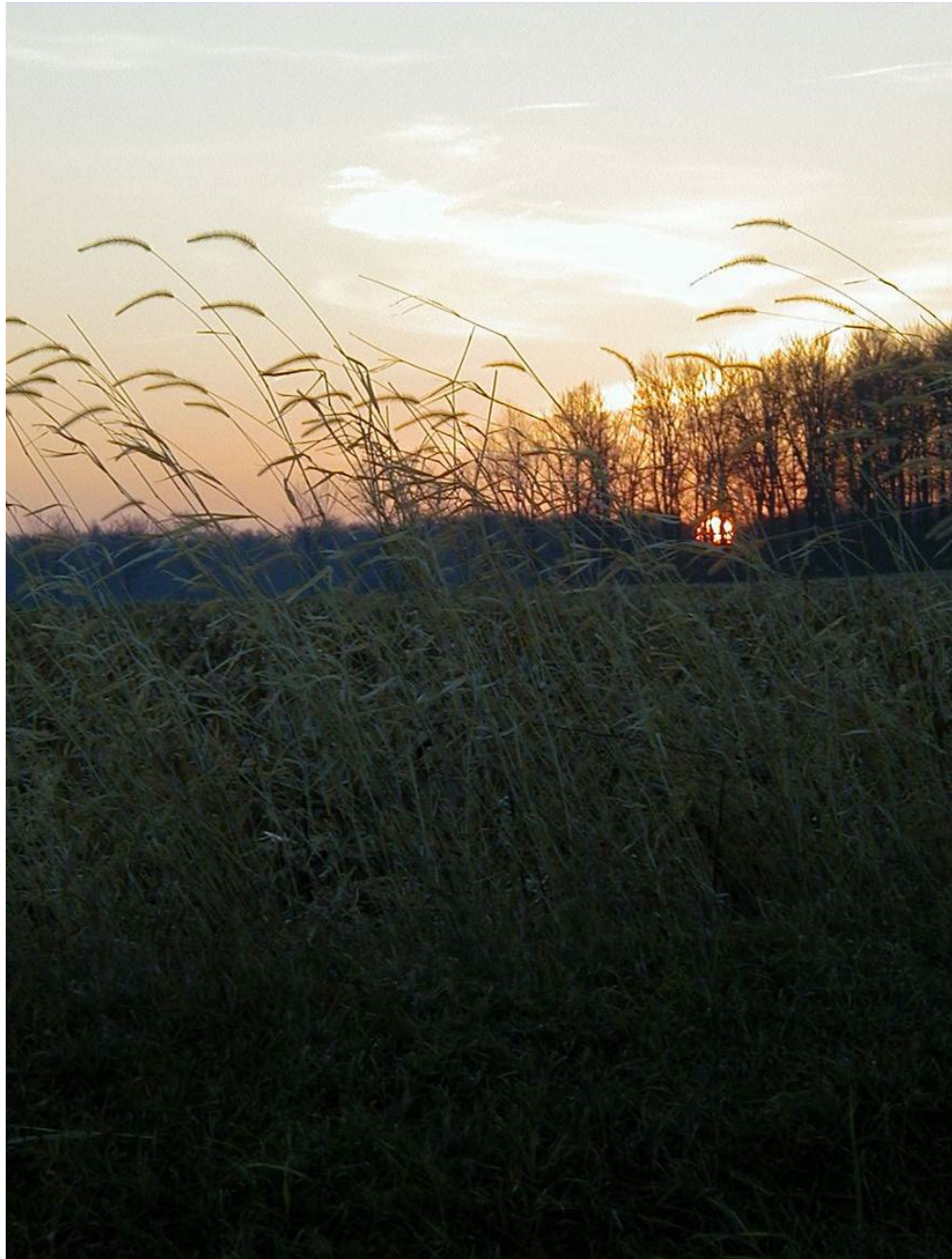


DNR Planning Guidelines for Five Year Parks and Recreation Master Plans



Indiana Department of Natural Resources
Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails

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Planning Guidelines for 5-Year Parks and Recreation Master Plans

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This guide is for individuals, organizations or communities who intend to complete a five-year park and recreation master plan for submission to the IDNR for eligibility to apply for grant programs administered by the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails. This publication replaces the 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 “Planning Guidelines for Five Year Parks and Recreation Master Plans” distributed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails (IDNR-SP-CGT).

All park and recreation master plans will be reviewed according to the criteria presented in this guide.

Introduction

There are many reasons to create a master plan, including, *but not limited to*:

- Improved funding opportunities
- Formulation of a written framework for future action that acts as a guide for sensible facility, program, and service development
- Providing community input and feedback opportunities
- Ensuring that the public actually wants the facilities that are developed
- Providing an opportunity to share information about your programs and facilities with the public
- Giving a clear sense of direction by providing not only information, but analyzing it carefully in terms of how it affects both the community at large and the parks in particular, ending in a strategic action plan (known in the civilian world as a “to-do” list).

An effective master plan is the result of a collaborative effort and utilizes strategic planning. There are specific components that must be included in your master plan in order for it to be approved:

- Definition of planning area
- Information gathering (scoping)/analysis/resulting strategies of scoping
- ABA/Rehabilitation Act/ADA Accessibility
- Public participation
- Needs analysis
- Priorities and action schedule
- Final public presentation of plan (public comment period or final public meeting)

Communities may submit master plans for approval throughout the year. This guide will assist you in creating the required components by illustrating how to:

- Examine your park system

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- Analyze public recreation needs and preferences and explore potential strategies for meeting those public needs and preferences
- Determine what recreation facilities and programs are publicly desired and appropriate
- Prioritize and plan for new and renovated facilities and programs

NOTE: Communities without a current IDNR-SP-CGT approved master plan who want to be eligible for grants requiring a master plan must submit a plan draft by November 15th and a final plan by the following April 15 (of the year for which they intend to apply for grant funds).

