

Career Profile: Alicia Meredith



Job title and description:

Parks Director, City of New Albany, IN

Responsible for a \$2,085,000 budget and oversee all aspects, operations, projects, and employees of the city parks and recreation department. New Albany has 10 recreational parks, 4 recreation centers, 2 golf courses, a youth fast pitch and baseball park (4 fields), an adult softball park (3 fields), a soccer park (9 fields), an indoor sports turf facility, and a family waterpark. We are also working through plans for the addition of a 5 acres dog park.

What led you to your career in Parks and Recreation?

Having grown up playing sports and having a love for the outdoors, Parks and Recreation has always been an area that is close to my heart. After playing a collegiate sport, I followed that path and began my career as an event manager in Division I athletics. After several years of coordinating sporting events, overseeing the maintenance of each venue, and managing budgets and projects for each, I decided I was ready for a change, one where I could make an impact on much larger scale. This is what led me to Parks and Recreation. In this profession I am able to enhance the quality of life and well-being of an entire community by creating opportunities for each person to learn, grow, and play through the use of our various parks and programs.

What skills, experience and qualifications are necessary for you to do your job?

Skills: must have the ability to see the big picture, along with the small steps it takes to get there, ability to multi-task on a large scale, be extremely organized, manage multiple people of varying personalities and abilities, believe in teamwork, ability to manage a large multifaceted budget, and be receptive to constructive criticism, suggestions, and creativity

Experience: managing large multifaceted budgets, projects, people, and organized activities all in the parks and recreation or similar field (turf management, playgrounds, construction, sports and sports venues, recreational programs, pool management, etc)

Qualifications: bachelor's degree (master's preferred), 4-5 years experience in parks and recreation or a related field, knowledge of policies and procedures, philosophies, trends, and principles and techniques of community recreation service administration and public facility management

What challenges do you face in your job?

There are multiple groups or people that play a role in what decisions are made affecting our department. It is sometimes hard getting all groups to agree, occasionally slowing down our ability to progress. Politics play a major role and it is sometimes hard to find a balance between politics and what is actually best. Vandalism is also always a challenge. Through all challenges, focus on doing what is right and best for your community.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your career?

Seeing positive changes not only in the physical aspects of the parks, but in people's lives. Taking a poorly maintained space and turning it into something beautiful and functional. Seeing people learn, grow, and play together at varying ages and abilities. Being part of a successful program, activity, event, or project and watching the smiles on people's faces as they participate in a parks activity or utilize one of our facilities or parks. It's the community we serve that make the job worthwhile and so rewarding.

What advice do you have for job seekers interested in your position?

Get involved and be known in the community in which you want to work. Build relationships, connections, and contacts through networking within the community. Be sure to gain the experience required to fulfill the requirements of the position, even if you must volunteer your time. Always always always be respectful and considerate of people in all positions at all levels, valuing each opinion and conversation, as you never know who might just be the one person you need in your corner.

How has NRPA helped you in your career?

The NRPA has been incredibly helpful. It is through the NRPA membership that an avenue to communicate with other professionals in our field across the nation was created, the NRPA Connect. The NRPA Connect assist each of us in finding answers to our questions, solutions to our problems, recommendations on software, procedures, and programs to use and implement, many of which our parks have benefited from. NRPA keeps us up to date with current trends in all aspects of the job and issues magazines that have great ideas shedding light on new activities to bring to our parks, creative solutions to problems, and companies to use on different projects and assist with various needs. Last, but definitely not least, we posted an Aquatics Director position on the NRPA website and it was through this that we found our top two candidates and hired one.