Program Services and Event Management

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Programming Concepts

A program is an opportunity provided by a park and recreation organization that enables individuals to experience recreation. As such, a program is a means to recreation and a vehicle to deliver benefits to participants.

The programs do not, in themselves, create recreation experience. Rather, it is the pattern of an individual's perception that enables him or her to experience recreation by interacting with the social, physical, and natural environments. Recreation programming is the process of planning opportunities for individuals to engage in recreation experiences. These opportunities can be enacted through facility design and social environments. Because recreation experiences are highly individualized, reflecting an individual's freedom to choose, participants shape the recreation experience based on their own expectations, needs, and interests. Programming is a dynamic process that continues as the recreation experience unfolds.

The primary responsibility of the manager is that of providing programs by which recreation experiences and environments enhance the well-being and quality of life of participants. Certain determinants give direction to what is provided. The nature of service must also be considered.

Program/Service Determinants

Managers have a responsibility to build their program and service offerings in a professional, systematic, and studied way. They require a sound philosophical and conceptual foundation. An organization's mission and goals must be a part of the consideration for selecting programs and services. In addition, it is important for park and recreation organizations, as people-oriented service agencies, to make a strong commitment to the creation of a participant-centered...
culture. The particular needs of the groups targeted by the park and recreation organization, as supported or reflected in its mission, should be the focus of the organization’s programs and services. Programs and services must be selected that can provide experiences desirable for that clientele. Further, park and recreation organizations are not isolated entities, but rather a part of a community network of agencies providing recreation programs and services.

Thus, programs and services are built upon six basic determinants:

- conceptual foundations of play, recreation, and leisure;
- organizational philosophy, mission and vision, and goals, and objectives;
- constituent needs;
- creation of a participant-centered culture;
- experiences desirable for clientele; and
- community opportunities.

**Conceptual Foundations of Play, Recreation, and Leisure**

Recreation programs should reflect the basic conceptual foundations of play, recreation, and leisure. Recreation programs should encourage or promote a degree of freedom, choice, or voluntary engagement in their structure or design. Recreation is an activity in which a person engages for a positive, purposeful end. Certainly the program design of park and recreation organizations support the idea of creating and delivering purposeful, wholesome activities, events, and services. Play as a form of behavior is usually considered a creative, spontaneous expression. Often, park and recreation programs reflect the spirit of play in their design, promoting open, free, and expressive opportunities for individuals.

Park and recreation organizations usually have as their mandate the promotion of worthwhile programs and services. Such programs reflect positive themes, aimed toward improving the quality of life of individuals and community members. In general, public park and recreation agencies provide land and other resources, and hire professional staff to develop program services. These services are built upon positive themes, such as wise use of leisure, development of a land ethic that encourages preservation and conservation of the environment, and the promotion and protection of human dignity.

Other worthwhile ends promoted by park and recreation organizations include enhancing the social, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of individuals. Current programs’ conceptual foundations focus on the individual and the recreation experience. This includes the pursuit of joy and pleasure, as well as excitement and challenge. It sees the recreation experience as creative, providing individual growth and development, and self-enhancement. The recreation experience also has a role in therapy.

**Organization Philosophy, Goals, and Objectives**

Another determinant for developing recreation programs is the organization’s philosophy, vision, mission, and goal statements (see Chapter 7 on Strategic Planning and Chapter 8 on Goals and Objectives). Park and recreation organizations that have at their core the enhancement of quality of life, or the promotion of human happiness, are anchored with a foundation that provides direction to their efforts. Encouraging the preservation and/or conservation of environmental resources, promotion of human dignity, and the wise use of leisure provide direction for program offerings. Most park and recreation organizations are grounded in a strong “service ethic” (see section on Nature of Service, below). This enables program offerings to have a strong orientation to meeting needs of individuals in a way that encourages responsible, ethical behavior, focused on creating caring relationships between a park and recreation organization and those who it serves.

