Programs and events are what draw individuals and families to an organization:

- for the private for-profit enterprise, it is the services being sold to customers;
- for the nonprofit agency, it is what a person receives for being a member or a targeted service recipient; and
- for the public agency, it is what is offered to the general public and to targeted populations.

Providing mission-driven programs or services is the challenge to a manager and the management team and is central to strategic management. In many communities, programs and events are offered in response to expressed demand, regional trends, and deep-rooted tradition. However, a comprehensive recreation program plan integrates, in a holistic way, the organization’s programs and services; it looks at the function of these individual programs, activities, and services and their contribution to the mission of the organization.

The focus of this chapter is on the comprehensive planning for those programs/services, whereas Chapter 9 is directed toward specific operational planning and management, particularly for the public sector. This book does not address the selection and conduct of individual programs or activities. For this, see the many programming and leadership books available. Chapter 10 discusses the supervision of programs.

The recreation program plan is one of the dimensions of the organization’s comprehensive system plan (see Chapter 7, Planning for Strategic Management). The planning process steps are briefly defined, and then the information base needed for planning is described, followed by the plan components and program performance evaluation.

The Planning Process

For the private for-profit sector, planning is based on the strategic plan of the enterprise (see Chapter 7) and market research (see Chapter 15); however, for the nonprofit and public sectors, the planning process is similar and involves elected officials and their constituents.

Step 1: Establish a Task Force

Usually the governing body or a program advisory committee (if there is one) appoints a participant task force. The program director of the organization provides leadership to the task force, facilitating their efforts in an ex-officio fashion. A member of the organization or a citizen usually serves as chair. The manager’s role is that of facilitator and supporter, providing the resources for the task force to do its job and encouraging the task force to “remain on task.”

Step 2: Assistance of the Organization Planning and Research Unit

The organization planning and research unit (see Chapter 23) assists by providing the information base; that is, basic community information and constituent assessments.

Step 3: Preparation of the Preliminary Plan

The task force, with the help of staff, develops the components of the plan. There may be input from various constituent groups.

Step 4: Review of the Preliminary Plan

The organization presents the preliminary plan to either the general membership (nonprofit sector) or citizens (public sector) for review and input. Managers of a for-profit enterprise may present it to the stockholders, board of directors, or owners.

Step 5: Adoption by Governing Body

Once finalized, the plan is approved (adopted) by the appropriate governing body of the organization.
Step 6: Implementation

The manager and staff, with the support of the governing body, are responsible for implementing the plan. Also, based on the adopted comprehensive plan, the program master plans can be developed. The more specific phase of planning for individual programs/services also can be initiated.

Step 7: Evaluation and Update

The plan includes ongoing performance evaluation. The planning and research unit facilitates gathering of operational data for the annual report and assists in evaluating program performance (see Chapter 23).

Step 8: Modifications/Update

While the plan may be a “product,” it is not to be “an end in itself.” It must be continually updated. Plan modifications should be based on the performance evaluations, continued relevancy, and situational changes in the environment and within the organization itself.

Information Base

To properly plan, an organization must have an information base. An information base is a collection of data about both the community and the constituents. There also should be an operational database, sometimes referred to as an internal environmental scan. Planning components include:

- community information, which include basic sociological, political, economic, and environmental data, referred to as an “environmental scan” (See Compendium 8-1 for an environmental scan of Windsor/Essex County); and
- an inventory of what is in the community in regard to parks and recreation, both programs/services and physical resources (See Compendium 8-2 for Middletown NJ Parks and Facilities Inventory); and
- constituent needs and preferences, including demands, needs, and preferences.

Community Information

A comprehensive community study based on population shifts and changing social and economic conditions should be made at least every five years with interim updating. The study may be made by a multi-organizational planning group that includes the park and recreation organizations. It should utilize social and service statistics.

Two types of community information useful to the recreation planner are: a. the trends related to social, economic, political, and environmental characteristics (see also Chapter 5 on strategic planning and Chapter 11 on feasibility studies); and b. an inventory of existing and potential park and recreation resources in the community.

Environmental Scan

Contemporary planning of recreation programs and services must consider a number of trends and accompanying challenges. An environmental scan assesses those factors within a community that affect or influence an organization’s park and recreation service role. It describes the milieu within which the organization exists and must operate.

The scope of environmental scans should be confined to the general service radius. The purpose of the scan is to identify major impediments and opportunities to consider when planning local organization recreation programs and services. While a manager should be aware of national and world trends (journals like The Futurist and American Demographics can be very helpful), it is essential to know the local, regional, and state status and trends. There are seven categories of data that compose the environmental scan.

1. Demographic data. Metropolitan and regional planning agencies, social service associations, and governmental agencies generally can provide recreation planners with demographic information such as ethnic heritage, age, gender, residence, occupation, social status, income levels, religious affiliation, educational level, disabilities and health status, and family configuration. These demographics may influence participants’ demand, need, and preference for certain recreation opportunities or they may constrain participants’ involvement (see Compendium 8-3 for sample demographic data).

Census data are published every 10 years and may serve as an initial set of meaningful community statistics. However, to be more useful, the data require annual percentage adjustments that accurately reflect changes or fluctuations perceived and identified by each state planning office. The manager should identify all the census districts within the community and review the most current report of census. Each of the census district reports identifies relevant socio-demographic data such as, but not limited to, total number of residents, number and type of dwelling units, gender, age, employment, education, income, and ethnic characteristics. (For information, see http://www.census.gov)

These demographics with projected statistics can serve as a population baseline for future need identification. Data that reflect regional and neighborhood trends
have particular relevance for interagency response and programmatic intervention.

2. Social problems. Organized public recreation, along with social service agencies and associations, may play a role in ameliorating social problems such as youth crime and gang violence, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of before and after school child supervision, and older adult dependency. Different generations—such as the World War II generation, the “baby boomers,” “Gen-X,” and now the “Millennials”—have distinctive societal needs. Baby boomers are moving into retirement, changing the complexion of the marketplace and creating extended needs of well elderly.

3. Physical resources status and changes. Not only must there be information regarding the status of physical resources, but also it should include the changes that are occurring or are projected to occur. Changes, such as the loss of open space, decline of industrial or waterfront areas, new transportation patterns, neighborhood changes, and other land use and water concerns, have implications for park and recreation services. Further, one must assess any conflict between economic development and environmental protection or preservation. The U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) provides reports that identify all soils by type, location, and use. The SCS also provides some aerial photographs of the areas. Inventory maps of forest classifications, wetlands, waterfowl migration routes, etc. are available for each state from the Department of Interior, Fish, and Wildlife Division.

4. Economic data. What is the basis of the local economy—diversified or dependent essentially on a single industry? Is employment relatively stable? What is the amount of discretionary income? Increased privatization, resulting from a pay-as-you-go taxpayer mentality, represents a growing challenge for local government and social service agencies as they address needs of the economically disadvantaged. Individual and corporate tax revenue represents an important, but shrinking, proportion of the local government operating budget.

5. Technology. Technological advances, such as computer mapping, Internet, and information management, redefine another dimension of professional competencies for park and recreation practitioners. Telecommunications also result in a redefinition of the workplace. Widespread access and use of the Internet has created an effective medium for communication between constituents and service providers. (See Chapter 14, Information Technology Management.)

Technology and its availability have added both competition for leisure time and a greater need for social, active recreation. What technology is available for programming and what are the skills of the constituents?

6. Environmental quality. The state of environmental quality legislation and action in the community is also of importance to park and recreation programs. Are the golf courses, parks, cemeteries, gardens, orchards, and open spaces living laboratories for desirable environmental practices? What about the solid waste disposal areas: can they be “recycled” into park and recreation areas? Air and water contamination in rural as well as urban settings are impacting quality of life in many communities.

Environmental quality also includes the local environment and the park environment. Are the areas safe for play, are they in good condition? Have gangs overtaken the area or is it peaceful with helping and interested citizens?

7. Political atmosphere. Are the legislators, government officials, and politicians parks and recreation “friendly”? Do their policies reflect the core values attributable to the parks and recreation profession? Do they facilitate financing of programs and services? What is the political climate toward development of public sector parks and recreation and toward the encouragement of private for-profit leisure service opportunities? (See Chapter 4, Politics and Advocacy.)

Community Inventory
An inventory of program elements and services and physical resources in the community determines overlapping areas, areas of insufficient activity, areas of omission or inadequacy, and potential safety hazards. The public park and recreation agency should take the initiative in maintaining such inventory; if no other group of which recreation is a part has such responsibility. It should be managed to include a referral service, information services, and baseline data for use by other service entities.

