

# Economic Issues Affecting Parks & Recreation: A White Paper Summary of Two Special Sessions at the 2009 NRPA Congress



National Recreation  
and Park Association

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*Prepared for:*  
The National Recreation & Park  
Association

*Prepared by:*  
Michael Mulvaney, Ph.D., CPRP  
Dept. of Recreation Administration  
Eastern Illinois University  
Charleston, Illinois

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# Acknowledgment

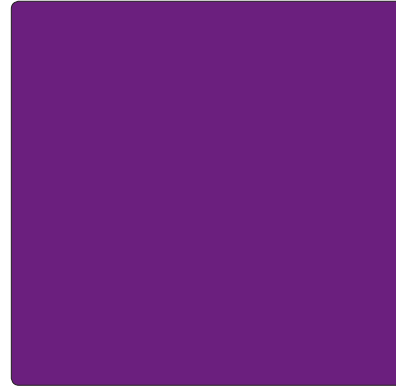
The National Recreation & Park Association would like to thank the following professionals for their contributions to this white paper:

## Session Panelists:

James Garges  
Andrew Kimmel  
Thomas Lovell  
Timothy Mitchell  
William Mitchell  
Paul Romero  
William Scalzo  
Joseph Wynns

## Roundtable Facilitators & Discussants:

Bill Beckner	Andrew Kimmel
Mary Bradford	Joshua Larsen
William Clevenger	Thomas Lovell
Jeff Cumley	David Miller
Mark Davis	Timothy Mitchell
Mary Dodsworth	William Mitchell
John Drew	William Nelson
James Garges	Gerald Pagac
Harry Geesaman	William Palmer
Richard Grodsky	Rafael Payan
Dennis Harris, Sr.	Paul Romero
Vern Hartenburg	Harry Saltzgaver
Cindy Heath	Diane Sauer
Charles Hester	William Scalzo
Dan Hibbler	Donna Stephens
Dianne Hoover	Judy Weiss
Roz Johnson	Joseph Wynns
Nancy Kaiser	





## Introduction and Background

### The Role of Public Park & Recreation Agencies

It is well documented that the field of parks and recreation in the United States resulted from several social movements occurring in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Sessoms, 1993). All were somewhat related to industrialism and urbanism, the emergence of a system of mass production, and mass consumption (Sessoms, 1993). Stemming from these issues of industrialism and urbanism, the parks and playground movements played pivotal roles in shaping today's park and recreation agency.

As a result of the parks and playground movements, municipal park systems became increasingly prevalent in the United States during the turn of the nineteenth century. In describing this growth, Kraus (1978, p. 173) stated, "...in 1900 only 12 cities were reported to be providing recreation through public funds. By 1906 there were 41, and by 1920, 465...and between 1925 and 1935, the number of municipal recreation buildings quadrupled." Clearly, the notion of city government being involved in recreational programs, playgrounds, and facilities for their residents became widely accepted during this time period.

At the conclusion of World War II, the fields of parks and recreation again witnessed substantial growth. This growth could largely be attributed to the return of thousands of servicemen and servicewomen who had participated in the recreational programs and services provided for them overseas. These servicemen and servicewomen returned home with a renewed appreciation for the value of recreation in their lives. In addition, several of these people had originally left their positions as recreation leaders and wished to return to their professional lives. Thus, there was a significant increase in the number of municipal park and recreation departments and in most forms of leisure participation.

As the twentieth century progressed, however, public park and recreation agencies experienced significant changes in size and scope. Largely in response to the tax revolt of the 1970s and 1980s, public park and recreation agencies were confronted with increasing pressures of limited budgets and fiscal conservatism from the electorate. Faced with these challenges and in order to keep pace with the changing needs of the publics they serve, many park and recreation agencies were left to develop alternative financing sources to supplement property taxes (Crompton, 1999). Consider the following comments made by Crompton (1999, p. 5) in describing the changing budget in the public sector:

"The tax revolt movement developed as a reaction of more than 50 years of government growth during which public spending increased from one-tenth to one-third of the gross national product. During the early 1970's, state and local governments were the fastest growing employers in the economy. For example, even under two fiscally conservative governors, California's state budget grew at the rate of 12% annually in the decade preceding the passing of Proposition 13 in 1978...Total property taxes in California fell from \$10.3 billion in fiscal year 1977-78 to \$5.6 billion in fiscal year 1978-79, a decline of more than 45%."

Proposition 13 provided a tax and expenditure limitation resulting from publics who were disgruntled at the tax hikes and perceived government was wasting money through its overpaying of workers, laziness of employees, and concentration on too many "unnecessary services". Although Proposition 13 was limited to California, the effects were widespread as several states instituted some kind of reduction in property, income, and sales tax or had some type of spending limitations in place (Crompton, 1999).

## The Landscape of Today

The field of public parks and recreation is again at a crossroads. Changes in economies at the local, national, and global levels have created new challenges for public park and recreation agencies and their constituencies. For the first time since the postwar period, local, state and federal governments have reported shortfalls in all major revenues—sales, income tax, and capital property—at the same time (Miller & Svara, 2009). To further illustrate the current local economic landscape, consider the findings of a 2009 study conducted by the National League of Cities:

- 88% of the city finance officers surveyed indicated that their cities were less able to meet the fiscal needs in 2009 than in the previous year.
- City revenues from 2008 (after accounting for inflation) were at 3.4% while spending increased 4.9%.
- City finance officers predicted that 2009 revenue would decrease (-0.4%) and spending would increase by 2.5%.
- Property tax revenues increased by 6.2% in 2008 but were predicted to slow to 1.6% by the close of 2009.
- Spending pressures were expected to continue in response to rising fuel and energy prices, public safety and infrastructure needs, and employee-related costs for health care, pensions, and wages.
- To balance annual budgets and meet ongoing spending needs, many cities have been instituting hiring freezes and laying off personnel, as well as delaying or canceling planned infrastructure projects.
- Ending balances or “reserves”, while still at high levels, decreased as cities used those balances to weather the effects of the downturn (Hoene & Pagano, 2009).

In addition to these findings, economists and city planners have suggested that city fiscal conditions tend to lag behind national economic conditions due to delays in property tax assessments. Thus, the full effects of the depressed real estate market, low levels of consumer confidence, and the high levels of unemployment in recent years may not have fully impacted local agencies yet (Hoene & Pagano, 2009). As some national economic forecasts have predicted slow to moderate improvements in the nation’s economic conditions, public park and recreation agencies will likely still be realizing the effects of the current downturn through the year 2011 (Hoene & Pagano, 2009). Clearly, public park and recreation agencies are in the midst of an economic downturn that might be several years in length.