Your master plan will only be as realistic and useful as you make it. IDNR-SP-CGT strongly encourages you to design this plan to fit the unique and individual needs of your community. If you have questions during the preparation of your plan, please contact us at:

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New SP-CGT Webpage: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/>

Chapter One: The Planning Process

Planning is a commonsense approach to decision making. It involves examining what you have and asking the public what they want, so you know what to do tomorrow. The IDNR-SP-CGT park and recreation master planning process allows you to review your present recreation situation with an eye towards your community's future recreation opportunities. It helps you look at local issues and needs, and identify those which are most important. A plan developed only to meet requirements for a grant is ineffective. To benefit the most from a master plan, planning must be considered only as a first step. Once you know what you have, you can evaluate the available alternatives and set priorities for courses of action to meet your identified needs.

A new plan must be submitted every five years to maintain Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) application eligibility. It is strongly recommended that Indiana Trails Program (ITP), and Wabash River Heritage Corridor Fund (WRHCF) projects have plan support. To save the time and expense of starting the whole process over, keep your plan current. Every new plan should include additions to the park site inventory, discussion and assessment of recent park system program, service, and amenity additions and improvements, new socio-economic data, new public input, new issues and recommendations, changes in priorities, and new/revised recommended strategies and actions. When done responsibly, planning is a cyclical process. Creating a new plan is not simply moving a few sections around, changing a few words, and calling it finished. Each plan submitted to IDNR for review is carefully cross-compared to previous planning efforts to ensure that plans improve and provide better utility for their communities over time. See the "Plan Improvement from One Plan to the Next" heading of this plan for more details on how to improve plans over time.

In order to be responsive to changing community needs, planning must be flexible. Keeping the plan simple will help make it flexible. All of the information, analysis, strategies, assumptions, and justifications behind the plan's priorities and recommendations should be clearly stated. As change occurs, it will then be easier to determine which strategic decisions remain valid and which do not. By continuing to incorporate and analyze new information, the plan will always remain current.

It is suggested that you explain the reasoning behind your strategies in the information gathering section of the plan. Anyone who reads the plan should be able to easily understand why a strategic decision has been made and what information was considered in reaching that decision. This allows you or your successors to re-evaluate proposals, then determine if new strategies are necessary. If the reasons and informational basis for a strategic decision are not clear, a key part of the plan is missing. Make sure that people reading the plan understand how analysis was done, and strategic decisions or options were chosen.

Mass media could provide you with an important tool for use in the planning process. Newspapers, radio, television, social media, and the internet can help you get the word out about your project, survey, or plan. News releases, feature articles and social media posts are three suggestions for using the mass media to publicize your planning activities. News

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releases are official correspondence to the media written on department letterhead. They include the date of issue, release date, contact name and phone number, headline, and information. Feature articles address public or human interest stories. Use a feature article to present an aspect of your park system that will project a favorable image, in addition to increasing awareness of your planning activities. Concentrate on what will be of interest to the readers. Photo stories in the media can do what a thousand words cannot. Make the local newspaper aware of all potential photo opportunities. Online social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, are also being used by park departments and boards to effectively share and gather information about their parks and their park users.

How to Produce an Approved Plan

Park and recreation planning typically occurs at three levels:

- System wide master planning
- Site planning
- Operational / maintenance planning

This guide addresses parks and recreation planning at the system wide, strategic, master planning level, grounded in practical concerns.

NOTE: A current, IDNR reviewed and approved system-wide master plan for the entire recreation system under your jurisdiction is required for participation in the LWCF program.

All park boards will deal with site planning as parks and facilities are developed, but many function without operation and maintenance plans. We strongly recommend all three levels of planning for park boards, as a best management practice in parks and recreation.

Time Frame for Planning

Depending on the size of your community and of your public park system, the entire master planning process may take a year or longer to complete. Typically, in order to gather adequate information, a minimum of nine months will be needed to complete the plan. It is important that the park board establishes an individualized time frame, which specifies target dates for completing major components of the plan, in the early stages of the planning process. Depending on how many people are working on the plan, it is not uncommon for a park plan to take between nine months and one year to complete a full-length 5-year parks and recreation master plan for a mid-size park system with multiple sites; smaller communities working with a smaller, simpler park system may take slightly less time.

Suggested steps for completing the park and recreation master plan are listed in the Sample Planning Schedule below.

