2018 Recreation and Conservation Leadership Summit
Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society and
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Professional and Leadership Development
in the Recreation and Park Industry

The growth of park and recreation services, and the increased popular recognition of their essential value, is directly attributable to the professional development of providers, and the sharing of that expertise in practical ways.

Developing and empowering industry leaders as trusted change agents, interpreters of societal trends, community problem-solvers, and skilled advocates of public policy can exert a profound influence for our colleagues, profession and public.

Building a culture and a path that recognizes and rewards better training, in turn, builds better professionals. This paper examines some of the resources and methods to achieve such a goal.

In a 2018 national professionalism and credentialing survey, Pennsylvania professionals ranked the average importance of its attributes at a higher level (4.90) than the national average (4.66) (Beason, Cable, & Brunton, 2018). Results of this survey with regard to attributes of professionalism, earing CEUs, and obtaining professional credentials are shared below.

Attributes of Professionalism. *(PA level of importance of factors, ranked highest to lowest)*
1. Professional Associations and Continuing Education *(higher than national average)*
2. Ethics
3. Sense of Calling *(PA mean and national mean)*
4. Peers as Referents
5. Certification
6. Peers as Judges of Competence and Performance
7. Indispensable Service
8. Autonomy *(ranked closely with the nat'l average)*

Earning CEUs. *(PA level of importance of factors)*
3 highest: Increase my competence level; Increase my skill level; Paid for by my organization.
3 lowest: Anticipated change in job function; Increase in salary level; Actual change in job function.

Obtaining Professional Credentials. *(PA level of importance of factors)*
3 highest: Better qualified/trained; Keep current on specific practices; More experience in specific topics
2 lowest: Prestige enhancement; Desire to be licensed.

While the comparative data is interesting and encouraging, several constraining issues and current transformations in the professional workforce present particular challenges to emerging leaders and

practitioners. Overcoming these limitations and managing change will be critical to developing and sustaining highly competent and effective leaders and professionals.

Constraining Issues

A variety of conditions and perceptions constrain a uniformly well-developed professional workforce. In many agencies, ongoing training is neither expected nor required, or is an organizational priority. Many professionals lack the necessary time, funding, or personal motivation to hone or gain new skills.

Professional Readiness and Integration. Many routes lead into our industry in a changing society, and many professional and volunteer contributors emerge from other than accredited higher education recreation and park-related programs of study. "The comprehensive park and recreation industry includes many diverse disciplines and related fields, but a lack of full and continual interagency and interdisciplinary awareness, cooperation and integrated services [among practicing professionals] impedes the highest effectiveness and influence of the entire profession" (Herd, 2017).

Advocacy and Engagement. Many recreation and conservation professionals need to develop political engagement and advocacy skills. This demands a collective leadership effort that supports incoming professionals through formal and informal opportunities to learn the hard and soft skills necessary to navigate and succeed in their unique municipal recreation environments.

Certifications. Although an array of national professional certifications have been established; among approximately 2050 Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society members, just 4 have earned the CPRE, 90 possess the CPRP, 65 hold the CPSI, and 31 are CTRS. There are no Pennsylvania agencies who have earned national accreditation from the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA).

Next-Gen Preferences. Millennials are now the largest generational cohort in the workforce and Gen Z is right behind them. These next-gen professionals prefer "microlearning" in small, specific bursts of information tied to immediate job demands, available at a time of their choosing—incorporating personalization; state-of-the-art tech platforms; curated content; plenty of networking in their field; and a sense of meaning. ASAE's ForesightWorks (2018) reports that Millennials are especially enthusiastic about using mentoring as a path to learning. Studies also show that formal mentoring programs help bridge leadership gaps.

Higher Education. While the knowledge economy places a premium on analysis and thinking, it is also creating new alternatives that threaten to transform how students receive postsecondary instruction. Traditional higher education models are under tremendous pressure as changes in work, technology, and student expectations demand innovations in curricula and instruction. ASAE forecasts that the value debate of colleges as social institutions versus professional training arenas will grow. How Pennsylvania universities will respond to such demands is unknown.

Workforce and Leadership Transformations

The Brandon Hall Group, 2015 (as cited by Velasquez, 2017) identified the following:

- "10,000 baby boomers are retiring each day; 48 percent of the workforce will be millennials by 2020. Meanwhile, 67 percent of millennials are looking for a new job, and 91 percent plan to

stay at their current job fewer than three years. Which might be why 84 percent of organizations anticipate a shortfall of leaders in the next five years."

- "83 percent of organizations say it is important to develop leaders at all levels, but only 5 percent have fully implemented development at all levels. 25 percent of organizations say less than 10 percent of their critical leadership positions have ready and willing successors."

- "58 percent of organizations' top priority is closing leadership skill gaps; 43 percent of organizations' top priority is closing gaps across all leader levels."

- "Only 18 percent of organizations say their leaders are "very effective" at meeting business goals, but only 19 percent of organizations say they are "very effective" at developing leaders."

- "More money is invested in leadership development than any other area of corporate training, yet 71 percent of organizations do not feel their leaders are able to lead their organization into the future."