In response to this economic turbulence facing public park and recreation agencies, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the American Academy of Park and Recreation Administrators (AAPRA) organized two special sessions at the 2009 NRPA Congress and Exposition (Salt Lake City, Utah) to discuss the economy’s impact on parks and recreation. Each of the sessions included brief presentations by a panel of experts followed by facilitated round table discussions. The first session focused on the economic issues affecting urban park and recreation agencies and was held on October 14, 2009. The second session focused on the economic issues affecting park districts and community park and recreation agencies and was held on October 16, 2009. Although the audiences for each session were unique (urban vs. non-urban settings), the intent of the two sessions were the same—to assist public park and recreation agencies in understanding the nature of the current economic condition while providing examples of best practices and benchmarking data to support economic recovery. More specifically, the sessions sought to address following questions:

1. **Current Impacts of the Economy.** In light of the global economic downturn, how has your department/ agency been impacted (positively or negatively)?
2. **Future Impacts Resulting from Current Economic Conditions.** Do you expect that there will be additional impacts as a result of the global economic downturn in the 1, 2, or 3 years ahead?
3. **Citizen Engagement.** Of the actions or decisions made as a result of the economy, please describe how you have involved your citizens or customers in making those decisions?
4. **Political Environment.** How have you managed the political environment in terms of positioning your department during funding discussions? What suggestions would you have for others that may have to go through similar situations?
5. **Staffing.** Many departments are facing staff reductions and various service impacts. How did your department handle these staff reductions? What steps did you take to minimize the service impacts to your community?

This white paper reports on the results of the sessions in order to offer public park and recreation agencies insights on how other agencies are managing this fiscal crisis and provide them an opportunity to benchmark their efforts against those of their peers. The white paper also contains a series of recommendations based upon the findings from the sessions.

## Findings: Results from the Panel & Roundtable Discussions

### Current Impacts of the Economy

The panelists and roundtable participants were asked, “In light of the global economic downturn, how has your department/agency been impacted (positively or negatively)?” The following paragraphs summarize the key findings from these discussions:

**Urban Park and Recreation Agencies.** These agencies have witnessed a decline in revenue, staffing (i.e., hiring freezes, furloughs, elimination of vacant positions, and layoffs), increased dependency on external funding/support, and an increased demand for recreation programs and services from residents. Many agencies are also facing increases in crime within their communities.

The urban park and recreation agency has also experienced positive effects from the current economic conditions. These agencies have seen increases in several areas, including: urban (population) growth, opportunities for grant funding, partnerships and cooperative agreements, and users of agencies’ parks, programs, and facilities. These times have also led agencies to revisit their mission and organizational structure to increase their productivity and operational effectiveness in their agency. To achieve this, agencies have performed critical evaluations of programs, services, and reviewed the overall scope of their agency to focus on critical strategies.

**Park Districts & Community Park and Recreation Agencies.** Similar to urban-based agencies, park districts and community park and recreation agencies have experienced budget decreases. Several agencies have been forced to prolong their already deferred maintenance projects and maintenance equipment purchases. To address the deferred maintenance issues, some agencies have established creative revenue sources with policies that designate a certain percentage of these revenue dollars to the maintenance and operation funds. Examples of creative revenue sources include: auctions on ebay to sell various items and maintenance equipment, local sales of retired memorabilia and equipment (i.e, golf carts, signs, bleacher seats, etc.), and competitive bidding processes for agricultural use of undeveloped land owned by the agency.

To keep pace with resident demand, agencies are also faced with an increased need for partnerships with non-profit, private, and other public agencies. Agencies are also seeking revenue through the introduction (or increase) of user fees for programs and services. Some agencies increased revenue streams by implementing

leasing programs for park and recreation sites such as, golf courses and large sports parks.

In addition to partnerships and new revenue streams, agencies have attempted to reconnect with their citizenry. In particular, agencies have become increasingly reliant on citizen engagement to successfully compete with other units of local government for funding and/or communicate the value of recreation for a community. Through grassroots campaigns and other citizen engagement efforts, residents have stepped up, recognized, and promoted the value of parks and recreation within the community. Several public park and recreation agencies have also advocated for increased involvement of residents within the planning process.

### Future Impacts Resulting from the Current Economic Conditions

The panelists and roundtable participants were asked, “Do you expect that there will be additional impacts as a result of the global economic downturn in the 1, 2, or 3 years ahead?” The following paragraphs summarize the key findings from these discussions:

**Urban Park and Recreation Agencies.** Agencies are expecting reductions in revenue from programs and fees while deferred maintenance costs are expected to increase during the next few years. Competition for funding among all units of local government is also expected to intensify prompting some agencies to consider the creation of special districts as viable options to improve their future financial stability. Agencies also anticipate investing more staff hours to obtaining external funding sources, such as grants, sponsors, foundation dollars, etc.

Grassroots campaigns will be an important asset for the public park and recreation agency in the years ahead. Agencies will need to rely heavily on their residents to campaign for the benefits of parks and recreation within the community. Agencies plan to work closely with their constituencies and advocates in “telling the story” of parks and recreation and their role in improving the quality of life within the community.

**Park Districts & Community Park and Recreation Agencies.** Agency leaders believe the face of the profession will change as a result of the current fiscal issues affecting American society. Several agencies are attempting to return to the foundational roots of parks and recreation with increased attention given to citizen-based planning, advocacy efforts, repositioning of the agency mission, and constituency-education efforts. For example, several

agencies have attempted to reconnect with their constituencies through “Did you know campaigns?” where residents are educated on the benefits of parks and recreation. This experience has enabled the residents to communicate a more consistent and unified message on the impact of parks and recreation within their communities to other residents and city officials.

Advocacy plans have been developed by agencies to encourage effective citizen involvement in the planning and repositioning of public parks and recreation. These plans include: advocacy recruitment techniques, strategies for developing advocates at an earlier age, and developing categories of advocates (i.e., parents, participants, community leaders, non-profit partners, etc.). Some agencies are also making efforts to modify the role of the consultant in the planning process by further ensuring the citizens’ drive the direction of the agency’s master plan. In fact, many agencies have attempted to relinquish some of the control in the planning process by putting more of the onus of the overall master plan on the residents.

## Citizen Engagement

The panelists and roundtable participants were asked, “Of the actions or decisions made as a result of the economy, please describe how you have involved your citizens or customers in making those decisions?” The following paragraphs summarize the key findings from these discussions:

**Urban Park and Recreation Agencies.** Three strategies relating to citizen involvement emerged from the discussions. First, agencies are relying more heavily upon residents to assist with fundraising efforts. For example, some agencies have required residents to raise anywhere from 50% to 100% of the funds for capital projects. These efforts have not only enabled agencies to move forward with projects that would have been postponed due to budget shortages, but it has enabled residents to “come together” for a common cause within their communities.