Sample Planning Schedule

1. Gather information on your park and recreation system (scoping); and analyze it for how it affects your community as a whole, and your parks in particular; then brainstorm solutions to issues and needs and add potential strategies to achieve them. (how will you make changes or improvements?)
2. Gather input on issues and needs (public participation) via:
 - a. Surveys, public meetings, interviews, focus groups, etc.
 - b. Meetings or interviews with interested parties (such as neighborhood associations, elected officials, civic groups, park stakeholders, and community leaders).
 - c. Record and document the number of members of the actual public surveyed or interviewed (do not count elected officials or government staff, media, park board members, or park staff), all public input discussions, and a synopsis of the results.
3. Perform a needs analysis and determine the park board priorities and action plan based on all collected data, data analysis, potential strategies and public input.
4. Assemble your draft master plan.
5. Submit your draft plan to the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails by November 15th (if your community wishes to become eligible to apply for Land and Water Conservation Fund grants in the following given grant year; otherwise, plans can be submitted anytime). It will be considered a draft plan, subject to revision.
6. After receiving review comments from the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails, make the necessary revisions (if any), print or PDF the final version, and adopt the plan by formal park board resolution.
7. Send the final draft of the plan to the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails by April 15th (only for LWCF eligibility; otherwise submit any time after the draft review was finished and the plan is revised) in electronic form. Either before or soon after final plan submission, please send IDNR hard copies of the Accessibility Compliance sign-off sheet and the park board adoption of the plan with original signatures. Verify that IDNR has a copy of your park board's most recent origination ordinance on file (should be post-1980, after "Home Rule" was passed by the legislature, and older statutes were all abrogated).

Ways to Thoroughly Explore the Data in Your Plan

As you write your plan, examine the data in each of the 'Scoping' sections of the plan (Natural Features, Man-Made & Historical, and Socio-Economic), at multiple levels, getting smaller-scale and more specific to your park system as you go: Regionally, Community-wide, and Park-centric. "Drilling down" through your data to each of these levels will help you discover larger impacts outside your park system, and perhaps even the community itself. Ask yourself: "why is this data important (analysis), and what am I going to do about it? (strategies)" for data at each of these levels.

- Regionally – Look at data from a 'big picture' viewpoint, encompassing the entire region around the community and its planning area. Are there regional effects from

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the data that change how the parks operate, the people they serve, and where those users come from? Just a couple examples of regional-effect data are: regional economic conditions, quality of large school districts, regional ecological conditions like large forests or lake effect snow, or interstate highway systems.

- Community-wide – Examine the data from a viewpoint of the whole community being planned for, not just the parks. Are there effects from the data on the entire local government or all the citizens? A few examples of community-wide data effects are: unemployment figures, poverty, availability of sidewalks and alternative transportation, large-scale flooding and drainage issues, shrinking tax base, and long-term population decline.
- Park-centric – Now look at the data in terms of how it affects the park system as a whole, or even specific park sites in particular, and how the system and its parks, programs, and services operate and are maintained. A few examples (there are hundreds more out there) of park-centric data that create future effects on parks are: very limited or shrinking park budgets, rapidly changing community demographics such as median age, poverty, or number of families, lack of available undeveloped land for parks, condition of facilities and biggest park site/amenity operations and maintenance challenges, impacts of invasive species and cost of their remediation, and creation of new special events impacting the parks and their programming.

Sample Plan Outline

You can use this outline to develop your master plan. Remember to include all the required elements.

These elements are considered the minimum planning effort. Including additional information pertinent to parks and recreation in your community is not required, but will strengthen your master plan and make it more meaningful and utilitarian.

- I. Introduction
 - a. Mailing address and contact information for the park department/system
 - b. Names, full contact info (emails are especially helpful and will be kept confidential), staggered terms of service, and overall political party board status (unless eligible to be waived, a township or a 3rd Class City) of the park board (requirements for Park Board compliance with State Statute for all but Towns using a waiver, Townships, and 3rd Class Cities)
 - c. Name(s) of park board president, superintendent, consultant, or other contact person
 - d. Name of plan author with full contact info
 - e. Date plan completed
 - f. Description of park board and department staff
 - g. Definition of planning area (normally related to total of park service areas; where do all your users come from?)

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- II. Goals and Objectives
 - a. Of the park board
 - b. Of the parks and recreation department
 - c. Of the master plan itself

- III. Scoping - Features of Entire Community (and impact on parks and recreation)
 - a. Natural and Landscape
 - i. Unique geographic features of area
 - ii. Unique soils/geologic/topographical/hydrogeological features of area
 - iii. Watershed information, streams, lakes, wetlands, etc.
 - iv. Wildlife; include impactful invasive species as well as their remediation
 - v. Vegetative cover, forest cover/tree canopy, local ecological conditions, etc.; include impactful invasive species, as well as their remediation
 - vi. Climatological and local weather effects on parks and rec (such as lake effect snow, flooding issues, etc.)
 - vii. Be sure to cover how all this affects the region at large, the community as a whole, and then drill down to parks in particular
 - 1. Analyze the data here at each of the geographies above (why is the data important, and how does it affect the community at each level?)
 - 2. Brainstorm potential solutions and ideas coming out of the analysis (how should the community as a whole and the parks in particular, react and how can issues or problems be solved, and opportunities created?)

 - b. Man-made, Historical and Cultural
 - i. Presence or percentage of completion of alternative transportation (sidewalks/trails, or other bike/pedestrian infrastructure) within community, and connections to surrounding area.
 - ii. Significant man-made features in area
 - 1. Such as: railroads, highways, large buildings, industrial parks, reservoirs, airports, etc.
 - iii. Historical sites, markers, celebrated historic events or people, etc.
 - iv. Cultural/ethnic background of the area
 - 1. Festivals, special events, music, arts, community theatre, etc.
 - 2. Presence of particular concentrations of religious/ethnic/cultural/national origin populations (EG – Amish, Burmese, Native American, Polish, Hispanic, Buddhist, Senegalese; there are many more possibilities statewide)
 - v. Be sure to cover how all this affects the region at large, the community as a whole, and then drill down to parks in particular
 - 1. Analyze the data here at each of the geographies above (why is the data important, and how does it affect the community at each level?)
 - 2. Brainstorm potential solutions and ideas coming out of the analysis (how should the community as a whole and the parks in

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particular, react and how can issues or problems be solved, and opportunities created?)

