

# Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

## Partnerships: *A Must for the Survival of Park & Recreation Agencies in Wisconsin*



### ***The issue***

Wisconsin park and recreation agencies – perhaps more than any other forms of local government – have been able to seize upon their considerable goodwill to attract partners or sponsors from the public, private and nonprofit sectors in ways that not only help the agencies, but also the communities they serve. Oftentimes the motive for partnering is to pool resources with like-minded government or civic organizations to serve an unmet community need. But even when an agency enters into a partnership in hopes of deriving a new revenue stream, the result is not profit, but a de facto reduction in user fees or taxes. Every dollar earned from a partnership is one less dollar that needs to come from tax revenues. As particularly responsible and capable units of local government, park and recreation agencies must explore all avenues for partnerships that can result in better service to their communities.

### ***Partnership principles and objectives***

Wisconsin park and recreation agencies partner with other organizations for a variety of locally determined motives, which typically include:

- Providing more non-tax revenue for the agency,
- Preserving natural resources or historic sites,
- Creating new educational opportunities for the community,
- Building better recreation facilities for the public, and
- Working for more effective local government.

The common threads in all successful partnerships are the principles of financial responsibility, increased capacity, greater efficiency and civic responsibility.

### ***Providing more non-tax revenue for the agency***

Agency partnership agreements that are primarily designed as revenue generators generally mirror private-sector partnerships. Agencies leverage the fact that their programs attract desirable audiences.

### ***Preserving resources***

While some groups partner out of a sense of philanthropy or a desire for profit, others partner with park, recreation and agencies because they sense a “mission meld” exists between them and the agency.

## **LEVERAGING THE RESOURCES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES**

### ***Creating new educational opportunities for the community***

School districts and park and recreation agencies often share common goals and concerns, especially when it comes to providing high quality sports and recreation venues. Time and again, these two units of local government have worked through political and legal impediments in order to serve the public by ensuring that park and school programs are getting the most use out of public facilities and aren't duplicating each other's efforts. For example, the Greenfield Park and Recreation Department partners with the Whitnall School District. The Park and Recreation Department utilizes the aquatic facilities of the School District to provide instructional and recreation swim and exercise classes for children, adults and seniors. Another example is the Whitewater Parks and Recreation Department who partners with their local University of Wisconsin – Whitewater in providing their dance programs. A university professor runs the program with her college students serving as instructors in a contractual agreement with the City. The Department advertises the program, accepts registration, provides the facility for the program, but the actual instruction is provided by the college students.

### ***Building better recreation facilities for the public***

Park and recreation agencies are often the sole units of local government charged with the responsibility for building recreation facilities for the public. But, even in the pursuit of that mandate, these agencies take advantage of local opportunities to share both the risks and the rewards of creating state-of-the-art facilities. One outstanding example in Wisconsin is the RecPlex in Pleasant Prairie. This comprehensive community and fitness facility provides countless athletic, fitness and social services to residents in Pleasant Prairie and surrounding communities, including northern Illinois.

Another example is provided by this quote from Joe McLafferty, Director of the Manitowoc Park and Recreation Department: *“During the past six years, six capital building and site projects have been accomplished in the City of Manitowoc by local not-for-profit organizations with interest in seeing unique Parks and Recreation facilities. These partnerships helped our department provide opportunities that we could not possibly do alone as a municipal agency. Frankly, with tight budgets and less dollars to improve or replace our infrastructure, we simply could not have provided outstanding recreational facilities such as a new 18 hole disc golf course at Silver Creek Park, the big Red Barn and a new bird aviary at Lincoln Park Zoo, the Community Built Playground at Henry Schuette Park, the new X-Sports Complex at Dewey Street Park and the newest disc golf course at Indian Creek Park without Friends Group fundraising. We are truly grateful for the help our Friends provided to ensure the quality of life in Manitowoc is outstanding. I can honestly say that the partnerships that were formed bonded several agencies together and provided the best possible resources for this community.”*

### ***Working for more effective local government***

Communities across the state often ask park and recreation agencies to partner with other units of local government so that the community will ultimately win. To do so, agencies sometimes extend themselves beyond what is traditionally thought of as a “parks and recreation function.

### ***Conclusion***

Park and recreation agencies have a unique understanding of local priorities and a proven track record of finding creative ways to respond to local needs. Although these agencies already excel at building partnerships that work, the Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association will provide models and networking resources to assist agencies as they continue to expand their innovative approaches to partnering for the public good.

### **ACTIONS**

**The Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association will:**

- **Forge alliances with environmental, economic and human service agencies, as well as nonprofit organizations, at the state and national levels to benefit our membership.**
- **Assist our members by sharing partnership models and research to foster cooperative efforts at the local level.**