7430 www.cityparksalliance.org	Provides resources and tools to equip parks and recreation departments, municipalities, urban design and landscape architecture firms, and advocacy organizations to enhance capacity and build equitable, healthy, and engaged communities.
National Association of Park Foundations 940-448-0057 www.the-napf.org	Provides information, education, advocacy, and networking opportunities to build the capacity of park foundations and friends groups.
U. S. Army Corps of Engineers 202-761-0031 www.usace.army.mil	Provides recreation opportunities at its campgrounds, lakes, and marinas and protects and restores the environment by cleaning sites contaminated with hazardous, toxic, or radioactive waste and material.
American Red Cross 800-733-2767 www.redcross.org	Provides Lifeguarding, Water Safety Instructor, Lifeguarding Instructor, CPR, and First Aid training courses.
National Center on Accessibility 812-856-4422 https://ncaonline.org	Helps park managers balance access and enjoyment for visitors with disabilities with the preservation of a park's natural and cultural resources through training, accessibility assessments, research, planning, and technical assistance.
Smart Growth America www.smartgrowthamerica.org	Empowers communities through technical assistance, advocacy, and leadership to create livable places, healthy people, and shared prosperity.

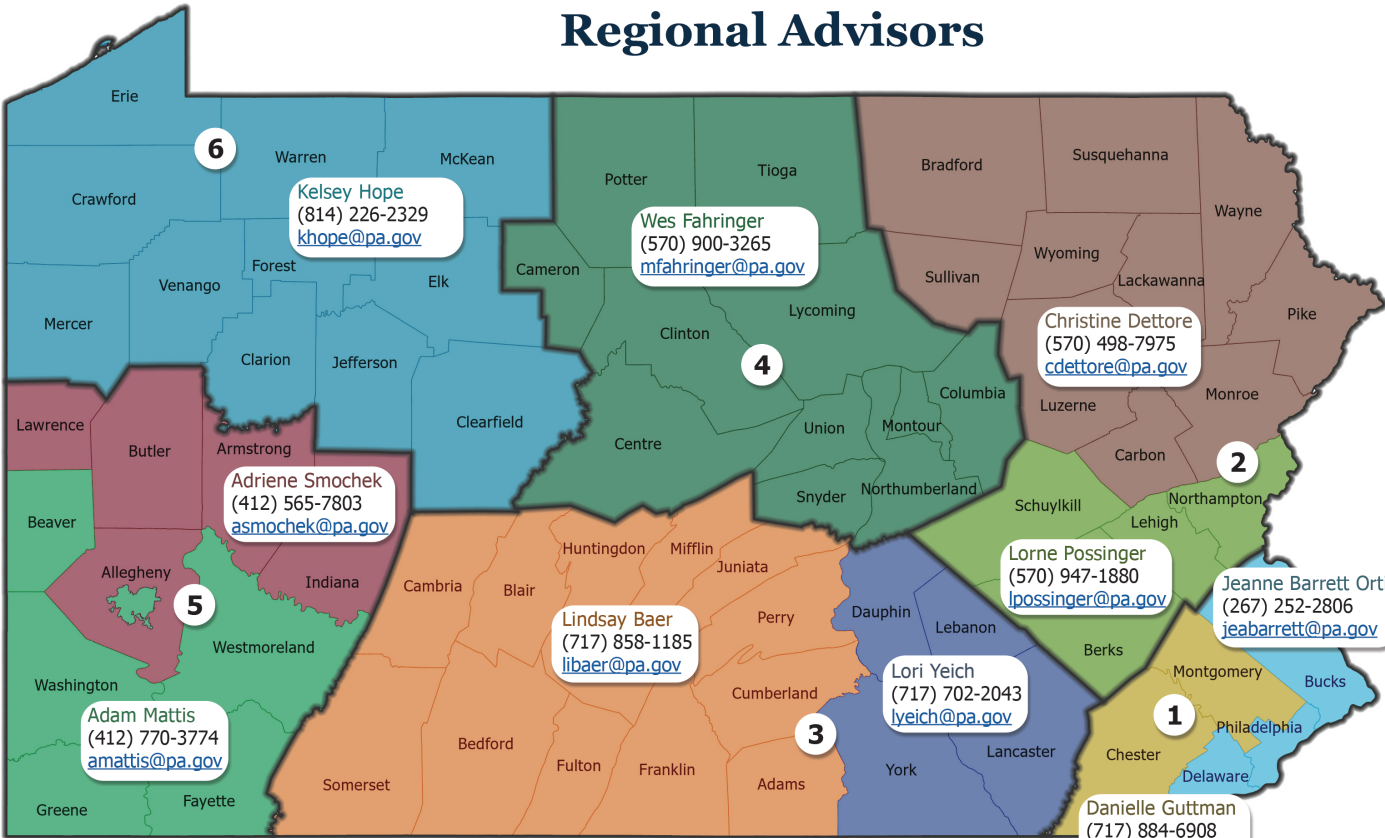
Appendix B

DCNR Bureau of Recreation and Conservation Regional Offices



Pennsylvania
Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources



Bureau of Recreation and Conservation Regional Advisors



Region	Advisor Name	Phone Number	Email
1	Danielle Guttman	(717) 884-6908	dguttman@pa.gov
2	Jeanne Barrett Ortiz	(267) 252-2806	jeabarrett@pa.gov
3	Lori Yeich	(717) 702-2043	lyeich@pa.gov
4	Wes Fahringer	(570) 900-3265	mfahringer@pa.gov
5	Adam Mattis	(412) 770-3774	amattis@pa.gov
6	Kelsey Hope	(814) 226-2329	khope@pa.gov

The DCNR Bureau of Recreation and Conservation (BRC) provides grants and technical assistance for community projects related to park and recreation facilities, trails, rivers, and open space. Regional advisors are a first point of contact for technical, funding, and partnership-building assistance to advance these types of projects.

Scan or click this QR code to learn more about BRC grants and programs.



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About the Author

Susan E. Landes, CPRE, believes a vibrant parks and recreation system is at the heart of every great community. She holds an undergraduate degree in Community Recreation and Parks and a master's degree in Public Administration from Penn State University. In 1990, Sue founded Recreation and Parks Solutions to pursue her goal of making public parks and recreation an essential service in Pennsylvania. She has a proven track record as a progressive and innovative thinker who gets things accomplished. Her past experiences working in local government have fueled her passion to help communities provide the best parks and recreation services possible. Located in Lebanon County, Recreation and Parks Solutions is a small firm with a big presence in municipal parks and recreation consulting. It has provided professional parks, recreation, open space, and trail planning services to more than 300 local governments of all shapes and sizes across the Commonwealth. Its mission is to build local capacity and community support to sustain and grow parks and recreation systems and services in Pennsylvania.

www.recandparkssolutions.com

“Leave all the afternoon for exercise and recreation, which are as necessary as reading. I will rather say more necessary because health is worth more than learning.”

--Thomas Jefferson



Pennsylvania
**Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources**
Bureau of Recreation and Conservation