- c. Social and Economic Factors (Population analysis)
 - i. Population Statistics
 - 1. Age, minority, education, disability, and gender distributions
 - 2. Past growth, distribution, projection of future community growth
 - ii. Economics of the entire area
 - 1. Income, poverty and unemployment statistics
 - 2. Major employers
 - iii. Be sure to cover how all this affects the region at large, the community as a whole, and then drill down to parks in particular
 - 1. Analyze the data here at each of the geographies above (why is the data important, and how does it affect the community at each level?)
 - 2. Brainstorm potential solutions and ideas coming out of the analysis (how should the community as a whole and the parks in particular, react and how can issues or problems be solved, and opportunities created?)

- IV. Supply analysis (Park department information/inventory)
 - a. Of park department being planned-for
 - i. Narrative, including # of acres per site, as well as its street address (or at least the nearest street intersection) in inventory
 - ii. System-wide map
 - b. Of all other or related agencies

- V. Accessibility (consider ADA [1990], ABA [1968], and the Rehab. Act [1973])
 - a. Designated ADA coordinator OR an info contact for either the local government entity or for the park department in particular (coordinator required only if the government entity has 50 or more employees; an ADA info contact for all others)
 - b. Self-evaluation or commentary on currently accessible facilities, programs, etc.
 - c. Self-evaluation or commentary on currently inaccessible facilities, programs, etc. with suggested timeline for improvements, estimated costs, and potential funding sources
 - d. Information about public notice of ADA requirements, and of availability of information for the public about accessible sites, programs, and services (short discussion of methods, formats, locations, etc.)
 - e. Information about ADA grievance procedures for either the local government entity or park department
 - f. ABA/ADA/Rehab. Act-Section 504 compliance sign-off sheet with original signatures (***must be submitted as signed original hard copy soon after final plan's IDNR acceptance***)

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- VI. Public Participation (Demand analysis)
 - a. Random sample of citizen demand for parks and recreation
 - i. Random survey (personal intercept, phone, mail, internet, etc.)

NOTE: Fully document all survey information: include survey types, date begun/finished, numbers of surveys sent, and number of surveys returned
 - b. Nonrandom sample of citizen demand for parks and recreation
 - i. User/non-user group input (stakeholder/employee/board interviews, focus groups, public meetings, etc.)

NOTE: Fully document all other input methods: dates, times, advertising used, number of participants in each method, number of public attendees at each meeting, as well as a synopsis of public comments received from each, even if the attendance was low or non-existent
[Please see the IDNR-SP-CGT Parks and Recreation Master Plan FAQ document for more detailed discussion of public participation, sample sizes, etc.]
- VII. Needs Analysis (Standards analysis; methods and results)
 - a. Park board-created or other (NRPA?, IDNR?) facilities standards
 - b. Needs indicated by standards analysis
 - c. Needs indicated by analysis of all public input
 - d. Needs indicated by park board
 - e. Needs indicated by stakeholders or partners
 - f. Needs indicated by analysis of data, and brainstormed solutions and ideas from the early scoping sections of the plan
- VIII. New/Existing Facilities Location Map (may be combined with the system-wide map)
- IX. Priorities and Strategic Action Schedule
 - a. Statement of specific park board strategies/action(s) brought forward from analysis/strategizing in earlier sections of the plan and collected/discussed in the needs analysis, and put them in priority order here
 - b. Time frame for park board action(s)
 - c. Estimated costs of action plan items
 - d. Potential sources of funding for master plan recommendations
 - e. Organize information into a table with a time-line (see Sample Priority Action Schedule)
 - f. Final public presentation of plan (or final public comment period)
 - i. Prior to finalized plan submission to DNR-SP-CGT
 - ii. Include any final/additional comments separately at the end of Section VI (Public Participation)
 - g. Resolution for park board adoption of the plan with original signatures (**must be submitted as signed original hard copy either before, or soon after final plan's IDNR acceptance**)

What Makes My Park Board “Legal” or “Compliant” with Statute?

A park board must meet the requirements of one of the Indiana park board origination statutes in order to be “compliant” or “legal” under Indiana Law. Usually Indiana Code 36-10-3 or 36-10-4; or 36-10-7.5-5 for Townships. The park board origination ordinance is commonly dated after the Indiana legislature passed Home Rule in 1981, and abrogated all the old versions of the park board origination statute.

What are the basic requirements for a compliant park board in their Ordinance and in practice?

- Staggered terms – each board member’s term of service expires on a different year (not all on the same year).
- No member of a county or municipal fiscal body (council, mayor, town manager, commissioner, etc.) may serve on a board.
- For Towns, Second Class and First Class Cities (all Cities over 35,000 population), and Counties: no more than two members of a board may be from the same political party (Towns can waive this by ordinance if necessary under 36-10-3-4.1). “A town legislative body may vote for a waiver only if this waiver is necessary due to the absence of persons who are willing to serve on the town board and who satisfy any or all of the requirements.” Third Class Cities (under 35,000 population) are technically exempt from this requirement, but have the power to follow it voluntarily (IDNR recommends this, as it helps take politics out of the board).
- All park boards established under State Statute have the duties and powers as described in Statute, and under the authority and supervision of the council/commissioners. (The board and council are all part of the same team.)
- All local governments having legal questions about the details of the Statutes and their application should always consult with an attorney for a legal opinion.