The comprehensive recreation program plan considers the complementary potential within the service region. Priority should be placed on synergistic service delivery and avoidance of duplication. When appropriate, socially unacceptable forms of free time alternatives common to the service region should be viewed as “competitive services.” Other recreation service organizations, as well as organizations with limited but significant relevance, should generally be viewed as potential partners.

Most communities are comprised of a variety of recreation opportunities. This includes structured pro-
programs and services and areas and facilities designed for independent use. No one organization can provide for everyone’s desires and needs. Therefore, there should be an inventory of recreation opportunities, encompassing all organizations. If there is not a community recreation council of organizations (see http://www.ccqr.org/ for a description of Greater Dallas Community Council) providing recreation services, the public park and recreation agency should take the initiative to compile, assess, and continually update information on these organizations and their respective offerings. (See Compendium 8-4 for City of Renton Program Matrix.)

The inventory includes profiles of all organizations offering recreation opportunities. Profile information includes organization mission and background, programs and services offered, areas and facilities operated, and names, titles, and phone numbers of contact people. All sectors are included.

Public agencies—for example:

- local government park and recreation agencies;
- forest preserve districts;
- county or regional agencies;
- state and federal agencies offering services in the area; and
- schools (private and public).

Nonprofit associations—for example:

- Boys and Girls Clubs;
- scouting programs;
- YMCAs and YWCAs and Jewish Community Centers;
- religious groups;
- senior service associations; and
- health and medical providers.

Private for-profit enterprises—for example:

- racquet and fitness centers;
- skating rinks;
- bowling establishments;
- golf courses;
- equestrian centers; and
- sports complexes.

The inventory information comes directly from each organization. A recreation services directory of basic information for each organization might be published as a convenient reference for other service providers, with a version made available through various outlets, including websites, libraries, agency lobbies and waiting areas, as well as other high volume public areas.

The Community Niche

An organization cannot be all things to all people. After the basic inventory is complete, an organization needs to further analyze the constituent groups served, nature of the programs and services, and location and use of areas and facilities to determine an organization’s community niche. A matrix may be used to identify types of programs and services for each target population and the organization coded program designed to address their needs. Program and service duplication and general scheduling conflicts should be identified. One example of such assessment is the form used by Northbrook Park District. (See Exhibit 8.1.)

The recreation organizations should consider the needs of all elements in the community without discrimination. In recent years, more determined efforts to achieve inclusion and positively recognize and celebrate diversity have resulted in greater participation of people with disabilities as well as people with differing sexual orientations. Local needs assessment efforts frequently reveal high levels of demand for local government and social service agency recreation by minority populations, yet under-representation in terms of actual participation.

Based upon an organization’s strategic plan (vision and mission) and with information about the community and the recreation program/service opportunities already in the community, an organization can identify its niche or role in providing recreation programs and services in the community and, thus, define its service population or constituency. In the private for-profit sector, this is often called market segmentation and its target population. The population identified has unique characteristics, which provide useful information for programming and services.

Assessing the Constituency

Having defined its service or target population, an organization must learn more about that population, inasmuch as participation is an individual decision molded by one’s past experiences, cultural context, socio-economic status, and personal abilities and attitudes. The type of assessment depends on the purpose of the assessment. There are basically three interrelated purposes (see Exhibit 8.2):

- entrepreneurial,
- human services, and
- leisure experience.

Most organizations serve more than one purpose, and, thus, would engage in several types of assessment. Each purpose requires a particular type of assessment because the nature of the relationship of the individual to the recreation program or service differs—the participant as customer, the participant as recipient, and
the participant as volunteer. Thus, the basic assessment terms of demand, need, and preference can be distinguished by the purpose or use.

**Demand assessment for entrepreneurial purpose.** With the entrepreneurial purpose, recreation is a commodity (product, service) to be purchased. The customers determine a perceived value of the commodity and if they do not like the product or service or are unwilling to pay the price, they do not buy it.

When an organization offers recreation opportunities (programs and services) on a fee basis, the type of assessment for such entrepreneurial purpose is constituency (target population) demand. One of the best tools to determine the nature of potential demand is through demographic analysis of the targeted population. Such analysis can help with marketing strategies and the pricing structure and to determine types of services to be offered, based on the characteristics of the target population. Demographic research should not stop after a single study. Frequency of data collection depends on the dynamics of the targeted region, that is, level of population turnover. While there are three types of demands—latent, expressed, and induced—usually the primary consideration for recreation services is induced demand. Marketing induces or creates
Exhibit 8.2
Types of Constituency Assessment by Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENTREPRENEURIAL</td>
<td>Recreation is a commodity to be purchased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>ASSESS DEMAND</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMAN SERVICES</td>
<td>Recreation as a modality for individual growth/development and societal concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>ASSESS NEEDS</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEISURE EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>Recreation as an activity engaged in for enjoyment and self-enrichment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>ASSESS PREFERENCES</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY**

Demand. Determination of demand is based upon marketing principles and is discussed in Chapter 15. Demand also includes affordable wants and desires that typically incorporate “convenience” and/or “access” considerations.

Demand assessment is not only for the private for-profit sector. Given the political and market-driven conditions within which most park and recreation organizations operate, demand (within the parameters of the organization’s mission statement) takes precedence. The park and recreation manager’s values may conflict with participant demands. If socially acceptable, the public agency, as well as the nonprofit association, should consider offering programs and services for which there is a demand.

Needs assessment for human services purpose. When the focus of the recreation program is on improving the human condition or positive developmental intervention, it also is important to learn about the individuals in the target population and the community in which they live. Thus, the needs of individual constituents and the social indicators of the community must be assessed when the purpose is human services. Wants and desires do not necessarily translate into needs, although it is extremely difficult to address needs without also appealing to the prospective participant’s wants and desires. For the most part, individuals can articulate their wants and desires, but not their basic needs because they usually do not have sufficient insight of self-analysis. Often individuals misconstrue a “want or desire” as their need. Wanting to participate in an activity and actually having that experience meet a need are two different conditions that may or may not be linked. For example, a well adjusted and secure pre-teen would not be a likely candidate for an outdoor adventure program aimed at
improving self confidence. For further discussion of needs assessment, see later subsection.

The term “needs assessment,” also referred to as “need index” and “needs inventory,” is used generically to encompass all assessments of the constituency, whether physical and social needs, preferences and interests, attitudes and aptitudes, opinions, desires and wants, and so on. If an organization wants more useful information for planning recreation programs and services, then the purpose for which the information is to be used must determine the type and nature of the assessment. This section endeavors to aid the manager in making the best decision regarding assessment tools.

Preferences assessment for leisure experience purpose. If the organization is directing its programming and services toward offering quality recreation experiences for the enjoyment and self-enrichment of the individual, then it is essential to assess the preferences of the individuals who will be engaging in these leisure experiences. Wants and desires as preferences are dependent upon feasibility of the organization offering the opportunity wanted or desired and the individual being capable in skill and funding. For further discussion of preferences assessment, see later subsection. Motivation to participate becomes a key element because there is great competition for people’s discretionary time. Organizations offer opportunities to which they want to entice participation, thus preferences become important.

What about the benefits that might accrue to the participants or that they may seek? For all three purposes there are collateral benefits for the individual and society. An individual may participate in entrepreneurial, human services, or leisure experiences for the same perceived or expected benefits. For example, an individual may participate in a fitness program for a feeling of well-being, to reduce weight, to get oneself into better overall condition; or an individual may participate in an activity to make new friends or to learn a new skill to enable one to participate with more enjoyment or to gain greater self-esteem. See Chapter 9 for a discussion of Benefits-Based Programming (BBP).

Needs Assessment
The use of recreation as a modality to address human services has long been a part of the nonprofit sector. However, in recent years the public sector has focused more on the benefits of recreation, particularly as a preventive medium for social concerns (see Chapter 9). Contribution to family wellbeing falls within the mission of many recreation organizations. For example, “building strong families” is a fundamental purpose of the YMCA.

Partnersing is essential to combat social concerns (see Chapter 6, Partnerships). Managers dealing with human services must understand both the needs of individuals/families and the community social indicators. Human services are not commodities with the recipient as a customer. That is, the recipient does not buy the service; often someone else pays for it or it is subsidized and the individual does not pay full costs. So, the recipient does not exercise the same controls over the service that one who purchases it does. Recipients often cannot shop around or switch. They may only have the choice to accept or reject, and rejection may not be a realistic option. This may be especially true for services to people with mental retardation or youth-at-risk. The provider must know the needs of the recipient and the environmental context in which the service is rendered. Thus, the provider must assess the needs of the constituency receiving recreation as a modality of human services.

