



CAPRA TOOLKIT



NATIONAL RECREATION
AND PARK ASSOCIATION

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WHAT IS CAPRA?

NRPA's Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) delivers quality assurance and improvement to accredited park and recreation agencies throughout the United States by helping them build a comprehensive management system of operational best practices.

This system improves their infrastructures, increases efficiency in all agency functions and demonstrates accountability within their communities. Implementation of this system strengthens teamwork among staff, embeds all aspects of CAPRA into their agency's internal culture and establishes a continuous improvement mindset for all activities.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit includes a number of resources to assist you in making an internal case for your agency to apply for CAPRA accreditation. On the following pages, you will find helpful talking points for pitching CAPRA accreditation to your agency's leadership, a video highlighting testimonials from CAPRA accredited agencies, a justification letter template that you can customize to your needs, as well as a PowerPoint presentation template to help you make your case. You'll also find a helpful infographic and a compilation of case studies highlighting the many benefits of CAPRA accreditation.



Photo courtesy of San Antonio (Texas) Parks and Recreation

CAPRA JUSTIFICATION SCRIPT

CAPRA accreditation is a strategic investment in excellence. It's the only international recognition that proves our agency is operating at the highest standard and that we're accountable, efficient and committed to continuous improvement. It strengthens internal operations, increases credibility with funders and stakeholders and unites our team around shared goals. By pursuing CAPRA, we're not just raising the bar — we're showing our community and leadership that we're serious about delivering top-tier programs and services.

BENEFITS OF CAPRA ACCREDITATION

For Your Community

- Demonstrates that the agency meets national standards of best practice
- Recognizes the community as a great place to live
- Helps secure external financial support and reduce costs for the community
- Holds the park and recreation agency accountable to the public and ensures responsiveness to meet their needs
- Ensures that all staff are providing quality customer service

For Your Agency and Staff

- Proves to decision makers, stakeholders and the public that your agency is operating with the best practices of the profession
- Increases credibility and can improve internal and external funding
- Improves overall operations and increases efficiency
- Enhances staff teamwork and pride by engaging all staff in the process
- Creates an environment for regular review of operations, policies and procedures, and promotes continual improvement