IDNR will need a digital copy of your most recent local government Ordinance that created the park board (it will need to be AFTER 1981). Then IDNR will need a list of your park board members, their terms of service, and a statement verifying that the board meets the political party affiliation requirement (or if your Town has waived it by ordinance, and provide a copy of that ordinance too). A copy of the most recent minutes for the park board’s meetings can provide proof of the real-world application of your park board’s duties and powers. Sharing a list of the current local government council members and commissioners/mayor/town manager (as applicable) is also helpful so that IDNR can compare against the board’s members.

Who Prepares the Plan? In-House, Consulting Firms, or a Combination

It is common for plans to be completed in-house by park board members and/or park department staff. However, private consultants or regional planners are possible alternatives. Professional planners can be responsible for either formulating the entire plan, or they may supplement the work of your community’s park department staff. IDNR has no preference as to who creates park plans for a community. When choosing a professional

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consultant, be sure the individual or organization has documented skills and experience with parks and recreation planning. Remember, the best plans are uniquely tailored to reflect an individual community's needs, based on current community data, extensive public input, analysis and strategizing. Each year, IDNR receives dozens of park plans created in-house by community members, plans written by consultants, and plans created by some combination of the two. Each method can produce a perfectly acceptable plan, and the authorship or cost of the plan is no indicator or predictor of plan quality.

Some Helpful Pre-Hiring Questions to Ask Potential Park Plan Consultants or Helpers

- How many local 5-year system-wide park plans have you written, and how many have been approved by IDNR? (shows experience and awareness of IDNR's planning guidelines; they should know that IDNR's guidelines are a bare MINIMUM standard, and seek to exceed them)
 - How many of those plans were then followed within the 5-year term with a successful LWCF grant application? (shows quality of analysis and data; poor plans often yield unsuccessful grant applications)
- Ask to see three different plans the firm has written for a community the size of yours. (Compare and contrast; look for lots of identical 'boilerplate' and fluff/filler not *unique* to each community; why pay for a plan that was originally written for another community?)
- Who on your staff does your ADA accessibility assessments for these plans, what is their experience/ADA training (especially in parks), and what are things that they look for? (Make sure that they check not only DOT items like curb cuts, but also look at play areas/structures, programs/services, building access, parking, restrooms, trails, accessible routes, and more; half-baked work here can cause a community huge problems later on. The firm should reference and double-check their accuracy against the most current Dept. Of Justice accessibility documents.)
- What do you think your firm will do in my community for public input methodology? How many public input methods will you use, and what will you do if one or more of those methods gets no real results? (Ensures that they intend to drive the planning process based on what/how much they hear from the public, and adjust it accordingly as they go. Good consultants always know how to do 'out-of-the-box' public input as needed, and will **not quietly settle** for low public turnout/participation.)
- A plan isn't a plan unless it actually puts considerable thought into the facts that it gathers. Ask the firm about their level of data analysis, and the resulting strategies. Truly well-done (and useful) plans go beyond simply stacking up some facts. Ask the firm if they do any of the following:
 - Do they explain why these facts are important to the community, and what the facts mean? (Example: "Schmoberg floods along Schmo Creek regularly. This causes lots of private and public property damage to several Schmoberg low-lying neighborhoods along Schmo Street.")

- Will the firm drill down to why the facts are important to the actual park system? (Example: “Schmo Park on Schmo Street is a park that’s regularly underwater; much damage comes of this. Damage that’s expensive to fix.”)
- Will the firm think up some potential answers to: “What are we going to do about this?” (Examples: “Schmoberg is in contact with FEMA and IDNR’s Division of Water, and is working on long-term solutions to the flooding, including some buyouts/home relocations, drainage changes upstream, water control structures, as well as flood-resistant designs and materials used in public amenities/parks in the flood zone.”)
- Can the firm connect the dots? Will they take the results from these bits of data analysis and strategizing, and use them to improve your public input questions, your needs analysis, and therefore your priorities and action plan? (Example: Adding a question about flooding to the public survey: “Schmo Park has been damaged by floods 5 times in ten years at huge cost; do you support relocating some of the more easily damaged play equipment to Schmuck Park on the other side of town and replacing it with amenities that high water won’t hurt, like hard surface walking trails and durable benches?” Will the firm then take this whole fact/analysis/strategy/public input bundle and break it down in the needs analysis, then put the results into the action plan? Did they do so in any of the other plans you saw?)
- Keep in mind that some consulting firms are unwilling or unable to put this level of care and deeper thought into a local park plan, and that tends to result in a plan that does little to inform the community. That leads to more ‘muddle through management’ instead of the plan supporting more proactive and cost-effective decision-making. Did the firm’s other plans do ANY of this sort of analysis and strategy creation? Did any of the firm’s previous plans actually manage to suggest solid, real-world solutions to any of the issues or needs brought up in the plan? Was there any “how-to” brainstorming recorded in the plan?
- Quality and quantity of public input as well as data analysis/strategizing are probably the most important things that determine the final quality and usefulness of a park plan; assess the potential consulting firm’s previous work accordingly. The trick is to determine the firm’s ability to deliver a unique plan to your community that’s worth the cost. High quality consulting firms actually put their effort into the ‘meat’ of the plan, not flash or useless frills. Keep in mind that pretty color maps and pictures and shiny plastic covers do not affect the quality, originality or usability of the plan inside. Simply taking the text in the previous plan, moving it around, and adding a word or two of new text isn’t enough to create a new, well-thought-out plan.

