

CHAPTER 7

Resources, Ideas and Information

This chapter closes the SCORP by examining resources for parks-and-recreation stakeholders. Resources include insightful research from the American Planning Association (APA); a new, free, parks system benchmarking database from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA); and a discussion of the always challenging topic of funding. The chapter lists options, resources and ideas for parks boards, superintendents, and concerned citizens who want to improve the financial situation of their parks departments.

THE APA'S "CITY PARKS FORUM": A HELPFUL RESOURCE

The American Planning Association's "City Parks Forum" website, <http://www.planning.org/cityparks/>, features not only interesting ideas, but also commentaries from some of the parks-and-recreation field's experts; real-world case studies of parks development, design and collaboration; and a detailed bibliography that provides primary research information sources.

One of the many helpful sections on the website covers briefing papers. The section features 11 short research white papers by a diverse group of well-known parks-and-recreation subject experts such as Peter Harnik, Megan Lewis, John L. Crompton and Joseph A. MacDonald.

The briefing papers examine how cities use parks for things like community revitalization and economic development. The papers also discuss how to help children learn, improve public health, promote tourism, create safer neighborhoods and more. The full text of each is also available on the website as a downloadable PDF. Some of the ideas shared are not necessarily new, but all are presented in the context of recent case studies and research. Each offers timely options and solutions to common issues.

PRORAGIS: NRPA'S NEW, FREE, PARKS-AND-RECREATION DATABASE

The NRPA has created a helpful, new and free benchmarking database for use by local government parks-and-recreation departments of all sizes. "Benchmarking" is an informational analysis/planning method that allows a community to directly compare relevant information gathered from other similar communities nationwide, such as data about a parks system. The database website is <https://www.nrpa.org/PRORAGIS/>. This database offers local government parks departments the chance to enter extensive data. The data are hosted for free on servers at NRPA for cross-comparing.

According to the NRPA PRORAGIS website: *"NRPA advocates the use of comparative benchmarking. The Parks and Recreation Operating Ratio and GIS (PRORAGIS™) system, our tool to collect and analyze data about parks-and-recreation agencies across the country, allows users to compare themselves to departments that they identify as similar to themselves—whether similar in geography, climate, size, or number of total employees. Users complete a survey that captures data about their agency and its responsibilities, and are then able to analyze their data and compare themselves to individual agencies or aggregated groups of agencies. PRORAGIS also allows agencies to upload existing GIS information about their facilities, or build a GIS dataset for their agency. Once this information is entered into PRORAGIS, agencies can perform various analyses about their parks and programming. For instance, PRORAGIS provides the ability to examine the location of their facilities in relation to current demographic and socioeconomic data, allowing proactive planning of facility and program development to better serve their communities. PRORAGIS is the largest collection of parks-and-recreation operating data in existence—and provides a powerful tool for agencies to examine their facilities and operations."*

The database requires users to create a free login/password, and complete a free registration. After that, all reports, data management and GIS mapping are free. There is no requirement to join the NRPA, making the database application free for all local government users.

This SCORP takes advantage of PRORAGIS by using one of NRPA's trend analysis tables from its "2015 Field Report: A Parks and Recreation National Database Analysis."

PAYING FOR PARKS AND RECREATION DURING AN ECONOMIC RECOVERY

We already have discussed the effects the recent nationwide economic downturn has had on the citizens of Indiana, its local governments, and parks-and-recreation departments in particular. Tough financial times often bring up the question: "Given our tight budgets, how do we pay for what we want to accomplish?"

In reality, tight budgets are nothing new. As previously mentioned, many communities use innovation to find solutions. There are many previous examples of successful financing methods that have been used for virtually all aspects of parks and recreation.

The list below offers a few ideas and options for financing or funding of parks and recreation, or saving money to use elsewhere. Each option has a short description to give interested park professionals or stakeholders a head start toward researching more details.

We strongly suggest researching local communities that have used some of these strategies to help ensure success. Some of these options are relatively new, and some have been in use for decades. All have the potential for fiscally helping parks and recreation. If a nearby community has tried one or more of these methods and succeeded, ask them what worked and why. Many will gladly share their ideas and tactics.