Park and recreation organizations use a number of strategies to enhance the quality of life in a community. Four models (see Exhibit 9.1) can assist park and recreation organizations:

- social planning;
- community development;
- social marketing; and
- social action.

**Social planning** is a task-oriented strategy directed toward rationally and logically distributing community resources (Edginton, Hudson, Dieser & Edginton, 2004). It can be thought of as a process wherein the park and recreation professional programmer uses his or her expertise to plan, organize, and deliver services. This strategy is also known as direct service delivery.

**Community development** rests on the assumption that individuals can be partners in the process of determining their leisure destiny (Edginton et al., 2004). The focus of community development is one of helping individuals help themselves. It is a process of enabling individuals to gain the tools they need to participate in the process of planning, organizing, and delivering their own services and is otherwise known as indirect service delivery.

**Social marketing** rests on the assumption that the park and recreation professional should have the basic objective of satisfying consumer needs (Edginton et al,
### Exhibit 9.1
**Strategies Used in the Organization of Leisure Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Basic Strategy</th>
<th>Professional Roles</th>
<th>Settings</th>
<th>Orientation to Those Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social planning</td>
<td>Task oriented; rational; direct service delivery</td>
<td>Meeting community needs; planning to increase the supply and reduce demand</td>
<td>Fact finding followed by professional use of expertise to plan programs</td>
<td>Program planner/implemenetr, research analyst</td>
<td>Government, nonprofit, commercial</td>
<td>Views participants as customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community development</td>
<td>Enabling; indirect service delivery</td>
<td>Promotes independent leisure functioning; self-help; democratic skills; process skills</td>
<td>Focused on helping individuals identify and solve their own problems; encourages partnerships</td>
<td>Community organizer, teacher, enabler, community agent</td>
<td>Government, nonprofit</td>
<td>Views participants as partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social marketing</td>
<td>Focused on satisfying customer needs; encourages a social consciousness</td>
<td>Focuses on meeting customer needs, satisfaction</td>
<td>Analysis of needs; initiation of the marketing mix—product place, promotion, price</td>
<td>Program planner, implemenetr, research analyst, promoter</td>
<td>Government, nonprofit, commercial</td>
<td>Views participants as customers, consumers, guests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social action</td>
<td>Disadvantaged population requires social justice; need to change the system</td>
<td>Seeks a redistribution of resources and power</td>
<td>Confrontation with current power centers; identification of barriers and ways of forcing change</td>
<td>Advocate, community organizer, negotiator, strategist</td>
<td>Government, nonprofit</td>
<td>Views participants as victims or disadvantaged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2004). This is accomplished by needs analysis, identification of discreet target markets and then the integration and initiation of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion, package) to meet needs. Marketing strategies have been widely applied in all sectors of the park and recreation field.

As Edginton et al. (2004) have written, social action has not been widely applied to the park and recreation field. It is a strategy that assumes there is a disadvantaged population, great social injustice and a need to change the way that organizations distribute its resources. The work of the park and recreation professional is advocating on behalf of disadvantaged populations to encourage a “. . . support for an individual or group viewpoint, program or ideological position (Edginton et al., 2004). The more specific goals and objectives for the various programs and services must be based on these overall organization directives. (See section on Goals and Objectives.)

**A Participant-Centered Culture**

At the core of successful park and recreation programs is the “participant-centered culture.” The participant-centered culture reflects a commitment to insuring that the participants’ needs are foremost in the creation and establishment of a park and recreation organization’s programs and services. The culture of an organization is its values, beliefs, and intentions. Schein (2004) has suggested that an organization’s culture can be thought of as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (p. 12).

Further, the culture of an organization can be reflected in many different types of artifacts and/or behaviors, such as its architecture, furniture, technology, dress, forms of address, decision-making style, communication during meetings, and network configuration (Miller, 2005, p. 91).