The second strategy that emerged from the discussions centered on the need for citizen education. Agencies have focused efforts on educating their residents on the benefits of parks and recreation within their communities. Through this process of leisure education, residents are able to work closely with park and recreation agencies to not only identify but prioritize these benefits, leading to the development of programs and services that are based upon that input.

The third strategy identified by agencies focused on generating more public involvement. A variety of techniques to elicit more public involvement were identified, including an increase in the number of focus group meetings, telephone surveys, forums, hall meetings, etc. In addition to increasing the pre-existing public involvement techniques mentioned above, some agencies have called for more transparency in the budget process. For example, one agency has begun sharing the economic report to residents to inform them of the current state of the agency. Through this process, the residents are encouraged to become more actively involved in budgetary decisions.

**Park Districts & Community Park and Recreation Agencies.** Similar to urban park and recreation agencies, park districts and community park and recreation agencies identified the need for increased citizen involvement and education. Citizens need to be educated on the economic issues facing the park and recreation agency within their community. By sharing programming budgets with the public, agencies are more likely to receive stronger support for changes in fees and charges associated with their programs.





## Political Environment

The panelists and roundtable participants were asked, “How have you managed the political environment in terms of positioning your department during funding discussions? What suggestions would you have for others that may have to go through similar situations?” The following paragraphs summarize the key findings from these discussions:

**Urban Park and Recreation Agencies.** Strategies identified focused on increasing: agencies promotional efforts for parks and recreation in their communities; communication with residents and elected officials, and; awareness of the economic impact of parks and recreation. To strengthen their promotional efforts, agencies have utilized a few techniques. Some agencies have integrated parks and recreation into the election campaigns of local officials. Specifically, agencies have publicized the list of projects and the agencies’ program of work accomplished during the elected official(s) tenure in office in an effort to assist the official(s) during their re-election campaign(s). The importance and value of agency accreditation and gold medal awards were also identified as promotional tools for public park and recreation agencies. Accreditation and national awards have been used by agencies to further validate and support the need for, and quality of, the parks, programs, and facilities within the community. The final promotional strategy identified by urban park and recreation agencies was the development of a marketing campaign that utilized quick sound bites. For example, several agencies have developed posters, marquees, billboards, etc that contained messages on the benefits of parks and recreation within the community (i.e., reduces crime, increases property values, saves lives, etc.).

To improve the communication line with residents, agencies have implemented a 24-hour response program for resident complaints. The purpose of the program is to respond to every residential complaint within a 24-hour period. As a bi-product of this program, agencies avoid unaddressed complaints going straight to elected officials. Improved relationships with elected officials were also identified by urban park and recreation agencies. One method to improving these relationships included inviting elected officials to recreation programs and special events. These invitations not only keep the elected officials informed of your programs and services, but enabled officials to witness firsthand the community impact of these programs and services.

Communicating the economic impact of public parks and recreation before, during, and following funding discussions was of critical importance, according to several agencies. Agencies need to be able to deliver a clear message that describes how public parks and recreation contribute to the economic development with their community. For example, parks and recreation provide major attractions within the community, positively contribute to the local economy (i.e., restaurants, hotels, shops, etc.) and help foster a stronger “sense of community” among residents. Furthermore, public park and recreation agencies oftentimes serve as a main source of tourism for communities.

**Park Districts & Community Park and Recreation Agencies.** The utilization of benchmarking data by park districts and community park and recreation agencies is becoming increasingly important during funding discussions. Some agencies are using benchmark data in more creative ways that not only illustrate funding needs, but establish an emotional connection to parks and recreation within the community. For example, one agency presented photos of various communities to decision-makers as examples of desired (and undesired) standards for parks, programs, and facilities. Through the images and stories associated with each picture, the park and recreation



agency was able to deliver a more powerful message during funding discussions. From photos of recreation facilities within other communities that illustrated the realities of ongoing deferred maintenance to the images of community centers as eye-catching jewels that have been strategically located to represent a community's overall identity, these pictured stories are used to strengthen the argument and support for community parks and recreation.

## Staffing

The panelists and roundtable participants were asked, "Many departments are facing staff reductions and various service impacts. How did your department handle these staff reductions? What steps did you take to minimize the service impacts to your community?" The following paragraphs summarize the key findings from these discussions:

**Urban Park and Recreation Agencies.** Two themes emerged from the staffing discussions. First, many agencies have used the fiscal crisis as an opportunity to overhaul their organizational structure. Agencies have re-examined their mission statements and future direction to determine their staffing needs. Benchmarking data for maintenance tasks has also been used to improve accountability and efficiency within the agency. Areas that are not up to benchmark standards are reviewed to determine appropriate response strategy. In some cases, outsourcing has been utilized by the agency.

In addition to re-organization efforts, many agencies appear to be at an avoidance stage. Specifically, most agencies have focused their efforts on avoiding layoffs of full-time staff whenever possible. Strategies such as early retirement options, furloughs, hiring freezes, altering staff (work) schedules, reductions of part-time positions, and not filling positions that have been vacant due to voluntary turnover have become commonplace within most agencies. When staff reductions have been implemented, they have primarily occurred within the part-time, seasonal, and maintenance areas.

**Park Districts & Community Park and Recreation Agencies.** Based upon the discussions, it appears most park districts and community park and recreation agencies have been minimally impacted in the area of staffing. In particular, agencies have witnessed decreases in areas of planning, research, and grant funding, but have avoided any significant staff reductions. The lack of staff reductions could be explained in a couple of ways. First, it might be that the unique nature of park districts as

autonomous, special districts with their own governing board and tax base, make these agencies more stable than a city park and recreation agency that must compete with other city services (i.e., fire, police, streets, sewers, etc.) on a yearly basis for budget funding.

A second explanation for the lack of staff reductions facing these agencies could be attributed to the economic lag that occurs at the local level. In particular, economists and city planners have generally acknowledged that cities' fiscal conditions tend to lag behind national economic conditions. Thus, the full effects of the depressed real estate market, low levels of consumer confidence, and the high levels of unemployment in recent years may not have fully impacted these agencies yet (Hoene & Pagano, 2009). Further research is needed to more fully understand this issue. In general, the special districts with their taxing authority and the large counties with a major revenue generating capacity are leaner to begin with and can fend off attempts to reduce staff that are tax funded.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

Changes in economies at the local, national, and global levels are creating enormous new challenges for America's citizens and their leaders—and enormous opportunities as well (Tobey, 2008). These turbulent economic conditions have the potential to drastically alter the public park and recreation landscape of today and the field's future directions. Responding to these challenges, this white paper sought to summarize the findings and provide recommendations from two panel and roundtable sessions on managing the current economic climate.