There are two dimensions to human services. Growth and development of individuals is that dimension wherein child-care programs, camps, youth-serving organizations, churches, and so on, use recreation activity to enhance the growth and development of the individual, whether preschoolers, elementary-age children or senior citizens. This dimension also may be used for prevention. For example, corporate industry may use recreation to reduce health costs. Remediation is used when there is an incongruity between the “real” and the “ideal.” When “deficiencies,” whether physical, psychological, or social, are present, recreation is used as a modality to assist in improving the state of the individual. This includes, for example, youth-at-risk and the field of therapeutic recreation.

There are several aspects of needs assessment, including:

- developmental characteristics,
- social indicators,
- priority setting, and
- needs assessment tools.

Developmental characteristics. Behavioral scientists have studied the human being to determine how individuals develop and function. Because recreation programs service all ages, it is necessary to focus on the whole life span of human beings.

Managers must have knowledge of individual growth and development characteristics, associated needs across the life span, and differing family stages and configurations. They can build a more in-depth understanding of the constituency upon this knowledge.

Organizations must carefully consider changes in physical, mental, and personality/social development, and their programming implications, during the

Recreation Program Planning
planning process. The adult population encompasses increasingly diverse family lifestyle structures. Further, there are different family stages and configurations that should be considered. Increasingly, single parent families are as prevalent as the more traditional, nuclear family configurations. DiGrino and Whitmore (2005, p. 128) have noted, “. . . there are single-parent units where family members are blood relations, single men or women caring for adopted children, and multiple arrangements of men, women, and children sharing a single family unit relationship.”

Social indicators. Regional and local demographic and socioeconomic indicators are relevant tools in determining levels of need. Social indicators describe changes over time in the social welfare of the population(s). Social indicators are aggregate statistical measures that depict aspects of a social situation or underlying historical trends and developments. Social indicators often characterize relatively large groups of people, tied to specific geographic areas. Yet, these statistics tend to be underutilized.

Most of the social indicator data are derived from pre-established sources. Local census data reveal insight relative to age, family size, household configuration, homelessness, employment status, income, and health. Public schools provide statistics relative to truancy and drop-out rates while law enforcement agencies reveal frequencies and locations of various crimes and delinquent behavior. Social indicators may also describe organizational expenditures and other inputs, for example, spending on senior citizen programs in specified regions of a community.

The policy makers and managers who understand social indicators can better set goals and service priorities. Social indicators can also be used to:

- produce descriptive reports of the status of the population and various groups within the population;
- enhance analytical studies of social change;
- forecast; and
- evaluate programs.

Priority setting. A comparative “needs index” to determine priorities for developing services within the community should be established within the comprehensive recreation plan. A “needs index” often is considered a survey of citizen attitudes and opinions on what recreational activities are desired; however, it really is much more and involves consideration of the basic needs of constituents or target populations, where needs are not being fulfilled, and how parks and recreation can contribute toward human development. An “index” infers scale or comparison.

A need index combines organization-selected social indicators (such as population shifts, median family income, and juvenile delinquency rate) with a series of social and service indicators (such as relative number of recreation service professionals in the region, existing number of programs, and current levels of expenditure). The use of such a tool is effective if the indicators used in the formula are based on reliable information and reflect the values of the organization. Once relevant criteria (indicators) are chosen and “weighted” according to relative levels of importance, this quantitative approach assures objectivity.

Social indicators provide guidelines about program and service priorities. While the recreation experience can be highly individualized, managers typically seek to serve individuals with the greatest need. The focused delivery of services should reflect high levels of sensitivity and specificity. Sensitivity refers to the effectiveness of programs for those individuals and/or groups targeted to receive and benefit from the program or service. Specificity refers to the effectiveness of excluding those non-designated individuals/groups that will not benefit from the programs or services.

Needs assessment tools. The manager and the organization planning and research unit should obtain the needs data for the program planners. While the term “needs assessment” is used, the manager must recognize that the planning and research unit is collecting needs identification information and then qualified professionals must interpret the data or evaluate it regarding “program” implications. In smaller organizations the manager may be responsible for planning and research functions as well as for program development and implementation.

Professionals can use various strategies and techniques, including focus groups, citizen advisory boards, key communicators, and forums.

Focus groups contribute in-depth insight regarding programs and services. Participants are selected for their unique perspectives or because they represent a “cross section” of the population(s) to be served. Focus groups should not exceed a dozen participants with a trained leader or facilitator. Focus groups are issue-oriented, from whence the name is derived, not just discussion groups. Each group focuses on an issue. Different groups should represent different population segments or perspectives. (See Chapter 23 for more information on focus groups.)

Citizen advisory boards and committees (community-wide and/or subpopulation) may be appointed or elected. They provide continuing input and direction relative to service provision. Community-wide program advisory bodies usually represent a cross-section of the community. It is not uncommon to have advisory bodies composed only of teens, senior citizens, devel-
mentally disabled, or another specific group. An advisory board is an excellent “sounding board” and vehicle for community input. All stakeholders should be represented. (For selection and function of Citizen Advisory Boards, see Chapter 3.) (See Compendium 8-5 for documents from Thornton CO teen advisory council.)

Key communicators: a park and recreation organization can enhance its understanding of community needs by consulting a stratified series of community-wide, regional, neighborhood, and block/ street representatives, composed of select, respected, and knowledgeable individuals. This method of representation empowers the community-wide group or council to provide grass roots input and serves as a conduit for debunking rumors and distributing accurate information. Key communicators also serve as excellent sounding boards for the testing of new ideas.

Forums of persons who have been involved in programming with youth, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, et al, can provide valuable information on both the needs and programs that have been successful in indicated circumstances. There are two “levels”—one is the local community and the other is the state-regional-national level. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has held such fora or colloquia on topics related to youth-at-risk (Witt & Crompton, 1996).

Preferences Assessment

Most public park and recreation agencies provide the major portion of their programs and services for the leisure experience of the participant. Thus, the assessment of participant and potential participant preferences is of utmost importance in planning.

Whether management aspires to meet or exceed its constituents’ expectations, the underlying premise is that constituent preferences and expectations are known and understood. Organizations can employ a variety of techniques and multiple sources of data to better understand constituent preferences. Doing so overcomes the limitations of one information source or technique. A preferences assessment must be done more than once if it is to represent a true picture. Preferences are not stable, but fleeting, subject to influence and “fad-ism.”

The planning and research unit typically collects the preference data. If available, college and university faculty and students can conduct certain assessment techniques, such as forums and surveys.

Preference assessments should include total citizen involvement to best discover preferences and gain support. Both general public and special interest groups can ensure complete and realistic views of community preferences to plan properly.

While a survey is the most common assessment technique, others can include:

- participant forums,
- citizen advisory boards and committees,
- program/service evaluations by participants,
- participation patterns,
- Internet services and data collection,
- institutional sources,
- non-participant feedback, and
- individual and household surveys.

Participant forums. Input from those who participate in the organization’s programs and services is critical. A forum is simply a meeting of specific groups who participate in directed discussions. Benefits are often derived from the interaction of constituents, thus forums are useful. The information they produce should be accurately processed and incorporated into the planning procedure. The forums must be well publicized, professionally monitored, and accessible. The facilitator should carefully record both participant complaints and suggestions.

Citizen advisory boards and committees. Ongoing citizen advisory boards and committees are valuable sources of preference information, whether the boards and committees are broad in scope or directed toward a special population, such as teens, people with disabilities, or seniors, or toward a type of activity, such as a festival or other special event, the cultural arts program, or the sports program.

Program/service evaluations by participants. Participants should in some way evaluate all programs and services (see section on Program Evaluation, below). The program planner should carefully review these evaluations for preference information.

Participation patterns. Organizations should consistently maintain comprehensive participation records and notes. Communities have unique participation patterns and organizations need to define and analyze these patterns. They provide excellent information on preferences.

Internet services and data collection. Increasing numbers of park and recreation organizations use Internet services to inform the public and promote their programs and services. They also rely on its interactive capabilities to communicate with current and prospective special interest users and to solicit public input in general. All sectors of park and recreation organizations are developing home pages on the World Wide Web and communicating through electronic mail (e-mail blasts). Input solicited through any of these electronic mediums could be open-ended and/or focused on a set of questions. An increasing number of park and recreation organizations have incorporated ongoing surveys to their organization’s Web site. Although this technique
improves the opportunity for constituency response, it does create a new series of validity problems. It is noted that, like many preference assessment techniques, the Internet is not used by a cross section of society and may not represent general community sentiment.