An abbreviated list of fiscal management/ financing methods in parks and recreation:

- Municipal General Funds and Revolving Funds: The most common taxpayer-funded budget source for many departments. Revolving funds that roll over



SHOOTING EDUCATION

each budget year help eliminate the spend-it-or-lose-it issue, and allow for better fiscal agility over time.

- **Taxes:** Local Option Income Tax (LOIT), County Option Income Tax (COIT), County Adjusted Gross Income Tax (CAGIT), County Economic Development Income Tax (CEDIT), etc. The proceeds of all of these tax programs have been used for parks, recreation and trail-related projects with varying amounts of success.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Cooperative efforts between businesses and communities with formal, written agreements. These can be short-term or long-term (single project or ongoing services).
- **Intergovernmental Partnerships and Cooperative Agreements:** Cooperative efforts between levels of government to provide services for all, using formal, written agreements. One example is for a township to provide some funding to a nearby town's parks system in exchange for free public parks-and-recreation access to township residents who live outside the town's boundaries.
- **Public and Private Foundations and Endowments:** Examples are the Ball Brothers Foundation, Lilly Endowment and other "name" foundations, community foundations, etc. Many foundations and endowments offer the chance to apply for specialty grants or offer other kinds of assistance.
- **Governmental and Non-Governmental Grants and Funds:** These include the usual parks, recreation and trails grant programs such as Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP), but also can include Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), INDOT Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ), and with creative thinking, probably a few others.
- **Private Philanthropy:** Private giving from individuals or families is still a common method for people to give back to their community. Many find that paying for a park is a fulfilling way to have their name live on past their time.
- **Recreation Impact Fees (RIF):** A local-level fee paid by developers intended to help the community cover the new costs of providing local government services to the added development.
- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF):** Uses the anticipated future improvements in an area's tax base to pay for current capital development.



TIRE SWINGING

- **User Fees and Charges:** Memberships, dues, subscriptions, entry fees, program fees, events, event sales, etc., are used to place part or all costs of providing recreation directly on those who use it most. Best practices use sliding scales, scholarships, "free" days, library checkout park passes and other tactics to avoid being too expensive for low- or restricted-income residents.
- **Concessions and Concessioners:** Vending, gift shops, event food sales, contracting, etc. For example, if Little League draws thousands of hungry kids, friends and parents, consider using the profit from feeding them to help maintain sports fields.
- **Branding:** Nike effectively convinces people to pay to wear clothing that advertises the company and helps it sell more clothing, and parks departments can use a similar approach. Selling branded T-shirts and ball caps can not only help market parks but also may help them make a few dollars.
- **Local Parks Foundations and "Friends" Groups:** Locally run park foundations are a way to fundraise specifically for a community parks system. They are targeted to local needs and don't depend on politics or government budgets. "Friends" groups gather human capital in much the same way. They band together interested people who work toward completing improvements and fulfilling needs in parks.
- **Donations, Memorials, Bequests and Gift Catalogs – "In-kind" donations** are gifts of anything other than money. Examples include manpower, skilled labor, or materials. Memorials and bequests are a great way for people

to honor family or friends in a lasting way, especially if the person honored loves or loved some aspect of the parks system. Gift catalogs can effectively spread the word about specific projects, wants and needs. Making such tools available is often necessary in order for someone to offer an in-kind gift.

