

**WE ARE
PARKS AND
RECREATION**



**NRPA
STRATEGIC
PLAN**
2021-2023





Every day, in communities across the country, the people of parks and recreation are making their communities better places to live, work and play. Because of their critical work, NRPA is shifting the narrative of parks and recreation.

Redefining this profession as an essential necessity, the full power of parks and recreation will be recognized for creating a better life for everyone by building strong, healthy and resilient communities.

We want the world to know what we already do about the people of parks and recreation.

We are strong.

We are confident.

We are selfless.

We are passionate.

We are driven.

We are essential.

WE ARE PARKS AND RECREATION.

Cover photo credits:

(Top left) A City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation staff member leads community members in an aquatic fitness class. Photo courtesy of the City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation

(Middle right) A professional from the Readington Recreation Department in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, celebrates with a tennis student. Photo courtesy of the Readington Recreation Department

(Bottom right) A Carmel Clay (Indiana) Parks and Recreation staff member stands tall behind an Adaptive program participant. The program, geared toward individuals with disabilities, ensures all ages and abilities can participate in classes. Photo courtesy of Carmel Clay Parks and Recreation

(Bottom left) Children gather to learn about animal life from a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources employee. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

ABOUT THE NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION

VISION STATEMENT

We seek a future where the full power of parks and recreation is widely recognized for creating a better life for everyone by building strong, healthy and resilient communities.

We advance this vision by investing in and championing the profession as a catalyst of positive change for social equity, climate readiness and overall well-being.

MISSION

To advance parks, recreation and environmental conservation efforts that improve the quality of life for all people.

A MOVEMENT IN THE MAKING

In 1965, five founding organizations merged to create the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). These founders, who fostered our country's early park movements, set out to accomplish goals that we carry on today. These include fostering excellence in parks and recreation, engaging communities, cultivating public demand for high quality parks and recreation, and elevating the role of our field.

The world has changed since the beginning of NRPA's story, but one thing has remained ever true, parks and recreation are essential to healthy people and communities. And healthy parks depend on our community heroes – park and recreation professionals.

“It is becoming generally recognized that the creation and maintenance of outdoor recreation facilities is a community duty in order that the whole public might participate in their enjoyment.”

- President Calvin Coolidge, excerpt from the foreword of the 1928 Manual of Municipal and County Parks

NRPA'S THREE PILLARS — OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES



ADVANCING COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Parks and recreation is vital to community health and well-being. Access to these spaces, programs and services remains essential to community vitality and is a key factor in advancing health equity, improving individual and community-level health outcomes, and enhancing quality of life. We believe that park and recreation professionals are uniquely positioned to create, together with public health providers, the community wellness hubs so needed to address chronic health concerns, increasing isolation and mental health disorders, and to rebuild a sense of community and connection.



EQUITY AT THE CENTER

NRPA strives for a future where all people have access to the benefits of quality parks and recreation. Achieving this future requires that we recognize the systemic inequities that have created very different lived experiences in communities across the country — differences based on factors like racial disparities and socioeconomic gaps. We must put equity at the center of all we do, from how we strengthen our organizational culture to how we prepare the park and recreation field for the future. It requires that as we build up equity-centered outcomes, we also work to dismantle the barriers to equity. Putting equity at the center of our work means we are committed to constantly learning, creating supportive and co-beneficial partnerships, and sharing our failures and successes.



CLIMATE-READY PARKS

Our conservation, environmental education and sustainability work aims to create a nation of climate-ready parks and park and recreation professionals. Rising global temperatures are causing major physical, chemical and ecological changes to the planet. These changes, collectively referred to as climate change, are primarily driven by emissions of greenhouse gases as the result of human activities and will impact our communities for generations to come. Park and recreation professionals, who serve nearly every community in the U.S., are essential in combating the causes and impacts of climate change.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

I. BUILD A MOVEMENT

Vision

NRPA will elevate the role of close-to-home parks and recreation services and the professionals who make it all happen — affording this discipline its well-deserved recognition and investment as an essential community service. Through strategic storytelling campaigns, PR efforts, partnerships and research, we will demonstrate the impact and vital work done by park and recreation professionals and highlight their roles in creating communities that excel in conservation, health and well-being, and equity efforts. Our members, partners, city officials and park supporters will gain an enhanced understanding of the fundamental role of local parks and recreation. Our community members will champion our field as the catalyst for changing how our communities come together and interact with people from all walks of life. People passionate about the health and well-being of their environment will look to NRPA as the champion of their cause.