Institutional sources. Valuable information regarding public preferences, as well as needs, may be obtained from leaders of other relevant groups such as:

- leaders of non-government funding sources;
- executives and board members of foundations, individual philanthropists, and United Way or similar community funding sources;
- leaders of community planning groups, advocacy groups, and civic organizations;
- advocacy groups, including senior citizens, ethnic and racial minorities, people with disabilities, neighborhood associations, parent-teacher associations, service clubs (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, Junior League), and community coalitions;
- government officials, including county and city managers, county and city planners, county supervisors or commissioners, city council members and mayors, state legislators, U.S. Senators and Representatives or members of their local staff, planning commission heads, and members of citizen advisory boards and “watch dog” groups;
- education representatives, such as school board members, parent/teacher association members, school counselors, elementary/middle-school/high school administrators, pre-school staff and board members, student council representatives, library staff and board members, community college officials, and university officials;
- business, labor, and professional leaders, including corporate executives and other business leaders, union officials, officers of professional associations, and other representatives of employee groups;
- religious leaders—of ecumenical councils and denominations; and
- media representatives—newspaper executives, editors, and reporters, as well as radio and television executives and reporters.

Non-participant feedback. Equally important, but often overlooked, is direct feedback from individuals and families who are non-participants. Reasons for non-participation by various segments of the community should be understood. A nationwide study by Penn State University researchers found that about one third of respondent nonparticipants surveyed cited lack of information as a reason for non-participation (Godbey, 1997). Local government community needs assessments conducted by the authors in recent years revealed significant factors to be: work commitments; inability to access “full” programs; as well as the direct and indirect expenses associated with participation.

Individual and household surveys. A properly-conducted survey is the most popular technique to ensure the most representative view of all citizens. Periodic surveys of individuals and families in the organization’s service radius allow management to better understand constituent preferences. Individuals to be surveyed may include “non-residents” if they represent existing or preferred user groups.

The results of such surveys, when based on random selection of households, represent an “estimate” of the actual preferences of the entire population being studied. The precision of the estimates and the level of confidence the management team places in those estimates largely depend on the proportion of the total population sampled and the types of internal comparisons being made between responding “sub populations.” Organizations may collect information from randomly selected households/individuals through mailed surveys, telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, and combinations thereof. When performed on a regular basis, survey data can provide invaluable insight regarding regional trends. A few tips on surveys follow.

Constructing the survey. Organizations follow several important conceptual guidelines when constructing a community survey. The manager and staff may want to consider the following survey concepts.

- Ask for information that does not exist.
- Avoid using the survey process to influence the community on specific or controversial issues.
- Do not use the survey as a technique to encourage or obtain other financial resources.
- Ask only for information that is really needed.
- Solicit interest in programs or facilities that can be feasibly provided.
- Avoid using a survey for public relations or educational purposes.

What should be considered during survey construction?

- Always identify who is completing the survey and why.
- Identify how the data will be used and why it is necessary or timely to obtain such data.
- Ensure confidentiality and when possible, utilize a data collection model that preserves respondent anonymity.
- Begin with simpler questions and end with the more complex or personal questions.
The Plan Components

All organizations need, as part of their comprehensive system plan, a long-range recreation program comprehensive plan (see Chapter 7), which is periodically reviewed and updated. The plan should include implementation procedures and prioritization, as well as an annual or current year plan.

The program is defined as the elements and services of the organization in all aspects, including administration, financing, areas and facilities, activity selection, etc. Program elements are such aspects as community centers and playgrounds, programs for senior citizens, people with disabilities and other special groups; program fields such as the cultural arts, fitness and sport; and program services such as program consultation, provision of equipment and facilities, and literature and education for leisure.

The plan should contribute to the overall direction of the organization, as well as draw upon other processes and materials. The comprehensive recreation plan should include ten components:

1. goals and objectives,
2. critical issues,
3. basic premises,
4. operational database,
5. program segmentation,
6. program master plans,
7. resources needed for implementation,
8. interagency partnerships,
9. prioritizing and timelines, and
10. comprehensive plan annual review.

Each organization’s plan is different and specific to that particular organization; and each organization will modify procedures and components to fit its own mission and goals, as well as its management style. Excerpts from the Recreation Comprehensive Plan of Virginia Beach VA are used below to illustrate various components; these quotes from the Virginia Beach plan are italicized.

Why a Plan?

The Department of Parks and Recreation offers a vast array of activities, programs, and facilities to the citizens of Virginia Beach. Recreation program planning is designed to introduce the art of recreation to the communities within the City and to offer ongoing services to guide and encourage participation in recreational and leisure activities as

The sample. It is important that those who are “sampled” represent the larger population to which generalization will be inferred. Likewise, the size of the sample directly influences the precision of the results as well as the confidence one has that the results are an accurate representation of the larger population being studied. There are some specific steps that can be taken to improve the number of respondents that is worth the extra time and expense involved.

- Use a Likert-type scale (see Chapter 23) for responses when soliciting priorities. (Avoid responses that provide ranked ordered preferences as they provide little value-based insight.)
- Select a survey format consistent with the method of distribution and retrieval.
- Use different surveys for the various age groups.
- Project survey expenses before beginning.
- Run a timed pretest and pilot to get respondents’ suggestions on content, clarity, and structure.
- Maintain the same response format within the form as much as is feasible to avoid confusion and delay in responding.
- Provide clear and concise directions.
- Design very clear “locations” for each survey question’s response.
- Group question topics together as units or blocks of questions.
- Complete a trial run to determine ease of recording data from completed surveys.
- Determine how the data will be analyzed and presented.

- Prepare the community through a timely public information campaign.
- If appropriate, prepare the survey in several languages.
- Color, size, and print the survey to avoid easy discarding.
- Use a well-identified department or organization logo.
- Carefully select the time frame for distribution; know the community and school calendar.
- Provide a self-addressed and stamped envelope for return.
- Provide a realistic “window” for completion and state the desired return date on the survey.
- Solicit and involve co-sponsors that have positive reputations within the community.
- Use a reliable and existing system for delivery such as utility billing or newspapers.
- Properly select a small sample, bar code each survey, and redistribute to those who do not respond initially.

(See Chapter 23; also see Compendium 8-6 for San Francisco Internet Survey and Compendium 8-7 for park and recreation phone survey.)

Recreation Program Planning
part of a healthy lifestyle in which play is an important factor.

The City of Virginia Beach will soon enter the 21st Century. It is imperative that the Department of Parks and Recreation develop strategies to deal with acquisition of parks and open spaces and improve service delivery to meet the growing demand from citizens for recreational programs and activities.

To develop these strategies, it must be understood what recreation is and how it impacts a City’s quality of life. A recreation program plan will provide the strategies for developing recreation programs, classes and services to serve the citizens of Virginia Beach.

The Process
The process for developing the comprehensive plan should include the members of nonprofit associations, participants, and the citizenry for public agencies. The manager’s role is that of facilitator and then implementer. The manager’s responsibility is in planning, not program leadership. Management elements of program planning are: security, maintenance, supervision, and funding.

The planning process should involve cooperation among related departments and organizations.

The City of Virginia Beach initiated a strategic planning process in 1995 and created six strategic issue teams:

- safe community,
- cultural and recreational opportunities,
- quality physical environment,
- quality education for lifelong learning,
- strengthening families, and
- economic vitality.

The teams were composed of Department Directors and top level managers to create a shared vision for the City. Out of this work came a Strategy Document for the City. This document serves as a guide for developing the Recreation Programming Plan.

Goals and Objectives
Decisions relative to long-range planning reflect the organization’s sense of purpose, to be fulfilled through successful programs and services. Thus, the programs/services of an organization are based upon its strategic plan—its vision, mission, goals, and objectives (see Chapter 7, Planning for Strategic Management). It must actualize what the organization is all about.

Before setting forth the vision, mission, goals, and objectives, Virginia Beach included a statement of Recreational Philosophy and Trends in its comprehensive plan. The trends were, in essence, an environmental scan (see Chapter 7).

Mission statement: Our Department’s QUEST is to enhance the quality of life in Virginia Beach by providing for the recreational needs of the Community through parkland, facilities, and programs. The Department will pursue this QUEST through:

- Quality—commitment to excellence,
- Unified Vision—clear sense of direction,
- Effective Leadership—that guides a creative and competent workforce,
- Service—response to customer needs through trust and communication, and
- Team Work—conviction that “It takes everyone’s contribution”.

Vision Statement: Recreational Opportunities—Our Community’s Choice
The key to developing vision, mission, and values statements that work for your organization is to actively engage the people with a stake in the organization. The vision statement and a two-paragraph explanation were distributed via newsletter to all staff members, who then were given opportunity to comment.