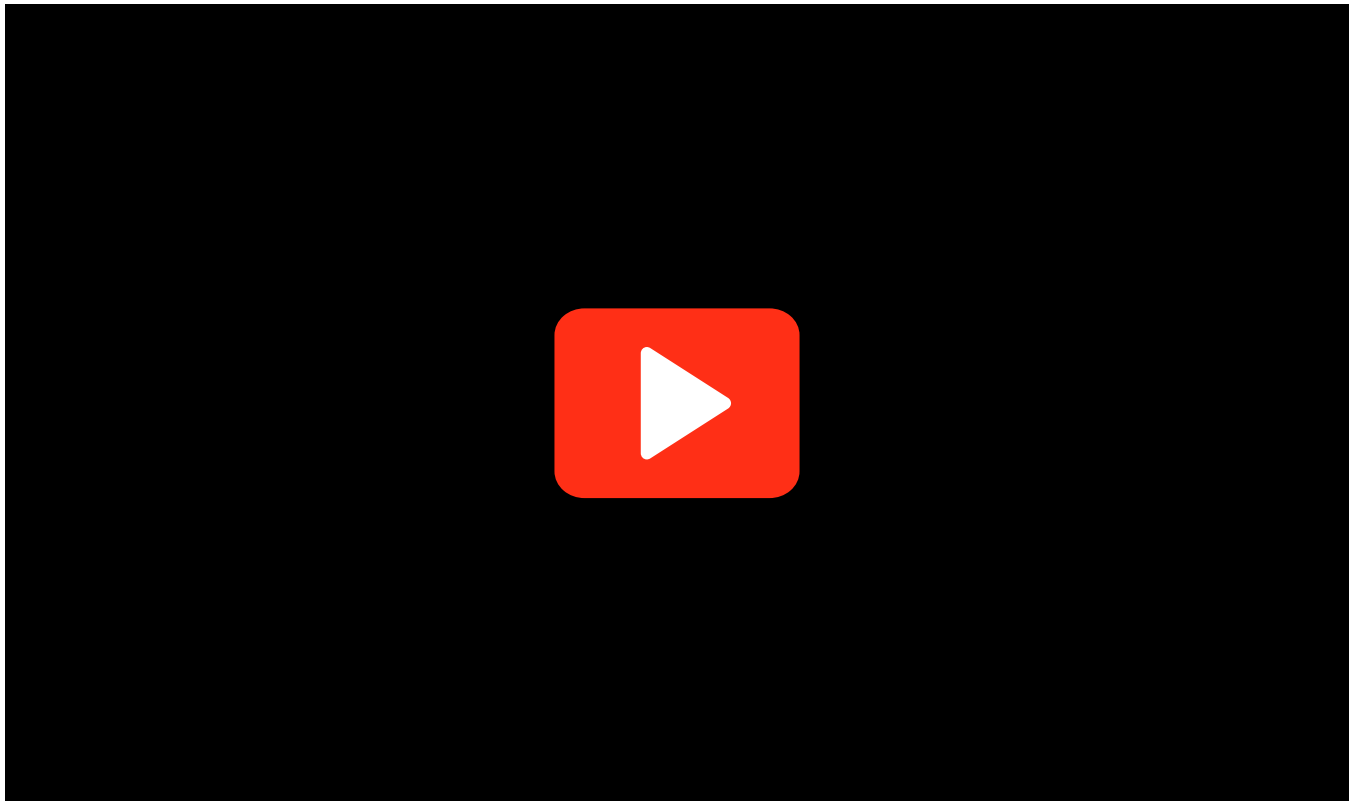
CAPRA Agencies by Population Served



| | | |
|-------------------|---|------------|
| more than 250,000 | → | 30% |
| 100,000 - 250,000 | → | 25% |
| 50,000 - 99,999 | → | 22% |
| 20,000 - 49,999 | → | 18% |
| fewer than 20,000 | → | 5% |



CAPRA VIDEO



Click to play.

[Date]

To: [Supervisor's Name]

[Supervisor's Title]

[Agency Name]

Subject: Justification for Pursuing CAPRA Accreditation

Dear [Supervisor's Name],

I am writing to formally recommend that [Agency Name] pursue accreditation through the [Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies \(CAPRA\)](#), the only international accreditation program for park and recreation agencies. This distinguished program, administered by the [National Recreation and Park Association \(NRPA\)](#), provides an invaluable operational management framework that strengthens infrastructure, increases department-wide efficiency, and establishes a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

Achieving CAPRA accreditation would significantly benefit our agency, our staff, our staff and, most importantly, our agency **[agency population served]** community members. By achieving this, we would join the **[percentage from page 2]** of agencies of our size who are already accredited. By aligning with CAPRA's national standards, we not only demonstrate our commitment to excellence but also build public trust by ensuring that all operations, services and policies are transparent, efficient and community focused.

In addition to the benefits already mentioned, CAPRA accreditation can also improve our ability to secure external funding, attract partnerships and reduce operational costs over time. Just as importantly, it embeds a culture of excellence and continuous improvement across all levels of our agency, helping ensure that we remain well positioned for future growth.

The CAPRA accreditation process allows agencies to evaluate their current operations, identify areas for growth and document alignment with 68 rigorous standards. Once accredited, our agency would commit to a reaccreditation process every five years, ensuring our continued compliance and growth. As part of this effort, we would gain access to NRPA's robust library of resources, training opportunities and an international network of accredited agencies committed to professional excellence.

In summary, CAPRA accreditation represents a strategic investment in the long-term success of our agency and the well-being of our community. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this recommendation further and explore next steps for initiating the accreditation process.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Full Name], [Your Title]

[Your Contact Information]

Usage Instructions: This text can be copied and pasted into a program of your choosing or you can [click here](#) to access the editable Microsoft Word template version.