The Case for a Movement

Park and recreation departments are often the first to have their budgets cut and are, typically, the last to have them recovered. Creating a movement around elevating the field of parks and recreation from “nice-to-have” to necessity is vital to the health of the field and the health of our communities. When the outcomes produced by parks and recreation are recognized — improved mental and physical health, more resilient communities through intelligent green spaces, enhanced access to parks and programs that serve all people, significant economic contributions — parks and recreation can achieve the funding commensurate with the services provided and requisite for sustainability.

Key Strategies and Opportunities

1. Galvanize the attention on parks in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic through storytelling — sharing how park and recreation agencies are providing emergency response services and offering essential places for restoration and recovery.
2. As the demographics of our country change, the field of parks and recreation will be at the forefront of the best hiring and programming practices to uplift all communities, especially underinvested districts. We will share these stories and campaign on Capitol Hill and in communities across the country on the value of supporting and stewarding local parks.
3. Increase understanding of the vital role of parks and recreation through advancing a strategic research agenda that identifies the impact, scope and scale of parks and recreation and makes the case for durable funding from local, state, federal and private partnerships.
4. Engage park and recreation professionals as advocates, strengthen their case for support and set them up for success in engaging policymakers, funders, partners, and city leaders — through media, advocacy and fundraising campaigns. In doing so, secure durable funding through important federal programs like LCWF, SFSP, CACFP, WRDA, etc.
5. Demonstrate how the park and recreation field has evolved and is on the frontline of our most pressing health, environmental and social issues. Through this work we will increase the number of community-based environmental stewards, increase use of parks and recreation for health and well-being opportunities and lift-up the field of parks and recreation as a preferred career path.

II. ENSURE ACCESS FOR ALL

Vision

NRPA advocates for fair and just access to high-quality parks and green space, recreation facilities, youth sports and programs that create healthy, resilient and economically vibrant communities.

Why Parks and Recreation

Every day, local park and recreation professionals and champions are working on innovative, long-term solutions to ensure that our communities have fair and just access to great parks and green space, recreation facilities, and programs. They are helping to close critical gaps in access, including the number of parks, proximity of parks and connection to parks all while ensuring that these places are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming for everyone.

Gaps in park access exist for several reasons, including racially discriminatory practices and policies, general lack of funding for parks and recreation, and rapid development that has outpaced local government. This has led to both physical gaps, such as more than 30 percent of the population in U.S. cities not having access to a park within a 10-minute walk, and socioeconomic gaps that have created barriers resulting in historically marginalized communities feeling unwelcome in park and recreation spaces. Our communities are facing numerous other challenges, such as increased flooding and extreme temperatures due to a changing climate, increasing disparities in health outcomes and a widening gap in access to economic opportunity. Now is the critical time for park and recreation professionals to be recognized as key partners in solving these pressing challenges through access to high-quality parks and programs.

Key Strategies and Opportunities

1. Build a time-limited taskforce to develop a framework, goals, and robust policy agenda and strategy around park access that unite partners in collective action around shared priorities.
2. Create a clear path towards improved access to high-quality parks through a research-based park access framework, curriculum, and train-the-trainer model that builds on the content in CAPRA Accreditation.
3. Expand the current park access resources to include climate resilience and climate-readiness strategies that elevate the role of parks and recreation in building community resilience.
4. Incubate and promote innovative solutions to the public through community convenings and engagements on specific park access challenges as well as new and adaptive technology solutions.
5. Advance local solutions through innovative funding mechanisms to local park and recreation agencies that provide funding for both capital projects and systems-change strategies.