Goals
The three community goals for the City of Virginia Beach were developed as part of the City’s strategic plan:

1. Community: Building Relationships and Capacities
2. Economic and Social Prosperity
3. Healthy, Safe, Attractive Surroundings

These goals were further developed through stating “Desired Outcomes and Outcome Strategies.” The Recreation Program Plan chose to emphasize the following strategies:

- Develop a benefits driven needs assessment.
- Utilize demographic information.
- Use marketing techniques to identify citizen’s needs.
- Treat people as individuals with capacity.
- Continue collaborative efforts with other agencies.
- Promote open dialogue.
- Focus resources on the development of a qualified work force.
- Diversify the array of recreational opportunities.
- Offer programs to enhance citizen knowledge of the natural environment.
- Maintain the recreational facilities infrastructure.

Critical Issues
It is essential that parks and recreation be an integral part of the organization within which it resides. If parks and recreation cannot establish its contribution to the
organization’s vision, mission, and goals, then the governing body may feel that the department should not have operating budget funds or at least not as much as requested. Budgeting and program performance are closely linked. (See Chapter 20, and also Chapter 9 on the BBP model.)

In preparation for budget meetings, the Department of Parks and Recreation had several staff meetings. Staff members were asked to reevaluate the programs and services offered by the Department. Trends within parks, recreation, and golf course areas were identified with desired outcomes. Strategic focus areas were chosen to give direction to the Department in the next five years. Throughout this process, alignment with the Strategy Document (above) was critical. After the focus areas were determined, then the top priorities for the budget were established and core strategies set. The resultant top three issues (foci) for the Department and incorporated into the budget process were:

- **Employee Recruitment and Retention.** Qualified, diverse staff reflecting the City’s organizational values and satisfying customer needs proactively through collaborative efforts and communication.
- **Stewardship of Facilities and Land.** Long-term commitment to enhance the Community’s quality of life by providing safe, secure, accessible facilities and equipment that are proactively maintained and improved with Community input.
- **Community-based Outreach for Youth.** Meet current and future needs of all youth through outreach programs involving families and the entire Community. Develop better citizens by providing, through collaborative efforts, recreational, educational, and social opportunities. (A major part of future programming efforts is to be in this area.)

Seven unique services related to the recreation program, youth in particular, were defined with descriptive detail:

- Youth opportunities office,
- Promoting leisure activities for youth (PLAY) team,
- Curfew program,
- Recreation center officer program,
- “Grow your own lifeguard” program,
- New Year’s Eve Rockin’ Lock In, and
- Grow to be a pro program.

To do detailed planning of parks and recreation, it is useful to work with staff and citizen teams to address critical issues. Virginia Beach formed many teams to deal with recreational programming. Some of these teams and their function included:

1. **At-Risk Youth Committee**—to provide ideas and programming for teens with emphasis on at-risk youth.
2. **Camp Program Committee**—to discuss registration problems that occur, field trips, training, meetings, and so on, so the recreation centers are providing uniform camps.
3. **Class Supervisor Team**—to share class information, share instructors, discuss private contracts, obtain more private contractors, do problem solving, edit class descriptions, and proof the Parks and Recreation brochures.
4. **Departmental Guide Committee**—to provide a link with the Marketing and Information Systems Unit so that information can be disseminated to each of the budget units.
5. **Athletic and Flexaerobic Coordinators Committee**—to exchange information on classes, instructors, issues in the athletic and flexaerobics programs and to discuss changes, direction, and goals of the programs.
6. **Partnership/Sponsorship Team**—to develop, recommend, and implement policies, procedures, and standards, which will create additional revenues, resources, and collaborations among public agencies, private organizations, businesses, individual citizens, and the City of Virginia Beach.
7. **Human Diversity Team**—to promote and educate people about diversity.
8. **Registration Processing Committee**—to identify common registration and day camp issues and processes.
9. **Benefits of Marketing Benefits (BOMB) Squad.** (Benefits Based Management Team)—to introduce a philosophy of identifying benefits or department services and facilities, and to staff and to share benefits with the public.

**Basic Premises**

It is useful to have an operational paradigm of basic premises to deal with changing times (see Exhibit 8.3).

**Operational Database**

In addition to the information base discussed in the first part of this chapter, there must be available operational data, sometimes referred to as an internal environmental scan. It should include an inventory of physical assets, human resources, and program opportunities; and statistical information such as costs analysis, attendance information with demographic breakdown, user satisfaction surveys, etc. The organization planning and research unit should be ever involved in gathering, processing, and analyzing operational data. For both long-range planning and current-year planning, data that show trends over several years are most helpful.


**Exhibit 8.3**

**Basic Operating Premises**

**City of Virginia Beach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The new paradigm assumes that public recreation agencies will:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide services based on social and economic unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide programs of human service that may go far beyond traditional recreation activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act as a community organizer and catalyst in matching community resources to citizen need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer programs anywhere in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use staff resources to coach citizens until they can provide their own leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund services from a variety of sources, including fee-for-service, donations, sale of services, contract arrangements, barter, agency partnerships, and cooperation with the private sector, as well as tax resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan by anticipating a preferred future, organizing services around client groups in response to participants’ felt needs, and a careful community-wide needs analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan with potential clients, community informants, other agencies, political figures, and corporations, as well as with staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a marketing approach to operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate services in terms of human consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivate the staff to work with the people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justify budgets in terms of social need and program results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require financial and program accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve the ultimate goal of human development and community organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted by Charlotte Barrett

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**Compliance with Standards**

Standards are desirable practices as set forth by the industry or profession. For those programs that have standards, the standards should become part of the planning information base, and whenever feasible for the organization, they should comply with them to improve the quality of experience and for risk management. Here are just a very few of the programs that have standards:

- organized camping — American Camping Association;
- adventure programs — Association for Experiential Education;
- recreational sports — National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association;
- fitness and wellness programs — American College of Sport Medicine;
- horseback riding;
- aquatics and watercraft; and
- youth athletics (coaches).

The director of a program must stay current and annually incorporate any modification in standards. A program should be offered *only* if it can meet the standards for that particular program.

**Program Segmentation**

Just as in marketing there is market segmentation, so should there be in programming: program segmentation. Program budgeting also requires segmentation. Program segments are elements or aspects of program. They may be categorized into five major categories (however, there are crossovers among categories):

- by age/person (e.g., programs for senior citizens, therapeutic recreation inclusion programs, preschoolers, youth-at-risk);
- by program field (e.g., sports/athletics, health and fitness, cultural arts, aquatics, environmental education);
- by facility (e.g., community centers, playgrounds, parks, camps, nature centers, sports and aquatic complexes);
- by service (e.g., program consultation, provision of equipment and facilities, and literature); or
- by geographical region.

The recreation program comprehensive plan should include each of the segments that are within the organization’s mission and goals.

The City of Virginia Beach chose to do their five-year recreation plan by age; they called the different age groups their target populations and had statistical data on their numbers and geographical location. Based
Exhibit 8.4
Virginia Beach Department of Parks and Recreation
Inventory of Community Recreation Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center Name</th>
<th>Square Feet</th>
<th>Amenities</th>
<th>Other Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kempsville</td>
<td>82,000</td>
<td>25-meter indoor pool, gymnasium, exercise and weight room, arts/crafts and multi-purpose rooms, and a theater</td>
<td>Located in a 23-acre community park (Larkdowns); celebrated 20th anniversary 5/6/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bow Creek</td>
<td>31,800</td>
<td>Four program/meeting rooms, demonstration kitchen, lobby/television viewing area, indoor pool, weight room, handicapped access, senior citizen activities, two bowling lanes, gym, and elevator, if required</td>
<td>Located adjacent to 118-acre golf course; Referendum included addition/modification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seatack</td>
<td>23,500</td>
<td>25-meter pool, gym, changing facilities, work stations/storage</td>
<td>Completed April 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayside</td>
<td>83,931</td>
<td>25 meter x 25 yard pool, gym, multipurpose rooms, meeting/activity areas, dance/aerobic studio, demo/catering kitchen, therapeutic fitness area, two bowling lanes, weight rooms, handicapped access, senior citizen activities and programs</td>
<td>Center built by 1987 Bond Referendum; completed 1992; located at the western end of Bayville Farms District Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Neck</td>
<td>83,931</td>
<td>25 meter x 25 yard pool, gym, multipurpose rooms, meeting/activity areas, dance/aerobic studio, demo/catering kitchen, therapeutic fitness area, two bowling lanes, weight rooms, handicapped access, senior citizen activities and programs</td>
<td>Center built by 1987 Bond Referendum; located adjacent to Great Neck District Park; completed 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess Anne</td>
<td>83,931</td>
<td>25 meter x 25 yard pool, gym, multipurpose rooms, meeting/activity areas, dance/aerobic studio, demo/catering kitchen, therapeutic fitness area, two bowling lanes, weight rooms, handicapped access, senior citizen activities and programs</td>
<td>Center built by 1987 Bond Referendum; completed 1994</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

on the recreation trends, statistics, current facilities inventory, and budget priorities, the plan outlined the Department’s planning efforts for fiscal years 1999–2004. Their plan incorporated facilities (recreation centers), program fields, (e.g., crafts, dance, fitness, sport), and structure (e.g., classes, leagues, field trips, etc.) See Compendium 8-11 for Virginia Beach Comprehensive Recreation Plan By Age Group.