Good plans versus bad plans:

Generally speaking about all park plans being completed by anybody, anywhere:

Good plans:

1. Are unique to the community

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2. Improve with each plan iteration, and update all sections with changes in the community and the parks since the last plan
3. Are all about substance, not appearance; utility is everything
4. Are all about people and the interwoven community context (scoping), with parks as only one aspect of the big picture
5. Consider public input so important that it's the "backbone" of the plan, and leads the way for the rest of the data
6. Are written in a clear, concise manner, aimed at a "layman audience"
7. Go beyond gathering data to full analysis and then specific potential strategies (answers Why, How, and What Next)
8. Are thoughtful, innovative, and brainstorm ideas, opportunities and potential solutions to issues and problems throughout the plan
9. Allow the reader to follow ideas from their start in the data through each section's analysis, collects and organizes them in the needs assessment, and connects the dots all the way through, to the action plan
10. Are so useful that hard copies get worn out (or are carefully bookmarked in the computer) from constant use (and mark up for the future)

Bad plans:

1. Are generic, and use lots of "boiler plate" from unrelated other communities or other sources, over, and over, and over, and over...
2. Become static from one plan to the next, and never look at the changes that HAVE taken place in and around the community and parks each 5 years
3. Care more about fancy covers, pretty formatting, complicated charts, and snazzy graphics than they do about the quality and utility of the work in it
4. Ignore people and community context (scoping), and don't look at how all those complicated things affect the community at large, and parks in particular
5. Barely do public input, settle for "no members of the public showed up for the meeting we barely advertised" and don't base the action plan on what people want, as almost no one gave feedback for the plan
6. Are written in "academic-speak" or rely on meaningless but important-sounding proprietary acronyms, and needlessly complicated plan structures to hide poor planning and vague or inadequate thinking and lack of actual strategies directly supported by careful public input, real-time community data, and analysis (EG – "If you can't dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with baloney.")
7. Are an unorganized pile of data (with no real analysis or strategies) plagiarized from "city-data.com", or bought from ESRI and other generic national data sources, and pasted into the plan with zero consideration of what it means or how it affects the local community
8. Do no thinking, and provide nothing more useful than fluffy, generic platitudes ("The department should change their programming if demographics might change."), instead of detailed analysis and strategies
9. Wander aimlessly and thoughtlessly in circles throughout the plan, and magically come up with a highly detailed action plan at the end, with no idea or explanation of where it all came from or why any of it was chosen

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10. Sit on a shelf or in a hard drive untouched for five years, until it's time to use "find and replace" to create the next one, are created for no other reason than to get LWCF eligibility, and barely meet even IDNR's low minimum park planning standards (we deliberately set relatively low standards to encourage first-time, non-professional, beginning planners; that's why it's a *minimum*, that seasoned professionals should easily surpass)

Joint Planning

Joint planning occurs when neighboring local government park and recreation boards choose to complete a five-year master plan together. For example, several cities and towns may wish to combine their resources along with their county to formulate a countywide master plan. *It is a primary requirement that all park boards/agencies involved must address each of the plan elements and include an action schedule for their own community. Joint plans developed by separate government entities that "share" scoping data that's not unique to each community involved will not be accepted.*

When prepared properly, a single master plan may provide several park boards with five-year strategies toward their respective goals while avoiding the duplication of similar facilities. The main benefit of forming a joint plan will be improved awareness and understanding of how your park system, service areas, and priorities relate to neighboring park systems. An additional advantage may be an emphasis on common goals that can be cooperatively and jointly implemented. Some examples of cooperative planning are:

1. A city park department and a community redevelopment agency plan the renovation of an old park in the city's central business district. The park is an integral part of the redevelopment agency's downtown revitalization plan.
2. Several park boards plan the development of a contiguous greenways corridor trail system linking segments of the trail system in their respective towns while protecting natural resources.
3. A town park board plans to develop a sports complex that is proposed in a regional/community economic development project.
4. A city park department and a neighborhood non-profit community center cooperatively plan programs and facilities aimed at expanding recreational opportunities for youth, including sports competitions and playground activities.
- 5.

Technical Assistance and Local Information Sources

A major component of planning involves researching the information and/or assistance that is available within the community. By networking with professionals from diverse disciplines and organizations, the planning process becomes more effective. For example, pertinent information relating to mapping resources, zoning, transportation, and demographic data may have been compiled previously by other sources. Information from a variety of sources

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adds depth to a plan. Whenever an outside source of technical assistance is used, always identify (cite) the source of assistance in the plan. Some of the typical sources which can provide general planning assistance or data include, *but are not limited to*:

- Colleges and Universities
- Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVB's)
- County Resource Conservation and Development Districts
- Economic Development Corporations
- Internet (cite your webpage sources)
- Local Libraries and School Districts
- Nearby Park and Recreation Agencies
- Neighborhood Associations
- Planning Consultants
- Regional, County, Township, and municipal planning departments
- Service Clubs (Kiwanis, Lions, Jaycees, Breakfast Optimists, etc.)
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Please see the Appendices for a list of state, national and private agencies, and other organizations that provide an array of services related to parks and recreation planning.