Based upon these roundtable sessions and a review of related literature, several findings emerged:

### Finding 1: The Significance of the Current Economic Conditions

- The current economic conditions facing public parks and recreation are arguably the most significant the field has faced in more than 50 years. To illustrate the significance of these conditions, consider the following:
- States with a strong dependence on sales taxes and development-related revenues, such as Arizona, California, Florida, and Nevada, have experienced significant reductions in spending and home construction (Facer, 2009).

- Local governments with substantial transfers from state government are expected to experience reductions in 2010 (and beyond) as revenue shortfalls of more than 7% of the operating budget are predicted in almost 70% of the states in U.S. (Miller & Svara, 2009).
- Almost every state and local government budget is facing significant financial constraints. As a result, America is starved of the public resources it needs to invest in infrastructure, skills training for workers, and other priorities that have historically been found to strengthen local and regional economies (Tobey, 2008).
- Manufacturing states in America's heartland have seen the high demands for exports collapse (Bartle, 2009).
- Agricultural-based states (Kentucky, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Montana, Kansas, and Utah) have experienced milder effects, but conditions could worsen if energy prices decline (Miller & Svara, 2009).
- Those agencies relying heavily on property tax revenues have been shielded from declining revenues due to the delay in property tax reassessments. However, property tax revenues are expected to decline in the future (Miller & Svara, 2009).
- Housing foreclosures for every state are expected to persist. Largely attributed to subprime mortgages, the initial wave of foreclosures has played a significant role in creating the current economic conditions. Looking ahead, housing and banking experts expect a second wave of foreclosures to follow as a result of the rising unemployment rates and other bi-products of the recession (Benton, 2009).
- Government borrowing cost has been impacted by the recession. Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy in 2008 and the credit market freeze have led to a decrease in demand for municipal debt and increases in the cost of credit for municipal borrowing. As borrowing became more costly, several agencies experienced a decline in the financing of capital projects (Peng, 2009).
- Public pension plans have experienced significant reductions in value. For example, at the end of the third quarter in 2007, state and local pension plans held assets worth \$3.26 trillion; at the end of the third quarter in 2008, they had dropped to \$2.75 trillion (Peng, 2009).

Clearly, the landscape of the economy is changing. Public park and recreation agencies must be flexible, open, and dedicated to meeting these challenges. The

demand for local recreation services has magnified as communities work to recover from the recession and the role of public park and recreation agencies in this recovery cannot be overstated. For example, consider the effects of housing foreclosures within communities. Heavy concentrations of foreclosures in an area often lead to declining property values and stagnant sales tax revenues within the area. With these housing foreclosures, public park and recreation agencies need to be prepared and able to respond to increases in public health issues, crime, dislocated families, and psychological issues (i.e., humiliation, depression, financial insecurity, etc.) facing foreclosed families within their communities.

## Finding 2: Opportunities Associated with the Economic Downturn

Although significant challenges face public park and recreation agencies, some are also using this period as an opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations. Some agencies are focusing their efforts on returning to the social service models that characterized the parks and playground movements of the past, while other agencies are using the economic downturn as a call to improve their agency's business model. Regardless of the service model adopted by the agency, virtually every public park and recreation agency recognizes the need to think and act strategically and is achieving this through re-organization of staff and resources, reconnecting with their constituencies, and/or revisiting their mission, goals and objectives.

To successfully implement and manage these transitions, agencies must ensure their decisions and actions are guided by longer-term organizational plans. Every action that park and recreation agencies take builds a foundation for what will happen to the agency five or ten years from now. Agencies must ensure their decision-making is consistent with the direction of their strategic plan. Thus, the ability to effectively plan is becoming increasingly important and a key ingredient for an agency's future success. Furthermore, as this is arguably one of the most significant periods of change facing the current generation of professionals, additional research and education (i.e., workshops, training sessions, etc.) on planning and managing these changes is recommended to assist agencies with these transitions.

Public park and recreation agencies have also witnessed a growth in users during the past few years. Historically, public park and recreation agencies experience increases in program registrations and park and facility use during a recession as a result of a decline in

discretionary spending by families. National statistics and benchmarking data for park and recreation is available from NRPA through the on-line Operating Ratio Report. Benchmark data on specific functions can also be purchased from associations, such as the Society for Human Resource Management (<http://www.shrm.org>) and the Professional Grounds Management Society (<http://www.pgms.org/>) who have developed benchmarks based on data from years of conducting studies. It is also important to note that some public park and recreation agencies have begun collecting benchmarking performance measures from other areas, including the private sector. The data collected from the private sector has been particularly helpful in improving agencies' efficiency within the areas of park and facility maintenance.

### Finding 3: Returning to the Citizen

Bringing back the common good as a focus of public discussion and agency policy, whether on the economy or other issues, requires professionals and elected officials at all levels to embrace a fundamental shift in the way that citizens and agencies work together (Tobey, 2008). New techniques for eliciting citizen involvement in the work of identifying key issues and opportunities facing communities and how agencies and other stakeholders within the community should respond are needed. Additional citizen involvement with the budget, planning, and fundraising processes for park and recreation agencies have also been recommended.

To encourage additional citizen involvement, researchers and planners have suggested agencies subscribe to the following principles:

- Reaching out through a wide array of groups and organizations is critical for mobilizing large numbers of citizens, and many different kinds of people.
- Most public problems cannot be solved without the effort, energy, and ideas of citizens and their organizations (churches, associations, businesses, nonprofit groups, etc.)
- Large-scale, open-minded deliberation, where citizens consider a range of policy options, results in public decisions that are fairer, more informed, and more broadly supported.
- Giving people a sense of “political legitimacy”—a sense of status and membership in their community—promotes individual responsibility and leadership (Tobey, 2008).

Grassroots campaigns subscribe to these principles and many agencies have recognized the importance of these campaigns in encouraging citizen involvement.

Through grassroots campaigns, citizens are able to have an active voice in the planning and/or development process. Through their involvement in the process, citizens are empowered to rebut policies, projects, programs, development, etc, and are typically more likely to accept decisions, even adverse ones, if they perceive a fair decision making process. Furthermore, grassroots campaigns promote ownership over the process and manifests ego involvement and a personal stake in the success of the agency, enhancing acceptance. This democratic process also generates an atmosphere of cooperation and citizen support.