Program Master Plans

A program master plan is needed for each aspect of a segment category. These plans must follow steps similar to overall planning, i.e., have goals and objectives specific to that aspect and have an information base. For example, in addition to the target population 5-year plan, City of Virginia Beach Department of Parks and Recreation developed a master plan for its recreation centers to help them position for the future, as well as a program master plan focused on youth-at-risk (see section on Interagency Partnerships, below).

The program/service determinants, delivery design elements, and guidelines for programming specific programs, events, and activities are discussed in Chapter 9, Program Services and Event Management.

Resources Needed for Implementation

Programming implementation is resource-dependent. An organization needs adequate resources for any recreation program plan to be implemented; thus, a
resources plan is critical and integral. The organization must determine the human and physical resources needs for the comprehensive plan and each of the program master plans. It also must create a budget.

There are three types of resources: *human resources* range from volunteers with varied levels of capability to full-time professional staff; *physical resources* range from park land and natural areas to elaborate specialized facilities; and *financial resources* range from play apparatus to microcomputers, from paper clips to pool chemicals. Each of these are addressed in other chapters:

- Human resources in Chapters 16 to 18,
- Physical resources in Chapters 12 to 13, and
- Financial resources in Chapters 20 and 21.

There are two parts to a resources plan—what resources are needed, and how the resources can be obtained. However, one does not program according to the resources available rather, one programs what is desirable and then seeks the resources. Generally, successful attraction of resources is directly proportional to the levels of creativity, efficiency, and effectiveness associated with program and service
delivery, as well as financing creativity (see section on Interagency Partnerships, below, for an illustration of resourcefulness).

Assessing the availability and suitability of resources immediately follows the determination of what resources are needed. Often, there are three levels of planning related to resources, with an “if” scenario:

- If all resources can be obtained, then . . .
- But only partially obtained, then . . .
- And if resources are inadequate, then . . .

There should always be a clear expectation below which the program should not be offered because a quality experience cannot be assured.

Just as areas and facilities represent highways leading toward the destinations of satisfaction and wellbeing among constituents, recreation programs and services can be thought of as the vehicles necessary to reach those destinations. The creative manager systematically identifies and develops areas and facilities to accommodate relevant programs and services. Consumer demand for increased efficiency and organizational agility to change has led to greater focus on multiple uses of areas/facilities.

A functional approach to program and service delivery should guide comprehensive recreation area planning. For example, an organization's decision to build, purchase, rent, lease, or incorporate some creative combination of approaches to its physical plant should be a product of long-range planning. Location considerations should also reflect long-range program planning decisions.

The organization should simultaneously develop a serviceable comprehensive program plan with the community's physical resources plan. The specific recommendations in the community's formal master physical resources plan should help the organization determine the logic and feasibility of the formulation and implementation of a three- to five-year comprehensive program plan.

Interagency Partnerships

The recreation program comprehensive plan should encompass cooperative programming among public agencies, nonprofit associations, and private for-profit enterprises to ensure maximum coverage with a minimum of duplication, as well as to reduce inter-organization competition for an individual's time. Joint programs among community organizations should be established wherever feasible. Marketing and community action groups should be involved in program development.

It is important to ensure groups are well-balanced to truly represent both the majority and the minority of community desires. The total community programming avoids unnecessary waste of effort and finances. Frequently, several organizations program the same type of activity, for the same people, at the same time, while some activities and people are neglected altogether. Organizations should avoid competing with each other for the time of groups of people who have similar types of experience and characteristics (see the section on Community Inventory, above, and also and Chapter 6).

The following excerpts from the Virginia Beach master plan for youth-at-risk illustrate the wide variety of interagency partnerships the agency utilizes for specific programs.

Youth-At-Risk will be a major focus for planning purposes. . . In 1997 the Department created seven Recreation Specialist I—At-Risk Youth positions by upgrading existing vacant Recreation Support Assistant positions. These individuals work directly with at-risk youth and provide specific at-risk youth employees who direct their efforts on a citywide basis, through collaboration with other City agencies (including the Community Services Board, Social Services, the Health Department, and the Police Department), as well as within the scope of the individual community recreation centers.

Other unique services related to recreation programming (for youth in particular) are:

Youth Opportunities Office . . . a collaborative, systems approach among youth, youth serving agencies, schools and the community to provide youth with accessible and available opportunities which improve their quality of life, increase their chances for positive development and reduce or prevent youth and family problems.

Promoting Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY) Team. . . . The Department of Parks and Recreation designated eleven existing positions to specifically address the needs of youth and families in crisis. Seven new staff members with counseling and intervention experience have joined forces with representatives from the Youth Activities Unit and the Therapeutic Recreation Unit to form the PLAY team. This team works with other youth serving agencies to provide programs such as the annual Safety Camp, youth volunteer opportunities, mentorship, life skills training, and alternative discipline. Teen participation and parental involvement have increased at all city community recreation centers as a result of this program. The services to this population have been enhanced and expanded without additional staff by reallocating Recreation Support Assistant positions to Recreation Specialists.

Curfew Program. This program is a collaboration between Parks and Recreation, the Police Department, Juvenile
Courts, Tidewater Regional Group Homes Commission (TRGHC), Virginia Beach City Public Schools and Virginia Beach United Methodist Church. Via grant money from the Schools, Parks and Recreation staff are staffing the curfew site from 11:00 p.m. until 3:00 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays throughout the summer. The Church is the curfew site. The intervention program is sponsored by TRGHC and will be co-facilitated by Parks and Recreation staff housed at the Kempsville and Great Neck Community Recreation Centers. Parks and Recreation staff are also adding a “family recreation” component to the program.

“Grow Your Own Lifeguard” Program. The Parks and Recreation’s Aquatics unit and the American Red Cross are promoting this program. The purpose is to target youth-at-risk and minorities who do not possess the necessary swimming skills to be eligible for a Lifeguard Training class. Parks and Recreation will teach a three-month program to enhance swimming skills and provide fitness training and CPR skills at no cost. A 30+ hour Lifeguard Training Course will then be offered. The Red Cross will incur the costs for the course and all necessary materials through a scholarship fund or through grants. Students who successfully complete the class will agree to provide 40 hours of on-the-job training (volunteering) with the Department and then be eligible for employment opportunities.

New Year’s Eve Rockin’ Lock In. In an effort to provide a safe and drug free environment for teens to celebrate New Year’s Eve with their peers, the Department of Parks and Recreation sponsored a New Year’s Eve Rockin’ Lock-in at Princess Anne Community Recreation Center. One hundred and twenty youth, ages 13 to 18 attended the event which began at 10 p.m. on December 31 and ended at 6 a.m. on January 1, 1998. Staff from Parks and Recreation, the Sheriff’s Office, Community Services Board and volunteers supervised the event. All-night activities included casino games, swimming, D.J. and dance, pool and basketball tournaments, bungee run, sumo wrestling and movies. Refreshments and prizes were donated by area businesses. For 1999, the Lock-In was held at Bayside Community Recreation Center and was open to 175 youth.

Grow to Be a Pro Program. This program began in July of 1998 and will be offered each year during the first week in July to allow disadvantaged youth the opportunity to learn golf, tennis, and other recreational activities free of charge. This program was designed as a weeklong comprehensive camp for youth ages 8 to 17 years of age to participate in activities that they normally could not afford. The camp stresses a number of values such as teamwork, sportsmanship, fair play, and self-esteem. The fees for the golf professionals were paid by the Department of Parks and Recreation. The fees for the Tennis Professionals were donated by Jose’s Tennis School. All of the lunches for the week were donated by area restaurants.

Program Prioritization and Timelines

Setting priorities is a fundamental task in comprehensive planning. A recreation program comprehensive plan (three to five years or more) includes procedures for setting priorities for the recreation programs and identifying a timeline. It provides the general framework upon which the annual provision of programs and services is based. Such services are reflected in the current year plan, forming the basis for the annual operating budget. Implementation of the current year plan requires leadership, teamwork, attention to detail, and the ability to adapt to unexpected change.