PRESENTATION TEMPLATE

CAPRA 6-STEP PROCESS

- 1 Complete Application
- 2 Attending Training – Prepare for CAPRA Accreditation
- 3 Develop Self-Assessment Report
- 4 Present Self-Assessment Report to assigned CRT members
- 5 Host CRT members for Hybrid or Virtual Visit
- 6 Attend In-Person or Virtual Hearing



“[CAPRA] is a blueprint for success to get us where we need to be, to make sure we were using best practices – not just updating our existing policies and procedures but identifying what our deficiencies are and enabling us to correct those.”

– Michael Wargo, CPRP, executive director, Willamalane Park and Recreation District, OR (population served more than 62,000) – CAPRA accredited since 2022.

...sive, and if you are worried about small agency particularly – there is g the right thing as an agency.”

ctor, Lower Makefield Township, PA
redited since 2022





**WHY <AGENCY NAME>
SHOULD PURSUE CAPRA**



[Click to download deck template.](#)



CAPRA STATS

NRPA's Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) provides agencies with a comprehensive management system of best operational practices to improve their infrastructures, increase efficiency in all their departments and demonstrate accountability within their communities. Implementation of this comprehensive system strengthens teamwork among agency staff, embeds all aspects of CAPRA into their agency's internal culture and establishes a continuous improvement mindset in all agency activities.

CAPRA BY THE NUMBERS



18

Commissioners
appointed from

10

different liaison
organizations



CAPRA
Volunteers

500



CAPRA
Mentors

100



CAPRA
Representation
Agencies

38

States and

2

Countries



Number of
CAPRA accredited
park and recreation
agencies

222



Number of
CAPRA-accredited
military installations

5



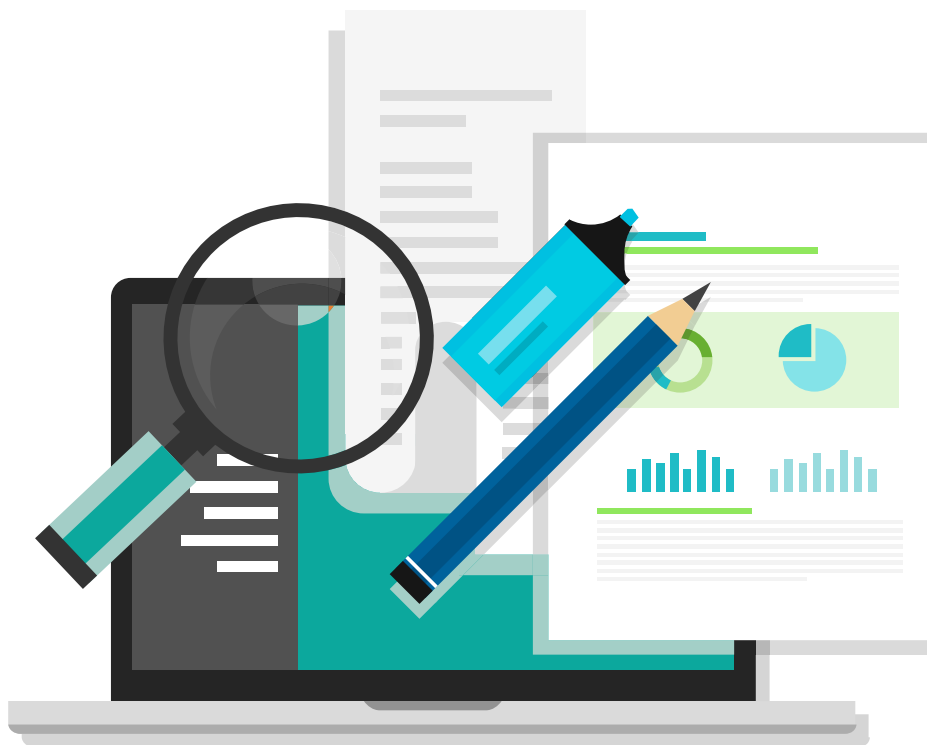
United States



Germany



CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDY #1

Agency Name: Baltimore County Recreation & Parks

Location: Baltimore County, Maryland

Agency Size: More than 250,000

Status: First accredited in 2024

What was the motivation for your agency to participate in CAPRA?