CITY OF MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE PRIORITIZES PARK ACCESS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH

In the city of Memphis, only 45 percent of the community has access to a park, and the number and acres of parks are significantly below that of other similar-sized cities in the U.S. In 2019, with technical and monetary support from NRPA, park professionals in the city of Memphis began the process of developing their first park system master plan in 20 years. While the plan itself is still in progress, the process and national exposure have united city leadership and community members around a shared goal of improving the health of the community through a higher-quality park system. Through NRPA's training, technical assistance and peer learning process, Memphis park and recreation professionals increased awareness and skills around equitable and inclusive engagement with the community. In the process, the city increased the number of community engagements from three planned events to 30 events by leveraging a matching grant. Memphis has advanced its goals



Youth in Memphis, Tennessee deliberate over their ideal park designs as part of a youth engagement effort of the City of Memphis Parks Master Plan process. Photo courtesy of Marcha Allen

significantly and is setting next steps in motion. Resources — such as a skill-building curriculum, framework for park access and a park quality index — will continue to support park and recreation professionals in Memphis and other communities to more efficiently and effectively implement solutions that ensure fair and just access to parks.

III. ADVANCE COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

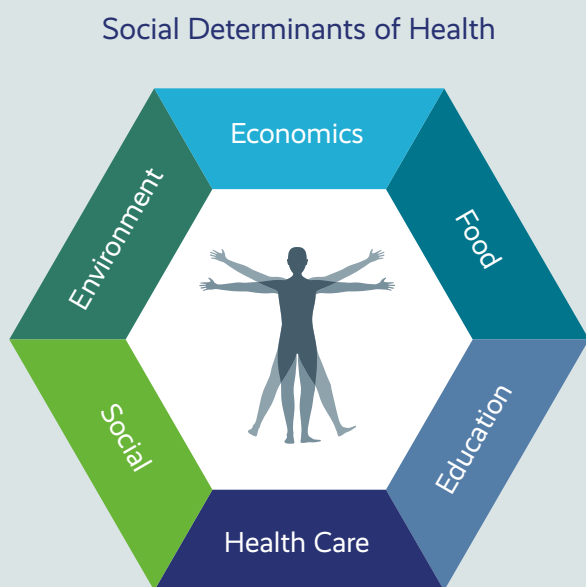
Vision

Park and recreation professionals — and the services they provide — are key to a fully integrated public health system. Public health challenges, such as inequitable access to the social determinants of health, continue to impact quality of life and life expectancy. Park and recreation professionals can play a vital role in meeting the evolving health needs of their communities by building a culture that prioritizes everyone's well-being. This can be achieved by leveraging the power of parks and recreation to serve as community wellness hubs — trusted gathering places that connect every member of the community to essential programs, services and spaces that advance health equity, improve health outcomes and enhance quality of life.

People of color, low-income communities and other historically marginalized populations face significant health disparities and inequities, including lack of access to quality parks and recreation. By focusing efforts on equitably advancing community health and well-being through parks and recreation, we can ensure that all people — regardless of race, class, ability or identity — have a fair and just opportunity to achieve positive health outcomes.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, social determinants of health are the complex circumstances in which individuals are born and where they live, learn, work and play that impact their health. They include factors such as political, socioeconomic and cultural constructs, as well as place-based conditions that include access to healthcare and education systems, safe environmental conditions, well-designed neighborhoods, and availability of healthy food.



NEJM Catalyst (catalyst.nejm.org) © Massachusetts Medical Society



Children in Little Rock, Arkansas create fruit kabobs during a Little Rock Parks and Recreation Department summer camp. Photo courtesy of NRPA

Why Parks and Recreation

Park and recreation professionals dedicate themselves to making their communities healthier, happier and more equitable places to live while confronting many of our nation's greatest public health concerns. Rising rates of chronic disease, food insecurity, other crises — such as the substance use epidemic and COVID-19 pandemic — and an increasing prevalence of mental health issues affect tens of millions of people each year.