What exactly is a participant-centered culture? Why is such a participant-centered culture important
to the success of park and recreation agencies? Most, if not all, park and recreation services require some type of interaction between the participant and the provider. The importance of creating positive, respectful, supportive, and quality relationships is at the center of effective park and recreation program provision. How park and recreation managers encourage their employees to connect to participants in such a way as to promote and sustain service excellence is at the heart of the matter. Service provision that places the participant at the center of the program process is the key. Encouraging sincere, genuine, caring, and positive responses to the needs of participants must be at the center of the culture of any park and recreation organization. Park and recreation managers must work to create a culture that emphasizes responsiveness, openness, and sensitivity that leads to action on behalf of the participant. Such values must be lived, not just discussed within park and recreation agencies. It is important to remember that substance, competence, and actions leading to the creation of supportive relationships must trump rhetoric (Berry & Selman, 2005, p. 46).

The Maryland National Park and Planning Commission has developed a participant-centered culture through a number of initiatives, including a new emphasis on public participation. For example, this agency has initiated a program entitled HUB at one of their 43 community centers. The focus of this year-long program has been to identify the needs of the residents, and to assist the staff in addressing those needs. This initiative led to a host of new social service programs offered by the community center. The goal is for the community to identify with the Community Center as the HUB of the Community.

Through the HUB program, the Maryland National Park and Planning Commission has evaluated a model of public participation promulgated by the International Association of Public Participation known as the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. This model details several levels of public participation, moving from where the staff informs the public, to one where staff consults (listens to and acknowledges) the public. Further, the staff moves from involving the public to collaborating with the public to build consensus. Finally, the goal is one of empowering the public to make final decisions. For example, during one of the public meetings, a state legislator suggested that the Maryland National Park and Planning Commission make this the first “Charter” Community Center by setting up an independent board of directors and handing the funding over to them to operate the facility. While this suggestion didn’t gain traction, it did demonstrate the concept of incorporating an evolving participant-centered culture in the planning process.

**Constituent Needs**

Recreation programs based on the needs of participants outperform efforts that are focused elsewhere. Understanding the recreation needs of participants involves an awareness of the dynamics of a community served by a park and recreation organization. Full knowledge of a given community’s recreation needs, interests, attitudes, and behaviors sets the stage for program development. Further, every community has unique and distinct features that can be incorporated into program development. When planning programs, managers must know basic community demographic characteristics such as age, income, educational distribution, family composition, race, ethnicity, and how neighborhood dynamics affect recreation preferences. (See Chapter 8, Recreation Program Planning.)

Understanding the needs of a constituent group requires that participants be involved in program planning. There are many avenues for participant involvement. For example, individuals can provide input into program designs by serving as club officers, members of senior citizen and teen councils, or serving on ad hoc committees. Distributing frequent social surveys that require participants to identify their needs can encourage participant involvement. The City of Estevan provides an open inquiry available for constituents to complete at any time (see Compendium 9-1).

The community’s participation in activities may enhance the program design phase. Examples of community involvement include individuals serving as volunteer leaders on playgrounds, judges for contests, or aids for special group services. Sponsoring activities can also encourage involvement. Individuals or businesses may sponsor advisory councils or athletic teams, or be special project patrons. Also, citizen advisory committees and/or neighborhood and community study groups may make policy recommendations that encourage identification of needs.

**Experiences Desirable for Clientele**

Programs and services must be designed to provide the experiences desirable to meet the needs of the specific clientele (or targeted constituency). Meeting specific needs is particularly pertinent with clientele who are considered “special populations”—including people with disabilities, youth, and the aging. Just how do programs and services provide the opportunity for experiences to bring about the desired benefits?

One of the tasks of any public and many nonprofit recreation programs is to create universal access to services. Public agencies, and often nonprofit associations, adopt a philosophy of inclusion, which promotes and values involvement of all in the recreation program offerings. Programs and services are diverse, reflecting the differing characteristics of a community, particu-
larly for persons with disabilities and the underserved. Programs that promote active participation, outreach, and an ethic of physical and attitudinal access create greater opportunities for the community.