To ensure alignment with national best practices as a way to provide confidence to our constituent base and to provide effective strategies, plans, policies and processes to our staff

What impact has CAPRA had on your agency operations since you were accredited/reaccredited?

CAPRA required the department to not only look at edits needed to current policies and practices but to better create new tools, resources and trainings for our team. CAPRA also has helped the department to reintroduce ourselves, our services, our team and our offerings to those we serve and to tell our story more effectively while gathering input and engaging in a meaningful way.

How has being CAPRA accredited impacted your community and/or relationships within the community?

CAPRA accreditation has increased and enhanced our social presence, it has helped us streamline communication and regular information sharing through regular community meetings and upkeep of public resources on the website, and has helped with transparency, accountability and standardization of policies, procedures and experiences county-wide.

What is one thing that you wish you had known before you applied for CAPRA?

N/A - as a CAPRA reviewer, I was able to enter the process with eyes wide open.

What advice would you give to other agencies applying for CAPRA?

There's no need to be intimidated or think that CAPRA isn't applicable to your agency due to size, budget or buy-in. In many cases, agencies find that they are actually living CAPRA long before they begin the accreditation process. CAPRA will help to validate your organization's best practices while fine tuning and enhancing areas that may need some additional guidance.

CASE STUDY #2

Agency Name: Lewisville Parks and Recreation Department

Location: Lewisville, Texas

Agency Size: 100,000 - 250,000

Status: First accredited in 2023

What was the motivation for your agency to participate in CAPRA?

Our motivation for pursuing CAPRA accreditation in Lewisville was driven by a desire to hold ourselves to the highest professional standards in the field of parks and recreation. We wanted to ensure that our operations, programs and planning efforts reflected best practices, not just internally, but when compared nationally. Ultimately, it wasn't just about earning a seal of approval – it was about becoming better for our residents, our environment and our future.

What impact has CAPRA had on your agency operations since you were accredited/reaccredited?

The process gave us the opportunity to take a close look at our policies, procedures, and planning efforts and identify areas where we could improve. It pushed us to formalize practices that had previously been informal and helped build a stronger culture of documentation, accountability and continuous improvement.

How has being CAPRA accredited impacted your community and/or relationships within the community?

It's created a greater sense of trust and transparency between our department and the public – we're able to show that we're not just meeting best practices, but actively striving for excellence in how we serve. Being accredited has helped us frame our work in a way that highlights its value, which has led to increased support, more meaningful engagement and a deeper connection with the people we serve.

What is one thing that you wish you had known before you applied for CAPRA?

We expected CAPRA to be a lot of work but underestimated the level of detail required for each standard and how important it would be to engage staff early and often. We would've started building a more collaborative internal team from the beginning and not relied on a small team to carry the load.

What advice would you give to other agencies applying for CAPRA?

CAPRA isn't just a paperwork project – it's a cultural commitment to excellence. You'll need buy-in from staff across divisions, so identify your champions early and treat this like a shared journey, not just an accreditation process. Document as you go. Don't wait until the final months to scramble for evidence. Incorporate CAPRA standards into your regular operations and track compliance year round. CAPRA is a milestone, but the real reward is the stronger, more intentional agency you become along the way.

CASE STUDY #3

Agency Name: Fort Sill Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation

Location: Fort Sill, Oklahoma

Agency Size: 50,000 - 99,999

Status: First accredited in 2018, reaccredited in 2024

What was the motivation for your agency to participate in CAPRA?

Compare ourselves to the national standard; illustrate to community we are providing a nationally recognized program.

What impact has CAPRA had on your agency operations since you were accredited/reaccredited?