To truly advance health equity, improve health outcomes and enhance quality of life, communities must invest in system-wide changes that prioritize advancing the social determinants of health, meeting community members where they are and responding to their unique needs. As the keepers of trusted gathering spaces, local park and recreation agencies play a critical role as central, accessible locations and hubs of opportunities that promote health and well-being.

Key Strategies and Opportunities

1. Develop strategic partnerships and strengthen communications to highlight the vital role of park and recreation professionals as public health agents and local partners in advancing health equity and well-being.
2. Build the knowledge, capacity and motivation of park and recreation professionals to create and implement community wellness hub models that provide greater public health benefits with a focus on holistic health and well-being.
3. Collaborate with local park and recreation professionals to create and navigate local solutions, evaluate their impact and refine the approach to scale.



Baltimore City Health Department providing meals to youth and families across the city. Photo courtesy of Baltimore City Public Schools

BEREA, KENTUCKY CREATES A COMMUNITY WELLNESS HUB

In 2019, NRPA provided funding and capacity building assistance to Grow Appalachia in Berea, Kentucky to expand access to healthy, local foods and address food insecurity in the community. NRPA provided extensive training and technical assistance to the cohort of grantees and helped them navigate unexpected challenges and connect with other subject matter experts.

With support from NRPA and our network, Grow Appalachia successfully expanded the Berea Farmers Market attendance by 300 percent. Their efforts included offering enrichment activities at the market, starting a junior farmers market to inspire young entrepreneurs, establishing a new site for youth summer meals, and encouraging low-income community members to shop for local produce using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and double-up benefits. The initiative built stronger social connections across the community and provided local economic benefits to producers. With the success of the program, Grow Appalachia was able to improve

food security for the community and secure additional funding to sustain and grow their efforts.

NRPA captured their lessons learned, analyzed the program impact, and developed resources outlining key characteristics and strategies to support other park and recreation professionals as they implement expanded food access strategies in their communities — scaling these creative and innovative solutions.



Grow Appalachia in Berea, Kentucky hosts a Junior Farmers Market for local youth to sell food and crafts. Photo courtesy of NRPA

IV. BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

Vision

Park and recreation professionals, and the parks and open spaces they manage, are catalysts for community climate-readiness — creating, maintaining and activating spaces that are not only resilient and regenerative, but also transformative at the community level. NRPA envisions park and recreation professionals as local innovators and champions in addressing our most pressing environmental challenges. Communities that spend more time relaxing, playing and learning in parks are seeing significant health and equity impacts through conservation programming and activities.

Why Parks and Recreation

As one of the largest land managers in the nation—especially in dense urban centers and metropolitan regions — local parks are key to climate-change mitigation and adaptation by providing opportunities for people to engage with nature and by creating healthy and biodiverse ecosystems. Park and recreation professionals are integral to both the proactive and responsive actions essential to building resilience in communities across the country, especially among underserved populations. By providing environmental programming, enhancing the ecological capacity of parklands and advocating for the benefits of nature, park and recreation professionals are addressing our most pressing societal needs through the power of parks.



With funding from NRPA, a neglected urban lot in Baltimore was transformed into Henrietta Lacks Educational Park. Photo courtesy of NRPA

“Great things are happening, and the possibilities are just endless here.”

- Regina Hammond, President,
Rebuild Johnston Square Community
Association

GREEN STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE CREATES RIPPLE EFFECTS IN BALTIMORE

NRPA's investment in the Henrietta Lacks Education Park in the Johnston Square community of Baltimore aimed to improve environmental and social outcomes for those living in the community through green stormwater infrastructure. The ripple effects of this project, though, have exceeded everyone's expectations. While the completed project has transformed a vacant, dilapidated site into a world-class local park that captures about 230,000 gallons of stormwater annually and helps prevent nuisance flooding in the surrounding neighborhood, it is the broader transformations that are truly astounding. The renovation and activation of Henrietta Lacks Education Park has unleashed a wave of support including additional funding, new volunteers and new policies. It has also inspired nearly \$100 million in renovation investments in the surrounding neighborhood. Civic groups and neighborhood associations, like Rebuild Johnston Square Association, are overseeing this economic stimulus to avoid displacement of current residents and encourage home ownership. More than 700 volunteers have contributed nearly 30,000 hours to the park's development and upkeep. This project is a shining example of how an investment in climate-readiness creates a multitude of opportunities and growth for communities.