User and stakeholder groups are a good source for suggestions about how park facilities can be designed to meet their needs. Often these groups can provide background information such as statistics about the types of users and available facilities. They can also provide rough estimates of the demand for particular types of facilities or programs. Such groups might include:

- Agencies serving individuals with disabilities
- Athletic leagues
- Daycare centers
- Faith-based organizations
- Historical societies/associations
- Local health and wellness coalitions
- Nature organizations (Indiana Audubon Society, Sierra Club, etc.)
- Schools (or their Parent Teacher Organizations)
- Senior centers/retirement communities
- Walking or biking clubs
- Youth agencies (Boy and Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, YWCA's etc.)

“But My Community Doesn’t Own Any Parks Yet!” First-time Plans For Communities With No Parks

So how does a community that doesn't yet own any parks complete a park master plan? Here's the short answer – They simply need to do the same basic 5-year park planning

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effort that everybody does, following these IDNR Planning Guidelines for 5-Year Parks and Recreation Master Plans.

That being said, a first-time plan for a government entity that currently has no formal park system obviously will not be discussing their own current park system. BUT this means that they should pay TWICE as much attention to **potential** new park lands, as pointed out during the usual **analysis and strategizing** of their natural features, man-made/cultural/historical features, and public input. Besides the usual “Park Department Info and Inventory”, they can add a “gap analysis” of what local/regional park and recreation opportunities exist, and where, as well as a “benchmark study” of what similarly sized and located Park Systems have to offer their residents (these aren’t an IDNR ‘requirement’, but can also be very important to a first-time plan).

Think of a ‘first time, no current park system’ plan as setting a **priceless** baseline/foundation of information for all future park system planning. Public input becomes a super-critical component, as this is the first time that somebody has actually ‘officially’ gone out to this particular subset of the public and actually asked them “So what exactly would you like to get out of a local park system, and what park needs do you have that aren’t currently being met?”

All that seemingly dull, boring, socio-economic data that tells a community “who we are” suddenly takes on a whole new importance as well, as this is going to help point out portions of the population whose needs for services like those offered by parks and recreation facilities may be critical (and often unnoticed and/or unmet). The amount of baseline data, and the depth of thought that goes into analyzing it, will be what either makes or breaks one of these “no park system, first-time plans”.

It is strongly suggested that ‘first-time, no-system’ planners bring all sorts of stakeholders into the public input picture, as this baseline will be that much more useful for the future if you can firmly establish what groups like the local Convention and Visitors Bureau, Economic Development folks, County Health Departments, Regional Hospital Representatives, Chamber of Commerce Representatives, and Government officials from the County, Township, and Local levels have to say about the chance to develop a first-ever, local-level park system. Bringing in a representative from a successful, “shining example” park system to talk to your folks about what benefits the “shining example” community gets from their investment in parks may help the learning curve here.

Sometimes local governments that happen to have extremely well-developed neighboring parks and recreation departments that already successfully draw users from the entire county will opt out of having a locally-owned park system. But more often than not, local Indiana governments are discovering that nearby communities that go out of their way to create really striking quality of life amenities like parks tend to be the ones who are growing and attracting new taxpaying residents and businesses, while sleepy communities that don’t care about those features tend to be fading away quietly.

Plan Improvement from One Plan to the Next

The trick to doing these plans over time, is to see them as slowly building on the foundation of the last one, with incremental improvements and small additions being the norm more than the complete re-working of the entire plan. Each plan gets slightly better, more detailed, more well thought-out. One of the things that you can do as a planner is to ask local government officials and park operations people (park superintendent, if you have one, the entire park board if you don't), what has happened in and around the community in the last five years.

Find out about any:

- Big weather happenings (tornadoes, floods, windstorms, droughts, heat waves, etc.)
- Any operational problems in or around the parks (dead tree removals, huge invasive plant or bug issues, failing playground equipment, vandalism, crumbling roads/bridges, poor drainage, overworked sports fields, outdated or overworked utility infrastructure or anything else that has affected the community and or the parks in particular). Ask them what they had to fix, replace, or build from scratch in the last five years; then explore why, and what they learned when they did it, what it cost, what the results were, and how they might do it better next time.
- New changes in or around the community (such as agricultural changes, changes in regional power or water utilities, industry moving in or out, big building projects like streets, sidewalks and trails, housing developments, industrial parks, etc.)
- Big shifts in socio-economics (like massive age shifts in median age, demographic makeup, local poverty up or down, business changes up or down, job losses or gains, school district consolidation, or population changes up or down over time).
- Opportunities that came up in the last five years that the community took advantage of (grants received that built/fixed or planned for something; philanthropy that paid for something for the community, large planning efforts at the department, local government or regional level that might provide data or insight into the parks and their users; outside forces acting on the community like INDOT building highways or roads, railroads decommissioning old railbeds, or utilities improving infrastructure or adding utility corridor that could be also used for trail)

Analyze all these bits of data in terms of how they affect the community at large, but also how they affect the parks in particular, any issues or opportunities they present. Then strategize what your park system should do about them. Nobody knows what has happened in a community better than the people that live there; the secret is to ask them. No community, anywhere, is unchanging; EVER. Changes happen, all the time, and folks in the community just need to be asked to share with you what those changes and happenings were. Sometimes local newspapers are a goldmine of change-over-time information.

Once you have caught up on what's happened in and around the community and parks in the five years since the last plan, ask this: How did the community and the parks in particular react to these events? What might they do better or differently next time?

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Don't feel like you need to write a book about every little thing, but note broad changes or ongoing effects, add some brief analysis about what it means for the community as a whole and the parks in particular, then look at either what solutions the park system already implemented, or what they might do, given the chance (strategy).