Increased interaction among agencies (internal and external); emphasis on administrative expectations and programming to meet community need and expectations.

How has being CAPRA accredited impacted your community and/or relationships within the community?

It's been marginally well received. We continue to struggle with explaining the benefits of accreditation outside of programming/activities.

What is one thing that you wish you had known before you applied for CAPRA?

It opened our eyes to the amount of redundancies within the organization and the struggle to reduce yet remain efficient.

What advice would you give to other agencies applying for CAPRA?

The accreditation process is worthwhile. It provides a benefit to the organization and allows for increased involvement in planning and programming for the community.

CASE STUDY #4

Agency Name: Lake Oswego Parks & Recreation

Location: Lake Oswego, Oregon

Agency Size: 20,000 - 49,999

Status: First accredited in 2023

What was the motivation for your agency to participate in CAPRA?

Agency accountability, agency excellence, value in accreditation for employee motivation and pride in work.

What impact has CAPRA had on your agency operations since you were accredited/reaccredited?

We designed CAPRA as part of our system plan.

How has being CAPRA accredited impacted your community and/or relationships within the community?

Assistance in providing the community with transparency in policies and procedures.

What is one thing that you wish you had known before you applied for CAPRA?

It could have been easier.

What advice would you give to other agencies applying for CAPRA?

Look at what you have in place and build on those policies and plans.

CASE STUDY #5

Agency Name: City of Lake Mary

Location: Lake Mary, Florida

Agency Size: Fewer than 20,000

Status: First accredited in 2014, reaccredited in 2024

What was the motivation for your agency to participate in CAPRA?

To show our community and city leadership that we are a top-level agency and meet all the standards a great parks and recreation agency should have.

What impact has CAPRA had on your agency operations since you were accredited/reaccredited?

Mayor and City Manager constantly give us praise at each city event.

How has being CAPRA Accredited impacted your community and/or relationships within the community?

Recognition at events from city leadership.

What is one thing that you wish you had known before you applied for CAPRA?

The time and effort it takes for the staff to meet all the standards and record everything.

What advice would you give to other agencies applying for CAPRA?

Make sure you are ready for the commitment and find great leadership within the agency to hold everyone accountable on all the standards. Make sure master plan is complete before starting.

READ ABOUT CAPRA THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

[North Port's CAPRA Accreditation Journey](#)

March 27, 2020

The Florida-based park agency shares what its team learned from the experience.

[CAPRA Can Take an Agency from Good to Great](#)

April 23, 2020

Discover what City of New Braunfels Parks and Recreation did to prepare for the submission of their CAPRA paperwork and why they are confident that they are ready for their upcoming site visit.

[Cullman Achieves CAPRA Accreditation](#)

July 23, 2020

In 2020, the team at Cullman Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism (CPRST) succeeded in becoming the first park and recreation agency in the state of Alabama to reach accreditation.

[How CAPRA Learned to Love Zoom and Maintained Continuity in the Wake of COVID-19](#)

January 22, 2021

Hear from park and recreation agencies who experienced their first-ever virtual CAPRA visit.

[A Journey to Accreditation and Excellence](#)

October 21, 2021

Loudoun County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services reflects on its path toward CAPRA accreditation.

[The Path to CAPRA Accreditation](#)

January 21, 2022

Milwaukee Recreation becomes nation's first school district-run agency to receive CAPRA accreditation.

[The CAPRA Connection](#)

June 22, 2023

Discover how the CAPRA accreditation program helps create better park and recreation departments.

[CAPRA Celebrates 30 Years](#)

December 15, 2024

Learn how CAPRA has been helping agencies improve their operational best practices for three decades.

[CAPRA Accredits 11 New Agencies in 2024](#)

February 15, 2025

Get a glimpse into the 2024 CAPRA accreditation season through the journeys of 3 new agencies including NRPA's first international CAPRA-accredited agency!



CAPRA TOOLKIT



Photo courtesy of Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services



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AND PARK ASSOCIATION