Examples of public park and recreation agencies reconnecting with their citizenry can be found in the budget reporting practices of several agencies. In particular, many agencies have established a more transparent budgeting process where citizens are regularly provided economic reports to educate them on the current fiscal conditions facing the agency. This process has led to an increase in citizen involvement in the project planning and funding phases of capital projects. Many citizens will not accept closures and mothballing of their community's parks, programs, and facilities and when educated on the implications of these funding reductions, citizens have become actively engaged in advocating (and fundraising) for parks and recreation within their communities.

Public park and recreation agencies must also go beyond the hall meetings and traditional public relations strategies and focus on building long-term, sustainable relationships with their residents. Agencies must establish open lines of communication with residents that will allow them to work together in the identification and prioritization of the benefits of parks and recreation within their communities. The development of advisory councils, open forums, focus groups, neighborhood advocacy groups, and programs that educate the public on the impact and value of parks and recreation within their community can help in establishing trust and support among residents while creating a unified voice for the promotion of public parks and recreation.

### Finding 4: Increased Need and Use of Benchmarking Data

Benchmarking is becoming increasingly important for public park and recreation agencies. Many agencies have begun comparing specific measures of agency performance against data on those measures in other “best practice agencies”. Common benchmarked performance measures obtained by public park and recreation agencies include: employee compensation plans, employee benefits as a percentage of payroll cost, maintenance costs associated

with park areas and facilities, programming needs and costs, marketing strategies, and performance appraisal systems.

Public park and recreation agencies interested in benchmarking should try to locate other agencies that do certain activities particularly well and thus become the “benchmarks”. Data from these agencies can be obtained through telephone calls, which then may be followed up with questionnaires and site visits (Mathis & Jackson, 2005). National statistics and benchmarking data for park and recreation is available from NRPA through the on-line Operating Ratio Report. Benchmark data on specific functions can also be purchased from associations, such as the Society for Human Resource Management (<http://www.shrm.org>) and the Professional Grounds Management Society (<http://www.pgms.org/>) who have developed benchmarks based on data from years of conducting studies. It is also important to note that some public park and recreation agencies have begun collecting benchmarking performance measures from other areas, including the private sector. The data collected from the private sector has been particularly helpful in improving agencies efficiency within the areas of park and facility maintenance.

### Finding 5: Communicating the Value of Parks and Recreation

At the very heart of leadership—indeed, its very soul—is the art of communicating, the ability to create a dialogue that others will willingly join (Whyte, 2004). Park and recreation agencies face increasing challenges to effectively communicate funding needs with their elected officials and constituencies during this economic climate. Furthermore, public park and recreation agencies operate in a culturally pluralistic society and it has become increasingly important to take into account how these cross-cultural differences may affect agencies’ marketing strategies, particularly their ability to effectively communicate their value and community impact.

Agencies should establish close relationships with local media outlets to successfully communicate the value of parks and recreation as a key component of a community’s economy, tourism, health, and overall quality of life. These media outlets can assist park and recreation agencies with educating their publics on the interconnectivity of parks and recreation with other city services and societal issues (i.e., crime reduction, improved health, education, etc.). Agencies must also have the ability to formulate reports for public consumption, handle citizen complaints, demonstrate an understanding of local social and political entities, analyze and assess crisis situations, interpret their agency’s purpose, goals, and objectives to

individuals, respond to special requests for information from writers and researchers, represent the agency at public events (i.e., trade shows, conventions, ribbon cutting ceremonies, etc.), work closely with elected officials, and participate with local and civic organizations.

A majority of these communication and marketing strategies will be the responsibility of personnel within the public park and recreation agency. Agencies must ensure their personnel possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet these challenges. At a minimum, successful agencies will have staff with effective public speaking skills, effective written and verbal communication skills, and the ability to be effective facilitators.

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# Appendix A

## Issues Affecting Urban Parks & Recreation Notes from Panelists and Roundtable Discussions National Recreation & Park Association Congress & Exposition

Salt Lake City, Utah • October 14, 2009

### National Recreation & Park Association Congress and Exposition Issues Affecting Urban Parks & Recreation: Panel & Roundtable Discussions October 14, 2009

#### Agenda:

- Explore significant issues impacting urban parks and recreation
- Panelists will present for ~30 minutes
- Following panelists, roundtable discussions will occur (~90 minutes)
  - > Each table will report three major themes from their table's discussion(s)

#### Panelist #1: Timothy Mitchell, General Superintendent, Chicago Park District

- Chicago Park District has strong mayoral support
- Agencies must promote park and recreation's role in economic development
  - > Redefine parks and recreation in communities—"Parks make cities livable"
  - > Parks are economic engines within the local economy
  - > Local businesses and philanthropic community pitched in to create Millennium Park
- Parks and recreation keep communities, neighborhood, areas safe
- Witnessing an increased reliance on external funding
  - > Seeking funding from other city units/agencies, private sources, and the federal government
- No longer 100% funding of projects
- Need to focus efforts on helping residents lobby for parks and recreation
  - > Aldermen
  - > Mayor
  - > Council members
- Need to establish parkways foundations. As an example, the Chicago Park Foundation raised \$400,000 7 years ago when it began. This past year, they raised over \$6 million.
- Interesting point of information—During the 1930's, local parks received—100 million from federal programs. Currently, local parks have received \$0 in federal stimulus monies.
- Legislation being pushed to allow funding to urban park and recreation development (through HUD). The bill is not through the legislative yet.
- Need to advocate for local dollars leveraged at the federal level again.

### **Panelist #2: James Garges, Director, Mecklenburg County Parks & Recreation**

- Need for balance within our field
- Need to answer, “How do we move forward with what we do?”
- Some agencies facing deferred maintenance issues
- Agencies are faced with the challenge of getting community support for deferred maintenance issues
  - > A suggested strategy is to write down deferred maintenance needs
- Agency repositioning & advocacy is crucial
- Need to focus on grassroots campaigns:
  - > Need to get community residents involved; establish advocates within each neighborhood
  - > Mecklenburg County organizes and asks groups/residents to attend two meetings per year:
    1. Meeting #1: Educate group/residents on agency needs
    2. Meeting #2: Budget meeting
- Need to establish “sense of place” within communities
- Agency staff need to get out (i.e., staff involvement in civic committees)
- Need more research (i.e., economic studies, impact studies, etc.)

### **Panelist #3: Joseph Wynns, Former Director, Indianapolis Parks & Recreation**

- Urban defined: Density, integration, & differences
- 80% of U.S. population live in 100 urban areas
- Two issues facing our field:
  - > Issue #1.) Threats: “We can’t do anything” “We’re in a trap”
    - Pressure from those (residents) “in the trap” to come out of this current economic situation ok
  - > Issue #2.) Opportunity: “How are we dealing with the opportunity?”
    - Know what it costs to do business
    - Performance measures—utilize timelines and benchmarking
    - Benchmarking
    - Plan our work. Work our plan.
    - Planning tips:
      - Obtain/produce/create credible financial information
      - Need good budget preparation. May have to go back to zero-based, program plan budgeting
      - Need to make good, tough decisions. Decision-making needs to be quick
- Need to determine current situation within your agency:
  - > Crunch: short term/low intensity
  - > Crisis: short term/high intensity
  - > Squeeze: long term/low intensity
  - > Crush: long term/high intensity

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

### CURRENT IMPACTS OF ECONOMY: In light of the global economic downturn, how has your department/agency been impacted (positively or negatively)?