The organization’s long-range plan should include a clear and well-articulated method of determining needs to be addressed as well as the populations to be targeted (see section on Needs Assessment, above). Criteria should be based on the organization’s mission and the needs of prospective participants. For example, the organization’s decision to expand its youth instructional music program to include “basic guitar,” rather than allocating those same resources for expanded “advanced tennis” lessons, may be acting on the priority (criterion) of “expanded alternatives” at the basic level of instruction/skill acquisition. Likewise, the organization that sets “introductory golf lessons for teens” as a higher priority then expansion of the “teen ice hockey” season may be expressing a commitment to the criterion of expanding lifetime leisure skills.

The process of setting priorities also incorporates public sentiment to affirm organizational purpose. A thorough understanding of the public’s demands (see Chapter 15) and preferences (see section on Preferences Assessment, above) is necessary if the management team is to deliver effective programs and services.

The recreation program comprehensive plan also should include a mechanism for determining area and facility priorities. Most communities will find it necessary to phase future improvements for their respective systems over extended periods of time due to initial costs and the necessary infrastructure for operation and maintenance. The organization can expect most individual neighborhoods to see their own area and facilities needs as the highest priority and the ones to be completed first, which typically is not feasible. Community demand for improvements will most likely exceed the financial and management capacities of the organization in any given year.

Nominal group process (NGP) is one effective way for managers to glean consensus from constituency groups. It is a highly-structured format that lends itself well even to controversial issues. It is best used in a town meeting format. The first step is to present a clearly defined question to the constituents.
The participants brainstorm solutions to the problem. They generate solutions without discussing the merits or failings of the ideas. A facilitator writes each idea on a chalkboard or flip chart. Next, there is a round robin discussion. All interested persons are allowed to speak once on the suggestions. The facilitator can enforce a time limit of perhaps three to five minutes per speaker. After the discussion, he or she asks participants to make a weighted ranking of their top five or ten choices. For example, for five choices, they give five points for ideas ranked first, four for those ranked second, etc. The facilitator tallies points for each idea. Participants consider the responses receiving the most votes in a second round robin discussion. Again, constituents may speak once for a specified time and another ranking is taken. The results of the second vote are the consensus of the group.

When there are more than 20 to 25 people at the meeting, they may be divided into discussion groups with a minimum of 10 members. The procedure is the same with each group reporting by way of a representative after the round robin. The advantage of the nominal group process is that everyone is allowed an equal opportunity to speak and the meeting cannot be dominated by the most vocal participants.

With this information, the manager can summarize the meaning of all the data and together with the staff and board begin to set priorities for facilities and programs. The manager can then formulate a chronological phasing plan, based on realistic organization capacities, to illustrate the estimated timetable for meeting the entire set of priorities. This process, updated annually, allows for a proactive park and recreation program.

**Comprehensive Plan Annual Review**

The annual review is an essential aspect of planning. Organizations must monitor for effectiveness even popular programs with sound histories of delivering intended benefits to their designated publics. Programs have life spans and sometimes need adjustments.

There should be an annual review of each program segment. It should include both quantitative and qualitative information, providing constituent data, operational information, and goals and objectives assessment. Information is a valuable commodity when it comes to better understanding the needs or sentiments of populations to be served. The progressive park and recreation organization anticipates the information needed to address decisions relative to programs and services. By anticipating rather than reacting, organizations can develop and maintain information bases that speed up decision making response time.

**Constituent Data**

- Number of participants by demographics—age, gender, location, etc.;
- attitudes and satisfactions toward programs;
- demands and preferences; and
- suggestions, recommendations.

Participant feedback, often of a specialized and highly sophisticated nature, can provide important direction in the fine-tuning program offerings. Organizations may collect feedback during or immediately following the program. This method of program assessment can yield very helpful information, but the organization should not generalize results to nonparticipants.

City of Virginia Beach Department of Parks and Recreation gathered user data from surveys, including user analysis surveys conducted over a four year period. Local college students assisted in conducting the survey. The survey focused on user needs and attitudes about the delivery of park and recreation services. The 23 questions included satisfaction with programs and services and demographic data (See Exhibit 8.6 for the executive summary and Exhibit 8.7 for satisfaction rates by center). An independent marketing research firm conducted a citizen survey done for the city’s comprehensive plan that also included aspects related to recreation centers.

**Operational Information**

What is the effort—what input does it take to deliver the program?

- dollar costs (see Chapter 20);
- staffing, including number of volunteers;
- number of programs, type, length, etc.; and
- strengths.

**Goals and Objectives Assessment**

What is the effect—what is the outcome? To what extent are the goals and objectives realized?

- community effect;
- organization contribution; and
- participant values, benefits.

Part of the comprehensive plan should be how the program is to be evaluated (see section on Program Evaluation, below).

**Programs/Services Performance Evaluation**

Performance evaluation is a manager’s indispensable tool as it provides managerial empowerment. The overview of evaluation is in Chapter 23; however, evaluation is
addressed in many chapters. The focus of evaluation in this chapter is on the performance of the programs and services of an organization.

Because academic accreditation standards require competency in evaluation and research, most curricula offer course content that includes techniques of conducting evaluations, measurement tools, data analysis, etc. Thus, this section does not include these operational strategies, but focuses upon some basic concepts for a performance evaluation system.

There are six basic concepts which provide the framework for evaluating the performance of programs and services.

- **Levels.** Evaluation is at all “levels” of programming, from goals and objectives to the preparation and conduct of activities.
- **Publics.** Evaluation must be performed by both internal and external publics.
- **Timelines.** Evaluation has its own timelines with some being immediate during conduct of the program or service and some annually.
- **Utilization.** Evaluation as a management tool must have the results used.
- **Criteria.** For evaluation to take place there must be criteria against which to judge worth.
- **Dimensions.** Evaluation is multidimensional.

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Exhibit 8.6
Recreation Center Survey Executive Summary

![Experience the Fun!](image)

1996 Recreation Center Survey Results

Executive Summary

The Recreation Division within the Department of Parks and Recreation operates six community recreation centers throughout the City of Virginia Beach. In order to evaluate the quality of services provided, a Recreation Center Survey was conducted at five centers in October 1996. One center, Seatack, was being renovated at the time of the survey. The major results of the survey are:

- Overall satisfaction rate is 98.7%
- Satisfaction with recreation center hours is 92.4%
- 96.5% of respondents feel the recreation center is an important part of their leisure activities
- Over 50% (53.8%) of respondents would like to see more outdoor programming
- Average time to a center is 9.4 minutes
- Three-fourths (75%) of respondents take 10 minutes or less to get to a center
- Almost 2/3 (63.5%) of respondents would like to see the minimum age for facility cards increase
- Three-fourths (74.9%) of respondents would support a facility card increase
- Over 90% (90.9%) of respondents drive to a center

The survey was conducted by Virginia Wesleyan College students from a social research class. Users of the recreation centers (741) were randomly selected to answer 23 questions about customer satisfaction and programs. The active involvement of Parks and Recreation middle managers in the construction of the questionnaire led to a very high degree of confidence in the survey.
Levels

Evaluation occurs at all levels of programming and services. (See Exhibit 8.8.) Systematic evaluation is a search for operational excellence. It involves evaluation that affects the mission, goals, specific objectives, experiences, and activities referred to as maxi-unit feedback loop. That is, this type of evaluation occurs periodically and on a more broad scale, usually involving external publics (see section on Publics, below).

Evaluation also involves direct program and services delivery in terms of format, activity selection, and structural components (see Chapter 9 section on Design Elements). This mini-unit feedback loop is continual as programs and services are provided (see section on Timelines, below). This aspect of evaluation is done primarily by internal publics.

As this mini-unit evaluation occurs, it is assimilated by the staff, then the programs and services are modified in response to input before being offered again. Thus, evaluation is a search for excellence, always seeking insights as to how programs and services can best be delivered.

Publics

When the evaluation is done only by those who plan and conduct the activity, the program, or the service, then the evaluation is often stagnant and seldom objective. But, when the evaluation includes more internal publics and many external publics, the evaluation is dynamic because of the diverse perspectives (see Exhibit 8.9).