Key Strategies and Opportunities

1. Help park and recreation professionals prepare for the current and future impacts of climate change on their parks and programming through climate resilience planning and action. Develop a national policy agenda and an advocacy coalition for climate-ready parks.
2. Leverage existing professional development, education and certification assets to build common baseline knowledge and skills. Adapt and scale more advanced training and certification opportunities to build the skills needed to achieve our vision of climate-ready parks.
3. Provide park and recreation professionals with tools and a curriculum to carry out environmental education programs in their communities.
4. Provide tools, guidance and training to help park and recreation professionals reduce the environmental footprint of their agencies' facilities, fleets, operation and maintenance.
5. Provide customized technical assistance around resilience planning, sustainability, natural resource management and innovative financing. Incubate and accelerate on-the-ground success by investing in bottom-up innovation. Focus larger-scale investments in transformative demonstration projects that can help drive systems-level change.

V. PREPARE THE PROFESSION FOR THE FUTURE

Vision

Parks and recreation is recognized as a destination field of practice, one that offers professional rigor, innovation, rewarding community engagement, and positive impact. It is further exemplified by a strong, connected and mutually-reinforcing network of practitioners, academics, advocates and partners with NRPA at its center.

Why Education and Member Engagement Are Critical

NRPA members have continually identified professional development, education and training as the number one NRPA member benefit. The identification of career paths and strategies to attract, engage and support future generations of park and recreation professionals are crucial to the advancement of the park and recreation field and long-term sustainability of the profession.

To help our members meet emerging and future challenges, NRPA will expand forward-looking and innovative theory, research and resources as well as develop a pipeline for park and recreation careers that includes life-long professional development. Doing so requires weaving diversity, equity and inclusion in all that we do, so that our field adapts to reflect the communities it serves, and our parks and programs are engaging and culturally relevant. This will create a virtuous cycle that engages the future stewards of parks and recreation and sustains the public's belief in parks and recreation as essential. At its foundation, it demands that NRPA have effective, adaptive and engaging tools, communications, educational offerings and membership platform.

Key Strategies and Opportunities

1. Embrace innovative modes of learning and engagement, factoring in accessibility and user experience in content curation, microlearning and communities of practice.
2. Identify critical emerging needs and work with strong partners to create resources for park and recreation professionals that support their growth, service to communities and overall impact.
3. Leverage partnerships and campaigns to highlight the contributions of parks and recreation professionals. This can be achieved through the continued development of professionals, including the creation of recruitment methods and education around diversifying the field.

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

To achieve our vision, we must measure our success in three areas. We will measure:

1. How well we have **supported park and recreation professionals to serve their community** using indicators that include usage of research and best practice resources, completed certifications, and online and in-person training.
2. The impact **we have achieved on the ground** using indicators that include community members who have increased equitable access to the benefits of quality parks and recreation opportunities.
3. How well we have succeeded in **harnessing public will in support of parks and recreation** through increases in investments in park and recreation agencies, including growth in per capita operating budgets and full-time park and recreation staffing, and the success of park and recreation ballot initiatives across the country.



Martina Leforce, Berea Kids Eat Program Director, helps prepare food for children in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo courtesy of Berea College

FINANCIAL MODEL FOR THREE YEARS

STRATEGIC PLAN FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

	FY20 FORECAST	FY21	FY22	FY23
REVENUE				
Conference	5,574,242	2,000,000	4,800,000	5,000,000
Membership	2,566,303	1,871,599	1,965,179	2,058,759
Professional Development	3,244,908	2,138,502	2,245,427	2,352,352
Research	84,650	131,000	150,000	175,000
Marketing and Publications	1,237,358	855,380	898,149	940,918
Other	169,319	148,044	150,000	170,000
SUBTOTAL CORE SERVICES	12,876,780	7,144,525	10,208,755	10,697,029
Programs, Partnerships and Development	6,980,655	8,324,798	8,500,000	9,250,000
TOTAL REVENUE	19,857,435	15,469,323	18,708,755	19,947,029
TOTAL EXPENSES	19,357,435	15,618,532	18,708,755	19,947,029
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	500,000	(149,209)	-	-