- Negative impacts:
  - > Dropped revenue
  - > Staff furloughs
  - > Closing facilities one day a month
  - > Consolidating park districts
- Positive impacts:
  - > Urban setting growing
  - > Grant funding has increased
  - > Fee increases and cooperative/partnership agreements on the rise
  - > More users and more money staying in community as a result of this trend
  - > Entitlement generation forced to readdress expectations
  - > Opportunity to rethink the way agencies are doing business (i.e., what programs to keep?)
  - > Drawing more people to public park and recreation services because of their value
  - > Efficiency has gone up as a result of agencies become more strategically minded with their operations
- Budget and staff decreased
- Need to maintain same service levels; agencies must approach them in a more efficient manner through collaborations/partnerships
- Increased dependency on federal funds
- Partnerships becoming increasingly important
- Things to do:
  - > Partnerships/collaborations
  - > Private funding/sponsorships
- General funds cut 75% in one city system; 8% cut in another city system
- Communities losing businesses
- Forest Preserve District not hurting too much yet due to a tax cap (20 yrs) that slowed growth
- San Diego experienced an 18-20% reduction (from \$120 million to \$80 million):
  - > Sequential cutbacks have been occurring, but now agency is looking for service delivery cuts
  - > Viewed as an opportunity to restructure
  - > Issue of cultural change in California (i.e., dense urban areas with large open space in other areas)
- Chicago and other large park systems in Illinois, California, and Michigan:
  - > Brought in tax cap which limited growth
  - > Peoria (IL) did not pass tax cap; Peoria Park District turned system around to only 25% of revenue is generated from property tax while 75% comes from fees and charges
- Fluidity issue is key!
- Must address question, "Do some programs subsidize other programs?"
  - > An agency must know real cost of their programs in order to budget correctly.
  - > Need to show community the benefits and not be afraid to ask for help
- Leverage corporate sponsorships
- Important to have plan backed by citizen input to create master plan and get bond referendum(s) passed

- Greater needs/demands from residents
  - > Fewer options for residents
  - > Fewer dollars to spend
- Park and recreation agencies need to adopt a holistic approach:
  - > Family
  - > School
  - > Community
- Leisure time is more valuable
- Budget (operating and capital) reductions
- Implementation of furlough days and hiring freezes
- Some communities faced with economic AND natural disasters (i.e., communities within the Gulf Coast region)
- Implementation of new programs and fees
- Need to look at how programs are being provided
- Address the question, “Is crime going up with services going down?”
- Increased reliance and use of public/private partnerships
- Must be able to do more with less
- Participant numbers are up, indicating more people are staying home
- Expendable income activities have been hit hard; introduced coupons which is common practice in the community; time is also a factor (i.e., 9-hole golf becoming more popular than 18-hole)
- Foundation of parks and recreation field was dissolved; agencies need new planning efforts to restore
- Community character affects park and recreation services (i.e., agriculture base, oil industry, etc.)
- Some agencies experiencing 30% increase in park use while fee programs, such as after school care experienced a decrease
- Private sector has stepped up to the plate!
- Private residents are stepping up, recognizing and promoting the value of parks and recreation
- Need for more grassroots campaigns and advocacy
- Vacant positions eliminated (but not currently implementing layoffs)

**FUTURE IMPACTS RESULTING FROM CURRENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS: Do you expect that there will be additional impacts as a result of the global economic downturn in the 1, 2, or 3 years ahead?**

- Revenue from program fees may decline
- Tighter criteria and constraints for allocating funds
- Maintenance funding will decline and affect long-term infrastructure replacement ability
  - > Without major repairs, closures will be imminent
- Creation of special districts and a departure from mainstream local government
  - > Politics is killing public parks and recreation
- The general public will not accept closures and mothballing of their investments; grassroots may become highly valued
- Community make-up is key: strong mayor, park district, etc.



- Acceptance that “this is the new normal”. Learn to start here and deal with fewer dollars
- More creative funding/corporate funding
- More deferred maintenance
- Allocation of (more) staff time to finding resources (i.e., grants, sponsors, foundation dollars, etc.)
- Increase in crime rate
- Opportunity/need for community to come forward to say, “Parks and recreation are important”
- Increased value of community centers as a method to bring the community together
- Need for cultural integration and awareness
- Increased need for community gardens
- More focus on service models
- Increased competition with private sector for recreation services
- Some recreation services will be run by service organizations and private, non-profit organizations
- Need entrepreneurial-minded professionals to help us grow!
- Stronger as a business
- More attention to ecological efforts (i.e., green initiatives)
- Increased focus on performance-based management
- Fiscal situation has caused more pressure on lower level (i.e., local) governmental services
- More focus on promoting/creating connectivity of programs and services (i.e., health and safety)
- Perception that things are not as bad as they say they are
- Different perspectives based on state, county, and city
- For military communities, money and programs are being provided to the whole military family
- Trend toward more short-term decision-making
- States’ shared revenue decreasing, which does not bode well for future budgets
- Expect slow progress for the future
- Healthcare coverage issue will impact future staffing
- Staff retirements:
  - > Institutional knowledge leaving agencies
  - > Need for succession planning
  - > Training and development cuts and the problem of an untrained workforce

**CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT: Of the actions or decisions made as a result of the economy, please describe how you have involved your citizens or customers in making those decisions?**

- Focus groups created for various programs and services
- Need more efforts on educating advocates (or the grassroots efforts will not work)
- Examples from Chicago:
  - > Required residents to raise funds for neighborhood capital projects
  - > Enabled the residents “come together” for a common cause
- Provided economic report to groups to inform them of the current state of the agency

- Consultant firm conducted telephone surveys with residents to gather input for agency's master plan
- Increased dialogue between city and residents (i.e., forums, hall meetings, etc.)
- Get the community involved in fundraising where the community raises ½ of the funds and the agency matches their efforts
- Worked with residents to identify and prioritize benefits of parks and recreation and developed programs based on that input
- Need more opportunities for citizens to become involved in budget decisions
- Need to have equitable opportunities for public involvement (i.e., "haves vs. have nots")
- Established more open forums
- Use of advisory council(s) as a way to gauge resident support

**POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT: How have you managed the political environment in terms of positioning your department during funding discussions? What suggestions would you have for others that may have to go through similar situations?**

- Use parks and recreation to "re-elect" officials
- Implemented a 24-hour response program for resident complaints to avoid complaints going straight to elected officials
- Identify trouble makers and make them your best friends
- Adopting (and following) a master plan that includes cost estimates for projects
- Monthly presentations to city council that also provide opportunities for public comments
- Value of accreditation and gold medal awards
- Promote role of parks and recreation in economic development:
  - > Provide major attractions within community
  - > Main source of tourism for most communities
  - > Promote (local and tourist) dollars invested within the community and its impact (i.e., economic, quality of life, market local businesses, etc.)
- Utilize quick sound bites:
  - > Parks and recreation programs and services reduce crime
  - > Parks and recreation programs and services increase property rates
  - > Parks and recreation programs and services save lives
- Invite elected officials to programs and events
- Need more interaction with elected officials
- Be more active at the state level

**STAFFING: Many departments are facing staff reductions and various service impacts. How did your department handle these staff reductions? What steps did you take to minimize the service impacts to your community?**

- Positions that are vacant are not being filled
- Some positions are being contracted out if they are not performing
- Layoffs of part-time positions
- Reduced level of service
- Increased use of partnerships to fund/manage facilities
- Reorganized work tasks
- Early retirement options
- Staff schedules have changed (i.e., number of hours)
- More seasonal employees
- Issue of outsourcing vs. in-house as it relates to service quality
- Competition for scarce resources results in some interesting outcomes
- Initial impacts felt in maintenance; reduced service levels
- Programming reorganization and re-prioritization of programs
- Opportunity to review structure; address “dead wood”
- Opportunity to benchmark



# Appendix B

## Issues Affecting Urban Parks & Recreation Notes from Panelists and Roundtable Discussions National Recreation & Park Association Congress & Exposition

Salt Lake City, Utah • October 16, 2009

### **National Recreation & Park Association Congress and Exposition Issues Affecting Urban Parks & Recreation: Panel & Roundtable Discussions October 16, 2009**

#### **Agenda:**

- Explore significant issues impacting park districts and community parks and recreation
- Panelists will present for ~60 minutes
- Following panelists, a roundtable discussion will occur (~50 minutes)

#### **Panelist 1: Andrew Kimmel, Deputy Executive Director, Lake County Forest Preserves**

- Lake County Forest Preserve District (LCFPD) hit the tough economy in good financial shape due to strong planning
- LCFPD is a special district with its own tax base
- LCFPD utilizes self-supporting facilities
- Agencies need to identify more private funding sources
- LCFPD hired financial consultants to create financial forecasts (1yr, 5yr, etc.) for future planning efforts
- Importance of public perception. LCFPD has taken conservative approach the past 2 years.
- Expect ~5% decline next year; 2–3% in future years
- LCFPD stopped filling vacant positions
- Cuts spread across LCFPD Departments as each has experienced cuts
- Connecting green thinking with management practices during tough economy through the implementation of solar (park entrance) gates to save staff hours
- Merit-based pay increases ranged from 1–3% last year; flat increases projected for upcoming years
- Annual replacement funds
  - > Used equipment auction revenue placed in annual replacement fund account(s)
  - > Service/usage fees also placed in annual replacement fund account(s)
- Some of the interest drawn from bonds has been moved to capital funds
- LCFPD have reduced expenditures in golf course operations

**Panelist 2: Thomas Lovell, Administrator, Lee's Summit Parks & Recreation**

- Current challenges/Global issues:
  - > Need to recognize/identify clear and present danger/issues
  - > Focus on repositioning of field
  - > Green initiatives are likely to suffer during economic crisis
  - > Loss of impetus on acquiring open space
  - > Loss of resources
  - > Increased focus on “mission critical” areas
  - > Decreases in property values and sales tax revenues
  - > Potential for changes in fee structure
  - > Homeless rate increases
  - > Increases in crime rate
  - > Challenges with bonding ability of agencies
  - > Impact on employee pensions
- Future impact(s):
  - > We are our own enemy; we need to get back to repositioning
  - > Repositioning starts at grassroots level
  - > Opportunity to revisit our mission
  - > Really need to educate the public on the value and importance of our services
  - > Opportunity to shed out old practices
  - > Increased need for partnering efforts (city, non-profits, internally, etc.)
  - > Increased reliance and need for volunteers
  - > Focus on essential-only projects; need to show that it is essential
  - > Reverting back to 1970's mentality
- Tactical Ideas:
  - > Pricing—need to be experts in pricing
  - > Programming with economic impact in mind
  - > Focus on how programs positively impact communities
  - > Human Resources – hiring and pay freezes (can be seen as negative), reduction in hours, eliminate positions by attrition, early retirement, elimination/termination
  - > Zero-based budgeting is likely to return
- ICMA suggestions:
  - > Act quickly
  - > Take long-term view
  - > Focus on core mission
  - > Invest in innovation
  - > Manage with critical eye on expenses
  - > Examine organizational design
- Concluding thoughts/recommendations:
  - > Look at IT/Technology and ask, “can this be cut?”
  - > Foster culture of environmental stewardship
  - > Promote urgency and timeline to follow
  - > Stay transparent

### **Panelist 3: William Mitchell, Director, Bucks County Parks & Recreation**

- Museums and cultural arts areas taking biggest (negative) hit
- Lots of dependence on state, county, and local issues
- Increased use of volunteers
- Parks and recreation field needs to get a handle on stewardship. Need to subscribe to the view that, “We are here to take care of the environment and promote quality of life.”
- Increased need for partnerships—work with non-profits. Bucks County has established a partnership with non-profit agencies where the non-profit provides maintenance for park areas in exchange for credit towards programs/services within the park site
- Buck County adopting new term, “Flat Rate Budgeting”
- Rethinking structure of how our field does programming. Need to be creative in program delivery

### **Panelist 4: Paul Romero, Deputy Director, California State Parks**

- Parks and recreation field has an increased need for citizen advocacy
- Fear of forgetting about citizen advocacy
- Parks and recreation field needs to get back to belief that we are here for the citizens. The field of parks and recreation needs to embrace the role, and power, of citizens in the field’s future (i.e., saving the field, promoting the need for parks and recreation, etc.)
- California Issues:
  - > Proposition 13
  - > Decreases in auto sales which has negatively impacted local sales tax revenue
  - > Issues with “smoke & mirror” budgeting
  - > Infrastructure, including park infrastructure, being backlogged
  - > Fiscal crisis has provided an opportunity for change within the California State Park systems
    - \$15 on every vehicle in California will go to state parks
    - Creation of “blue ribbon” committee of advocates
    - Blue ribbon committee generating \$5 million in funding per year
- General fund municipalities vs. special districts: Special district format provides more consistent, stable funding source
- Local grassroots advocacy efforts can save an agency money and can lead to special district formation