- **Corporate Sponsorships and Naming Rights:** For example, a business or corporation that just moved into town might like to put its name on new ball fields in exchange for funding a couple of years of maintenance. Or it might even sponsor the new leagues.
- **Volunteer Programs:** Bring enthusiastic public helpers into parks and programs to assist the staff. Trained, passionate volunteers can free up paid staff to work elsewhere and accomplish more for less labor cost.
- **Zoning and Development Requirements and/or Fees:** Similar to RIF, these require new commercial and/or residential developments to either build new parks-and-recreation features into their sites (such as a new bike/pedestrian trail extension into the road/sidewalk network of a new senior assisted living center), or pay a set fee to help the community provide the facilities and services the new development will need. It is cheaper and simpler to build new recreation-based features during initial construction than to add them later. Many developers readily work with these requirements with an eye toward using these low-cost bonus recreation features to attract buyers/residents. People and businesses often want to move next to parks and trails, and often will pay a premium to do so.
- **Municipal Loans, Bonds and Levies:** Special Assessment, General Obligation, and other types of loans, bonds and levies have been used to successfully fund parks-and-recreation development for decades. Those interested should carefully research the various types, particularly for diverse tax advantages and beneficial interest rates.
- **Parks and Recreation Special Districts:** Related to both zoning and tax methods, these districts are sometimes used to subdivide a larger community's parks department into smaller portions that can concentrate in more detail on localized fees and financing options, as well as on programs and services that better benefit their unique neighborhoods and local residents.



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- **Cooperation, Agreements and Site Sharing:** For example, if a nearby county park has a lot of new mowers and the staff to run them, and a city park has a trained arborist who could help the county park improve the health of its trees, perhaps an agreement to share personnel and equipment for mutual benefit could be developed. Such an approach works especially well between parks and nearby schools. Schools might be willing to trade the non-school-day use of playgrounds and sports fields/courts for help with maintenance. Indiana State Code directly supports School/Park recreational "Joint Use Agreements." (IC 20-26-8-1, 2)
- **Special Events:** Consider using a popular event as a fundraiser. If a park hosts all or part of a community's biggest local festival, and 50 vendor booths each contribute a \$200 vendor fee, there is a \$10,000 revenue added to the park's budget in exchange for minimum opportunity cost—mowing and trash pickup will have to happen to some degree even if such an event were not held. The larger the event's scale, the greater the potential for fundraising.
- **Economy of Scale/Bulk Purchasing:** If parks, the community's public works department, and the county's maintenance department need to buy grass seed or fertilizer, lawn mowers or trucks, consider banding together and making a bulk purchase of enough to supply everyone. That approach could save money on each side. Coordination is not easy but the savings can be considerable.
- **Privatization/De-privatization of Services:** Do the real-world math to compare what some maintenance/services cost in terms of labor, materials, training, insurance, etc., with the costs of contracting such tasks to carefully researched, qualified private firms. Sometimes in-house workers may be cheaper in the long run than private contractors, sometimes not. Make sure to include all possible costs when making comparisons.
- **Aggressive Preventive/Planned/Scheduled Maintenance:** Smart maintenance supervisors know the cost-effectiveness of taking care of equipment and facilities. New trucks are expensive compared with the cost of a few oil changes. Plan for equipment and facility maintenance and follow a carefully laid-out schedule. Train all levels of staff to habitually monitor and maintain all equipment, including taking it out of service when necessary. The

same approach can be just as valuable in facilities. For example, air conditioning systems in buildings function longer and use less energy when filters are changed on time, coils are cleaned regularly, and the refrigerant and oil levels are kept full.

OTHER FINANCING OR FUNDING RESOURCES

- A helpful online resource for any federal grant is: <http://www.grants.gov/>. The fully searchable website offers access to 26 federal grant-making agencies and their 800 grant programs, and even has downloadable or Web-based grant applications available for some programs.
- Another helpful website is that of the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA): <http://www.IN.gov/ocra/index.htm>. This website features a number of different state and federal grant programs sometimes used for parks and recreation, such as Planning Grants, Community Development Block Grants and Indiana Main Street. Contact the OCRA community liaison for any given area to get assistance directly targeted to a specific community's needs.
- As mentioned earlier, local community foundations sometimes offer many kinds of specialized grants, or can help create a new donation account for a specific parks department. Start at: <http://www.cof.org/community-foundation-locator> to find a nearby foundation.
- The DNR's grant programs are listed at <http://www.IN.gov/dnr/3190.htm>. The grants cover nearly every aspect of natural and cultural resources, and include full details for each and contact information.
- The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has a website specifically devoted to its competitive grants and fundraising: <http://www.nrpa.org/fundraising-resources/>. The site even offers a free online fundraising course.



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