KEY INVESTMENTS

Supporting a Changing Workforce

As part of NRPA's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and in alignment with the Equity pillar, it is vital that NRPA's workforce not only reflect the communities it represents, but also that it leads and models a blueprint towards that goal. NRPA will continue to develop innovative ways that will expand recruitment opportunities. Starting with equitable hiring practices, we will

focus on ensuring that we are removing barriers that impede our ability to attract and onboard diverse candidates, as well as implement a remote worker policy, which provides the opportunity for a much broader candidate pool as well as a wider network connected to an out-of-state workforce.

Consulting and Advisory Services

NRPA will invest and expand our relevance and role as a thought leader in areas aligned with our strategic priorities by providing a suite of technical assistance, consulting and research services to support, strengthen and connect stakeholders with park and recreation professionals. This will include the following:

1. Technical Assistance – NRPA offers individualized technical assistance and coaching to meet individualized needs, including comprehensive planning and policy strategies, community engagement, equity and inclusion, programmatic design, action planning and implementation assistance, cross-sector and transdisciplinary partnership building and monitoring and evaluation design support.
2. Research, Reports and Resource Development – NRPA develops and disseminates a host of resources that support the park and recreation field, ranging from planning and implementation toolkits, to comprehensive surveys and reports. Through these consulting services, NRPA can tailor resources to inform practices, policies, and procedures for inclusive and community-driven solutions. Growing these services will provide opportunities for park and recreation professionals to advocate and make the case for support.

Growing Development

NRPA will invest in growing the capacity of our development team to strengthen and support the park and recreation field. Growing our development team will allow NRPA to capitalize on our success working with foundations, government partners and corporations — including expanding sponsorship opportunities for our annual conference, research and professional development offerings — while establishing an individual giving program that can generate unrestricted revenue, support NRPA, advance the next generation of park and recreation leaders, and make greater impact in communities.

Other Key Considerations

Through the implementation of NRPA's strategic plan, new opportunities will surge. We will continue to explore our role with international counterparts and evaluate partnership and investment opportunities.

We are entering a three-year strategic plan during an unprecedented public health and financial crisis. Our budget and financial plans are deliberate in setting priorities and aligning choices in our shared values and strategic goals to prioritize the long-term sustainability of the organization, but we will remain alert and nimble to ensure we capitalize on the opportunities that this crisis presents to our movement.



Children receive a meal during a Haunted Family Camp Out event hosted at Oak Point Park and Nature Preserve in Plano Texas. Photo courtesy of Plano Parks and Recreation Department

We are strong.

We are confident.

We are selfless.

We are passionate.

We are driven.

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WE ARE PARKS AND RECREATION.

Back cover photo credits:

(Top middle) A group of pickleball players celebrate the game at the Incline Village Tennis Center in Incline Village, Nevada. Photo courtesy of the Incline Village Parks and Recreation Department

(Middle left) An adult park professional shares high-fives with soccer players participating in the Oswegoland Park District (Oswego, Illinois) soccer program. Photo courtesy of Oswegoland Park District

(Middle right) Residents enjoy lawn games and a BBQ at the Historic Longacre House in Farmington Hills, Michigan. Photo courtesy of Jeremy Whiting

(Bottom right) Adult students participate in an art class at the Sam Johnson Recreation Center in Plano, Texas. Photo courtesy of Kelley Crimmins, Plano Parks and Recreation Department.

(Bottom middle) Deborah Varner with the Hayward Area Recreation and Park District in Hayward, California poses with a tarantula on her shoulder. Photo courtesy of Hayward Area Recreation and Park District