A current concept related to internal publics is that of “co-evaluation,” advocated as an approach to organizational effectiveness, empowerment, and excellence (Gray, 1998). Co-evaluation makes evaluation a useful management tool. It involves—as a team—the staff, the board, volunteers, and the clients. Co-evaluation strengthens key areas of organizational behavior and policy, program/services effectiveness.
Exhibit 8.8
An Operational Model for the Search for Excellence Through Systematic Evaluation

CONSTITUENT NEEDS

MISSION OF THE ORGANIZATION

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM / SERVICE

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

EXPERIENCES TO REALIZE OBJECTIVES

ACTIVITIES WHICH PROVIDE EXPERIENCES

FORMAT PROGRAM / SERVICES

Activity Selection

CONDUCT PROGRAM / SERVICE

Structural Components

Maxi-unit Feedback Loop

EVALUATION for PLANNING

Modify

MINI-UNIT FEEDBACK LOOP

EXTERNAL PUBLICS

Effort

Process

INTERNAL PUBLICS

Cost / Value

Quality Assurance

Process
and outcomes, human resource management, resource development, and ethics and accountability. Co-evaluation does include some outside evaluators or external publics.

Evaluation should be done by the stakeholders of the organization. These include external and internal publics (see Exhibit 8.10 and Chapter 15 for further discussion of stakeholders and the publics).

**Timelines**

When is evaluation done? When is it used? Evaluation is continual, with mini-unit and maxi-unit feedback loops (see Exhibit 8.9). The mini-loops provide immediate feedback to the program and service planner, organizer, facilitator, and conductor. On the other hand, the maxi-unit feedback loops may occur seasonally, annually, or even every couple years. One might think of the mini-feedback units as the implementation of the maxi-feedback units. The evaluation system should have a scheduled timeline for the various types of evaluation.

**Utilization**

The power of evaluation comes only with utilization of the insights garnered through evaluation. The nature of the evaluation depends on the use intended. If there is no planned use, then why spend time and effort on evaluating the program or service? There are many diverse uses, but uses (objectives) should be specific—and for the enhancement of the organization. An evaluation system should have indicated the specific purpose for an evaluation as the first step in the process of determining the nature of a specific evaluation. Utilization includes everything from immediate feedback for conduct of a service or program to use in setting goals and objectives. An important use is in preparation of annual reports for an organization. Evaluation provides objective information.

**Criteria**

Evaluation is a judgment of worth, but worth in what terms? There must be criteria against which to evaluate performance, collection of data specific to the criterion being applied, and then to compare the performance and the criterion. The proper data cannot be collected unless one knows what information is needed to compare with the criterion.

There are three types of criteria, and the specific criteria are determined by the dimensions of evaluation. (see below) All three can be both quantitative and qualitative. They are:

- expressed—e.g., stated goals and objectives, organizational outputs, standards;
- implied—e.g., satisfaction, benefits; and
- experiential—e.g., by virtue of a person’s expertise, one is able to judge worth of effort, cost/value, and quality assurance.

Evaluation should be differentiated from assessment. Assessment is the measurement of a status; it has no criterion to evaluate worth. To evaluate without a criterion is only assessment! There is no judgment of worth.

**Dimensions**

There are six dimensions of evaluation (see Exhibit 8.11). For a comprehensive system of program and services performance evaluation, all dimensions should be considered. To what extent each should be undertaken, depends on why one is evaluating and what one wishes to know through evaluation.

**Effort**

What operational input was invested by the organization?

- Personnel: How many staff were required? Of what expertise? What training has had to be given?
- Programs: How many programs were offered to serve the clientele?
- Marketing: How much promotion, publicity, and advertising are needed?
Exhibit 8.10
External and Internal Publics

External Publics

- Power structure
  - policy-makers
  - funding sources
  - citizenry/community leaders
  - organization top administration
- Specialists
  - human development specialists
  - technical specialists
  - research specialists
- Constituent outreach
  - nonparticipants

Internal Publics

- Program/services facilitators
  - governing boards
  - citizen advisory boards/committees
  - program staff
  - operational staff
  - volunteers
- Participatory constituency
  - visitors
  - program participants
  - clients
  - customers

- Facilities and areas: What type and number of facilities and areas were required? Did the organization own them or did they have to be built or rented?
- Dollar (see cost/value dimension)

Exhibit 8.11
Dimensions of Programs and Services Performance Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EFFORT</strong></td>
<td>(operational input)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COST/VALUE</strong></td>
<td>(what you get for your dollars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QUALITY ASSURANCE</strong></td>
<td>(to the customer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROCESS</strong></td>
<td>(techniques and strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUTPUTS</strong></td>
<td>(programs and participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUTCOMES</strong></td>
<td>(the effects)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality Assurance
(See Chapter 15 section on customer service.)

Process
There are two types of processes that are involved in evaluation. The first is the process of assessment itself. Were the appropriate assessment techniques and instruments used? The second is the strategies used in offering the program or service. Perhaps is it not what the organization did, but how it did it!

Assessment techniques, tools, conditions. The program or service may be excellent, but if one does not have the appropriate techniques for assessment, the correct measurement tools, the proper environmental conditions under which the assessment is made, then the program’s or service’s performance may not be properly assessed. Or, if there is an invalid or inappropriate criterion used against which to measure the worth, then the evaluation is invalid. Was the correct impact indicator used?

Program strategies assessment. Was the leadership style appropriate for the participants? Were the activities of appropriate skill level? Were the activities appropriate to the age level of participants? Were the activities within the physical condition capabilities of the participants? Was the structure format the best? Were the activities of interest to the participants? (see Chapter 9).

Outputs
The outputs are the actual programs and services delivered to the clientele. There are two types of outputs: those related to programs/services, and those concerned with the participants. Outputs are quantitative, for the most part. Outputs are a matter of records management.

Programs/services. What was actually provided? How many programs of what type and length? When were the programs offered? What were the fees? See Chapter 9 for the scope of programs and services.

Participants. Participant outputs are concerned with constituent statistics. How many people were serviced?

Where were they located? What percentage of the potential targeted population participated? What were the ages, gender, ethnic backgrounds, and other demographics of the participants? Who were not reached? Were there other programs competing for their time; what alternative choices could be made by the non-participants? What was the accident record? How satisfied were the participants?

Outcomes
What was the result of the output? Even if many people participated in the programs and services provided, were the expectations in the form of goals and objectives met? What evidence is there that the goals and objectives were met? To what degree were the goals and objectives met? Were unanticipated benefits accrued? If so, to what degree, and by whom? Three approaches to outcomes should be considered.

Individual change. What skills did the participants learn? Was there any distinguishable change relative to one or more developmental domains? Usually to document change, there must be a pre/post assessment related to activity participation.

Organization contribution. Organization “outcomes” are often outputs, as the organization endeavors to provide certain experiences through programs and opportunities to a target population.

Community impacts. An objective may relate to a social concern, such as youth with deviant behavior, the quality of life for senior citizens, and opportunities for persons with disabilities. Often changes in social concerns due to recreation experiences cannot be measured directly and “impact indicators” become the criteria for judging the worth of a program. An objective may also relate to economic impact, such as increasing property value or attracting tourism revenue from nonresident participants/attendees.

A program or service may provide an outcome related to all three approaches; but, the three must be distinguished. One may be met without meeting the other two, although the objective was to do so.

Evaluation must be direct and specific with an objective that is measurable.
Resources


See Compendium 8-12 for Twenty-nine Palms Recreation Plan and Compendium 8-13 for City of Renton Recreation Programming Plan.
Authors, Consultants, and Contributors

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Sandra Whitmore is the retired Director of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities for Alexandria VA. She has more than 35 years’ experience at four different agencies which have been accredited by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies. She has concentrated on community involvement and working with diverse populations. She has had articles published on special events, cooperative suburban and inner city programs, and open space initiatives in urban environments. She has facilitated community master plans for recreation programs and open space. She has been a member of the National Certification Board and has served as Chair of the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies.

Chapter Contributors
Thanks to the following for their contributions to this chapter:

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Diane Hoover, CLP, Recreation Manager, Cincinnati Recreation Commission (review and input)
Dr. Michael Wise, Virginia Commonwealth University (review and input)
Dr. Ted Swanson (contribution to the section on surveys)

Field Material Contributors
Virginia Beach Parks and Recreation, information from their Recreation Programming Plan, February 1999, Sara L. Hensley, Recreation Administrator. City of Lincoln, Parks and Recreation Department, 1997 e-mail survey.
Northbrook Park District, community teen survey.
Nappanee, Indiana, Nappanee Park Board 1997 phone survey.
Charlotte Barrett, Grant Officer, City of San Antonio, formerly Administrative Analyst, City of Virginia Beach Department of Parks and Recreation, for Exhibit 8.5, adapted from Exhibit 6-6 from ICMA series on Current Issues on Leisure Service (1987).