According to the study by the Brandon Hall Group, four contemporary transformations underscore the ability to implement effective leadership development that can transform and sustain business success:

Transformation	What's out	What's in
Leadership Demographics	Boomers, Gen X leaders	Millennial Leaders
Re-focused development	Primary development on executives, high potentials	All leader levels, with emphasis on Millennial leaders
Learning Delivery	Traditional programs that build skills leader by leader	Ongoing immersion of leaders to build functional experience
Leadership Analytics	Program completion metrics	Leadership skill requirements and capability forecasts

It is within such industry-level and society-wide trends that the park, conservation and recreation profession must adapt to thrive. Establishment of an annual professional leadership development and mentoring program may contribute to productive opportunities to create more unified, competent, and engaged professionals—and in turn, a more responsive and valued industry.

Learning by doing has proven much more effective when training is focused on real-life "at work" projects for direct applications. The following recommended strategies should incorporate the above trends to implement through in-person and virtual formats, based on the learning styles and preferences of their target audiences, and utilizing the latest software and technological opportunities whenever practical.

Local/Regional Strategies

1. Individualized Training Programs.   Employers encourage and facilitate the use of ITPs to assist employees in identifying, integrating and enabling personal and organizational goals, learning objectives, and development activities.

2. Community Apprenticeship Programs.   With the assistance of the PA Dept. of Labor and Industry's Apprenticeship and Training Office, employers and NGOs establish local workforce apprenticeship programs.

3. Professional Learning Communities.   Offered free to engage new members and assist in identifying their training needs, PLCs are two hours of facilitated discussion among a limited audience of 40. Conducted twice a year by each PRPS Branch and District, topics would be based on member needs.

4. Skill Development Workshops.   Offered twice a year at a price, and with CEU credits, PRPS Branches and Districts conduct more in-depth day-long or multi-day workshops that develop technical and leadership skills in their specialty areas.

5. Cooperative Exchanges.   Coordinated by and between PRPS, its partners and allied organizations, these annual opportunities would bring together working professionals and representatives from state Departments, Commissions and Councils to learn and discuss collaborative actions.

6. Regional Summits.   Establish regional exchanges and summits to bring together learners and experts on a variety of topical interest areas, coordinated and conducted semiannually by the Urban Parks and Recreation Alliance, Get Outdoors PA, Pennsylvania Park Maintenance Institute, and other organizations. Outcomes of each event include contributions to the body of knowledge in an online, on-demand e-Learning Hub, housed on the PRPS website.

Statewide Strategies

1. PRPS Leadership Development Academy.   Establish and conduct the annual program of the PRPS Leadership Development Academy. Develop the program, eligibility and incentive guidelines, secure and compensate instructors, and conduct annually.

2. Mentorship Program.   Create and conduct an annual Mentorship Program as an auxiliary component of the Leadership Academy. Develop the program, eligibility and incentive guidelines, solicit and train mentors, and conduct annually.

3. Professional Competencies Training Series.   Create and offer a full slate of Professional Competencies Trainings, based on the subjects of *Management of Park and Recreation Agencies,* 4th Ed.

4. Certifications and Accreditation. As a state affiliate of the National Recreation and Park Association, PRPS will promote the value and benefits of attaining personal Professional Certifications and Agency Accreditation.

5. Educators Summit.   Coordinated with and among Pennsylvania universities and colleges that offer recreation, park, tourism and related majors, PRPS and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education host a Summit that identifies education gaps in the profession, facilitates dialog, proposes supplements to curricula, and better prepares and engages future professionals.

6. PA Parks Maintenance Institute. Assist in the development of the PA Parks Maintenance Institute and other special conferences, in which many related organizations contribute.

7. Professional Development Scholarship Fund.   Establish a Professional Development Scholarship Fund to offer assistance or program credit incentives to PRPS members.

8. Statewide Conferences and Summits.   PRPS, PALTA, PEC and other allied statewide organizations each conduct annual state conferences for their membership. Seek mutual promotion and collaborative opportunities among them for the benefit of all working professionals and volunteers.

9. Integrated Professionalism Forum.   To facilitate the sharing of expertise across disciplines and jurisdictions, initiate an annual forum among working professionals in recreation, parks, conservation, health, public works, maintenance, transportation, urban resources, land use planning, economic development, therapy and social work, etc. Contribute to a Resource Library of topical information shared among all types and sizes of agencies.

10. On-demand e-Learning Hub.   Through cooperation with an institute of higher learning, and perhaps a grant, PRPS and such a partner may establish and curate an online, on-demand e-Learning Hub, housed on the PRPS website. The site would include archived presentations and webinars, training modules, research studies and papers, recommendations from summits and exchanges, and other informational resources related to the recreation and parks industry and its wide-reaching connections.

Personal Strategies

1. Advocate.   Contribute to establishing agency policies that require professional certifications for employees, as appropriate. Advocate for ongoing/annual continuing education for all employees.

2. Develop.   Create an annual personalized training plan and follow it. Work toward becoming certified in your profession and specialties.

3. Mentor/Lead.   Contribute to establishing internal mentoring programs for new employees and/or interns. Become a mentor. Seek opportunities to lead.

Further Reading/Viewing

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Writing Team

Tim Herd, CPRE (Team Leader), CEO, Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society
Niki Tourscher, CPRP, CPSI, Director of Training and Get Outdoors PA, Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society
Jeremy Bean, PROSCI, Organizational Change Consultant, Penn State Finance and Business Office of Organizational Change Management