On the other hand, there are times when promoting inclusion for participants needs to be carefully evaluated. For example, will the experience be similar to other participants? What types of program and/or environmental adaptations will need to occur? How will the adaptations affect the play of other participants? How will materials need to be adapted as well as expectations for the participant? The park and recreation professional will have to be careful in examining whether programs can be inclusive of disabilities, and how participants must work collaboratively with others pursuing different goals. As programs are individualized, can the content be logically organized for different needs?

Another issue that has become important is ethics in program provision. In order to ensure that constituents are provided the highest quality programs, many communities have approached ethics from several different angles. Ethics can be thought of as right behaviors as defined by society. The notion of what constitutes “right behaviors” is changing as society changes. However, there are three general ethical areas of responsibility that park and recreation professionals must address in their work.

Human-Social Responsibility. These refer to the ethical standards that are established for dealing with people. If professionals say that they will operate with integrity and fairness toward all people, this is a reflection of the values that will have an impact on their work as recreation, parks, and leisure service managers.

Community Responsibility. Community responsibility refers to the interaction between the recreation, parks, and leisure service organization and the community it serves. All organizations operate in communities; a community can be a local municipality or it can be a world community. Organizations have the responsibility to contribute to these communities.

Environmental Responsibility. The world is dramatically affected by how the environment is managed. Recreation, park, and leisure service organizations by definition are committed to values that promote a strong land ethic. Preservation and conservation of the environment is a foundational value of this profession (Edginton, Hudson, Lankford & Larsen, 2008).

There are many ethical issues that park and recreation professionals confront on a daily basis. There is the ethics of the paid program provider. (See Chapter 1 for professional ethics.) There are now ethics considerations for volunteers and even for spectators. As poor sportsmanship occurs on the field and in the stands, recreation programmers have developed some interesting methods to curtail the poor examples given to our children. A community in Florida resorted to silent games, where fans were not allowed to cheer at all. Other communities have not allowed spectators at children’s games. And still others have resorted to parent classes and parents, coaches, or players signing ethics agreements. (See Compendium 9-2 for the Tallahassee FL philosophy and parent code of conduct pledge; Compendium 9-3 for the Templeton CA Coaches Code of Ethics; and Compendium 9-4 for the Marion Players’ Code of Ethics.) The code of ethics idea was even adopted for patrons wanting to use natural areas as well.

Community Opportunities

A community provides a vast network of opportunities for recreation programs and services. In planning a program, a park and recreation organization should determine what needs in the community are being met already. Nonprofit associations provide a vast array of character building services focused on youth. Schools often provide community education programs, extending their services by providing before- and after-school programs, and evening activities. Government agencies may be involved in providing services for senior citizens. Still further, private for-profit enterprises may provide opportunities for family recreation, sport activities, and/or other amusements or forms of entertainment. Each of these types of organizations targets a particular market segment.

Further, each organization has developed facilities and other resources that could be used cooperatively to extend program and service offerings (see Chapter 6, Partnerships). Each organization should carefully review all of these resources as a part of the planning process (see Chapter 8, Recreation Program Planning).

Local park and recreation organizations are uniquely equipped to help in community building. Their programs and services provide opportunities to link individuals, neighborhoods, and community groupings in socially beneficial ways. Recreation programs build community by providing positive, meaningful, and relevant services and events that encourage a sense of cohesion, unity, belonging, pride, and appreciation for the traditions and heritage of a community. Bringing individuals in touch with each other and their environment can enrich lives and enhance community living. Recreation programs offer individuals an opportunity to enhance their physical, social, spiritual, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic well-being. Communities that invest in recreation create greater opportunities for personal enrichment, economic growth, environmental integrity, and social and community welfare. From a planning perspective, these programs and services should be complementary.