

Issue 1: Elevate the Top-of-the-Mind Status of Parks and Recreation

Parks and Outdoor Recreation does not enjoy the same top-of-the mind status of other public services with decision-makers or the public and often fairs poorly in the allocation of resources during tough economic times.

Park and recreation programs and services typically receive high marks in public opinion surveys. In the 1997 *Public Opinions and Attitude Survey on Outdoor Recreation in California* over 82 percent of Californians felt that recreation areas and facilities are very important or important to their quality of life. Yet the public and many governmental decision-makers do not view park and recreation programs as being immediate and necessary and tend to place them at a lower priority over other important public services. This makes outdoor recreation programs more vulnerable during economic downturns. Public services such as fire, police, transportation and parks and recreation programs share and compete for the same discretionary sources of funding. When considering park and recreation program cut backs vs. reductions to other important public services such as fire or police services, the choice seems easy and apparent to many governmental officials. And the public typically accepts such decisions despite the favorable quality of life implications from opinion surveys. Often there is less political risk associated with cutting park and recreation programs in times of fiscal restraint than with other public services.

The reality is that parks and recreation does not enjoy a top-of-the-mind status with the very public that openly values and cherishes parks and outdoor recreation areas and the pursuit of their favorite activity. For many outdoor recreation users, parks and outdoor recreation areas can and are taken for granted; at least until they perceive a change in use or the threat of loss. Parks and outdoor recreation resources and programs are not perceived of as being at risk. This sends a message to decision-makers that decisions affecting parks and outdoor recreation is of limited political consequence when compared to similar decisions affecting other public services.

Park and recreation providers tend to be naïve and passive in political processes and tend to down play their contributions and accomplishments. Despite the significant social and economic values to communities attributable to park and recreation programs, such contributions are often not recognized by the general public and elected officials. This lack of recognition is often due to the lack of reliable information available to the public and decision-makers to enable sound judgements regarding the value and benefits from park and recreation resources. Non-economic benefits such as reducing juvenile crime and the number of obese children may not be immediately apparent or realized by the community. Awareness is lacking when it comes to the vital linkages between parks and recreation and positive outcomes such as crime prevention, public health, education, family values, community involvement, sustainable land use, and

economic development. Opportunities for important mutual support are often overlooked.

Finally, park and recreation service providers may be their own worst enemy. When confronted by a series of budget cuts and short falls since the late 1970's (and the passage of Proposition 13), service providers have typically employed a variety of techniques to keep parklands, facilities and programs open, available and seemingly well maintained. That is, they have done more with less, thereby making the decision to provide less much easier.

Key Points:

- Parks and outdoor recreation programs do not compete well against other public services or programs.
- Decision-makers may not view park and recreation programs as being immediate or even necessary.
- Park and recreation facilities and services are often taken for granted with little risk of ever losing them.
- Officials may assume there is little political risk associated with program reductions in times of fiscal restraint.
- Park and recreation providers tend to be politically naïve and avoid involvement in political processes.
- Park and recreation providers have demonstrated an ability to get by with less; consequently they get less.

Actions to Elevate Top-of-the-Mind Status:

1. Document and publicize key values associated with parks and recreation through different mediums and audiences.
 - A. Commission research to document the full benefits of parks and recreation programs and services.
 - B. Develop a parks and recreation benefits brochure.
 - C. Develop regular benefits segments for publication in news media, magazines, and web sites.
 - D. Employ a public relations firm to market parks (benefits) through creative out-of-the-box ideas.

- E. Design a statewide program and adaptable PowerPoint template that parks and recreation superintendents, directors and citizen advocates can use to showcase the wide range of economic, health and human development benefits gained from high quality/comprehensive parks and recreation spaces, facilities and programs.
2. Develop practical techniques that would raise public awareness of decisions made by elected officials that could lead to potential consequences for those that support/don't support parks and recreation.
 - A. Develop and design a report card that will inform the public as to the voting records for park and recreation related issues (CPRS started this in 2002.)
 - B. Develop legislative days or coordinate lobbying efforts on issues affecting parks and recreation.
 - C. Work with existing programs such as the CPRS VIP program, to better market the benefits of park and recreation.
3. Introduce legislation to amend the Subdivision Map Act elevating the Recreation Element to mandatory status in city and county General Plans and to update the recreation element within 5 years.
4. Expand the membership and efforts of the California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks and Tourism to give greater emphasis to legislative action and to advocacy efforts for park and recreation service providers.
5. Develop statewide (local) political action committee(s) and support networks for park and recreation providers and other advocacy groups with similar or shared interests.
 - A. Identify and meet with a select group of lobbyist to better understand the process, costs, role, and tactics for gaining political support through a park and recreation political action committee.
 - B. Take a proactive approach through such means as sponsoring legislation and lobbying legislation while in committee.
 - C. Encourage local and statewide "friends of" and similar support groups to give greater emphasis to advocacy efforts.
 - D. Establish a park and recreation retiree advocacy committee.
 - E. Create effective partnerships with the Departments of Health and Human Services, Social Services, Corrections, Tourism and with the Chambers of Commerce, etc. to work cooperatively to increase the credibility of park and recreation programs and services in addressing contemporary issues.

- F. Develop and design training modules to enhance the ability of park and recreation practitioners to effectively "play the game" through effective participation in political processes.
6. Host workshops for elected officials for the purpose of getting them to look at parks and recreation facilities and programs differently.
 - A. Develop workshops for elected officials and take the message to where they are or meet, e.g., League of California Cities meeting, Board of Supervisors meetings, etc.
 - B. Make a connection with the commercial or private side of park and recreation industry and recruit industry representatives as presenters as part of the workshops.
 7. Convene executive leaders with interests in parks and recreation (DPR, Health and Human Services, Social Services, Corrections, Tourism, etc.) and other service providers to develop and improve linkages between community-serving programs and interagency support.
 - A. Develop templates to facilitate linkages between service providers.
 - B. Develop incentives for partnering efforts; e.g. additional emphasis in competitive grants programs.
 - C. Collect and publicize case study profiles on partnering services.
 8. Establish a workgroup for the purpose of developing a state/federal healthy lifestyle initiative for California. Develop a MOU/MOA calling for collaboration on promoting health benefits from outdoor recreation activity, the design of recreation facilities programs to meet healthy lifestyle needs, developing new partnerships and joint participation on research on the benefits associated with healthy lifestyles.
 9. Support efforts that emphasize the elements of the park and recreation field most valued by the general public; i.e., contributions to their "quality of life", bringing families together, and investing in their children. Pursue legislation, grants programs, and agency initiatives for developing a "Child's Bill of Rights for California Outdoors."