### **Panelist 5: William Scalzo, Former Director, Maricopa County Parks & Recreation**

- Arizona facing increased need for maintenance of existing infrastructure in state parks
- Arizona has created citizen advocacy task force. The task force garners grassroots support for parks in Arizona
- Importance of being transparent
- Tips created from task force experience:
  - > Generate a variety of resolutions to address areas of need
  - > Increased need for land acquisition
  - > Important economic impact of parks (local and state level impact)
  - > Increased user fees (be transparent about the increased fee structure)

- > Energy (solar, wind, etc.) resources should have taxes assigned to them
- > Park restoration bonds
- > Local capital bonds
- > Dedicated sales tax
- > Real estate transfer tax
- > Creation of state park endowments
- > License plate surcharge for rental cars
- > Waive state residents annual park fee
- > Surcharge on tourism (i.e., bed tax)
- > Establishment of local partnerships
- > Seek private funding
- > Consider (financial) opportunities associated with state lottery system

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

### **CURRENT IMPACTS OF ECONOMY: In light of the global economic downturn, how has your department/agency been impacted (positively or negatively)?**

- Decreases in budget
- More contracting out of landscape maintenance projects/activities
- Fiscal situation provided opportunity for revamping of agency structure
- Improvements to agency business model
- Agency consideration to liquor sales in parks
- Introduction of user fees for youth programs/services
- Implementation of assessment program to determine specific fees to increase
  - > Used negative press about increased fees to inform/educate the public about services and importance of services
- Embraced/expanded a lease program for sites, such as golf course(s), large sports parks, etc.
- Increases in partnering with non-profits and other community agencies
- Increase in land acquisition due to price, but not doing anything (park and/or recreation related) with the acquired land. Considering leasing out land until development
- Trends toward agriculture programming with land purchases: community gardens, competitive bidding processes for farm land, etc.
- Facing issue of deferred maintenance. Getting to point of, “fix it now, or tear it down.”
  - > Need for agency to be aware of responsibility to maintain these areas
  - > Consider framing deferred maintenance projects as asset projects.
  - > Communicate to public that the value of the area will decrease if nothing is done
- Increases in deferred equipment purchases
- Use of auctions (i.e., ebay) to sell items/equipment
  - > Creation of maintenance and operations funds
  - > Establishing policy that designates a certain percentage of the money generated (or donated) from equipment sales to the maintenance and operations fund(s)
- Need to be realistic with changes
- Increases in the reliance of citizen engagement

**FUTURE IMPACTS RESULTING FROM CURRENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS: Do you expect that there will be additional impacts as a result of the global economic downturn in the 1, 2, or 3 years ahead?**

- Face of profession will change
- Focus more on recovery plan(s) rather than strategic plan
- With an estimated 6 more years of recession issues, the profession needs to focus on recovery efforts
- Need to reconnect with constituents in a different way
  - > Shallow connection currently
  - > Need to educate and clearly communicate impact of parks and recreation
  - > “Did you know campaigns?”:
    - 100 benefits of parks and recreation
    - Educate public on those benefits
    - The importance of NRPA in unifying this campaign
- Advocacy will be critical:
  - > Must answer question, “How do we get advocates on the same page?”
  - > Advocates are typically older residents
  - > Need to develop succession planning for advocates
  - > Need for education on the importance of parks and recreation at different levels:
    - Begin at an earlier age (i.e., elementary schools)
    - Parent and participant levels
    - Non-profit partner level
  - > Need to utilize users as a starting point for identifying advocates
- Increase in citizen-based planning:
  - > Repositioning efforts to focus more on resident-driven mission
  - > Changing nature of consultant role in the planning process; planning efforts need to be driven by residents
  - > Put onus of meeting and overall plan on the residents This has led some professionals to learn that, “The more I let go, the more I have gained”
- More efforts on reaching/communicating with residents
- Utilization of Facebook as an alternative marketing and promotion strategy

**CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT: Of the actions or decisions made as a result of the economy, please describe how you have involved your citizens or customers in making those decisions?**

- Communication is key to this process
  - > Sport leagues example: schedule meeting(s) with coaches, captains, etc. to propose fee increase
  - > Bring in opposition ahead of time to discuss any proposed fee or policy changes
- Embrace the idea that, “Advocates become Activists”
- Utilize full recovery concept and inform public of cost associated with service



**POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT: How have you managed the political environment in terms of positioning your department during funding discussions? What suggestions would you have for others that may have to go through similar situations?**

- Embrace/promote “Public Safety” concept. Specifically, parks and recreation can get to residents before they consider/pursue deviant/criminal acts
- Importance of elected officials using/visiting your agency’s services
- Utilization of benchmarking:
  - > Show how strong communities rely heavily on park and recreation services
  - > Educate elected officials on how parks and recreation impact a community’s attractiveness. Consider asking officials, “What do you want (the community) to be?”
  - > Utilization of pictured stories of various communities and ask officials what they want (their community) to look like
    - Use pictures/photos of deferred maintenance to drive point home to press/media, elected officials, residents, etc.
    - Utilize stories from residents to position need for parks and recreation to elected officials
  - > Share valid data to market your services (outside sources, NRPA, Academy, universities, etc.)

**STAFFING: Many departments are facing staff reductions and various service impacts. How did your department handle these staff reductions? What steps did you take to minimize the service impacts to your community?**

- Large part of budget is personnel
- Need to market how staff impact majority of residents; promote the value of the staff in achieving the mission of the park and recreation agency
- Must address the public perception that the park and recreation agency is “top-heavy”
- Personnel decisions create tough situations and tensions. Some personnel issues to consider:
  - > Consolidation of tasks as a result of a new business model
  - > Employing furlough days
  - > Reducing paid holidays
  - > Layoffs
- Decreases in budget areas of planning, research, and grant funding
- Utilize local resident experience to deliver programs
  - > Seek talent within the community and “train-the-trainer”

## The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

is a national, not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation, and conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people. NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy lifestyles, recreation initiatives, and conservation of natural and cultural resources. For more than 40 years, NRPA has been the voice advocating the significance of making parks, open space, and recreational opportunities available to all Americans. For more information on NRPA go to [www.NRPA.org](http://www.NRPA.org).



### National Recreation and Park Association

22377 Belmont Ridge Road  
Ashburn, Va 20148-4501

800.626.NRPA (6772)  
[www.NRPA.org](http://www.NRPA.org)