Chapter Two: Preparing a Master Plan

Planning Area

Before beginning the planning process, the park board will need to define the planning area. Generally, this is the area located within the jurisdictional boundaries or taxing district of the park board, but really should include the main area your users live in. Where do all your park users actually come from? Many rural communities have a significant number of users who live outside the local government boundaries. These fringe areas should also be considered. These are service areas of your park system which lie just outside the jurisdictional area. The county or township area surrounding a city limit is an example of a fringe area. If a city has a park board and facilities but the county or township does not, rural residents from the county probably use the facilities provided in the city. Even though fringe areas are outside your taxing district, they may contain potential park and recreation sites. Keep in mind that size and composition of your planning area will determine things like the size and type of user base your park system supports, the tax base drawn on by the parks, and even the geographic area impacted by the quality and scope of your park system. Be sure to include a map of the planning area in your plan if possible. The map will need to include a north arrow and list the approximate scale.

Information Gathering, Analysis, and Strategizing (Of Scoping Sections)

To plan for the future, you must know what you already have. Rather than focusing on the past, you want to document your present situation and predict trends, which will shape the future. Required elements in this section include:

- The planning area, park board and department
- Natural features and landscape
- Man-made, historical and cultural features
- Social and economic factors
- Park and Recreation facilities and programs
- User access to, as well as ADA Accessibility of, sites, amenities, programs, and services

Remember to analyze all this data you're gathering, and in response, brainstorm potential strategic solutions and ideas. A plan without analysis and strategies is nothing more than a pile of data with no actual thought applied to it. It's the analysis and strategies that makes a plan useful, as it converts simple information into a tool for strategic change. Some simple ways to analyze your data include:

- Answer "Why is this data important to my community and the parks in particular?"
- Answer "If this data is important to my community, and my parks, then what should I do about it?"

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- Once you answer broadly what you should do, then brainstorm some specific strategic answers to exactly “How, or what steps might we take, to implement these broad strategies over the next five or more years?”

The Park Board/Department

NOTE:

Purely “advisory” park boards or similar ad-hoc organizations do not comply with current Indiana State Statutes on the powers and duties delegated by local governments to their appointed park boards as established under either Indiana Code 36-10-3 or 36-10-4. If there is any question, the legal status of your local park board should be verified by an attorney.

Briefly describe the park and recreation board and/or the park department, and the park and recreation system in general. This portion of the plan should address the park board’s ongoing efforts. Include:

- The park department and/or park board’s current mailing address and phone number, and e-mail (if available). Please give us the PO Box if one is required for delivery of your Department’s mail, not a physical address that won’t allow mail delivery to it
- A brief history of the park and recreation board/agency, including a very concise progress evaluation of the previous five years
- An organizational chart showing the park board/agency within the local government structure and an organizational chart showing the structure of the park department
- The name and mailing address for each park board member (email addresses are strongly encouraged, and will be kept confidential, but are not required), appointing authority for each member, overall “no more than 2 of the same political party” political status of the board (unless currently under a waiver, or in a Township or 3rd Class City), and each member’s staggered term expiration date. This data is needed to show current compliance with State Statute unless “no more than 2” board status is waived, or are a Township or 3rd Class City. Please notify us of any changes to the board structure or authority since the last plan.
- An overview of the department’s management, such as budget summaries, sources of revenue, programming offered, and services provided. Include basic details of any formal partnerships or legal joint use agreements with non-profits, other agencies, the school system, etc.
- A list of the park department/system/board’s goals. Goals are general statements the board/department follows to provide public park and recreation opportunities. These should be consistent with needs found in the needs analysis section of your plan
- A description of growth trends affecting the park department/system/board as it has evolved. Are budgets, facilities, and/or user service demands increasing, decreasing, or remaining the same? How will these affect your park system in the next five years?

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- Verify that IDNR has a copy of your park board's most recent origination ordinance on file (should be post-1980, after "Home Rule" was passed by the legislature, and older statutes were all abrogated). Email a copy to IDNR as needed.

Natural Features and Landscape

Briefly describe the entire planning area's (not just the parks) natural features in terms of their current uses and future potential. Include items such as:

- Open space natural areas with park potential (surplus lands, abandoned railroad corridors, idle agricultural areas, forests, bogs, wetlands, prairies, stream corridors, etc.)
- Wetland and surface water features that would support or enhance recreational activities (rivers, creeks, lakes, ponds, bogs, etc.)
- Percentage of tree cover, trees species composition, street/park tree health and maintenance (who monitors and maintains your street trees and your park trees?)
- Vegetation and wildlife habitat that would allow passive or active recreation opportunities (woods, prairies, wetlands, etc.)
- Unique topography and geological features (hills, caves, sand dunes etc.), and underlying soils which are compatible (or incompatible), with recreation, development, and human activity
- Groundwater features that affect the community (high/low water tables, particularly good or bad quality/quantity groundwater sources, springs, artesian wells, etc.), including drainage issues and their possible solutions
- Recent impacts on nature in the community/parks, such as severe wind/storms/tornadoes, hail, floods, droughts, wildfire, and invasive species of all kinds. Include discussions of severity of impacts, any repetitions of the impacts over time, as well as costs to remediate/rebuild after each occurrence
- Condition of turfgrass and sports fields, reasons for issues with turf, and possible solutions and costs to implement them

When assessing the recreation potential of these features, you may wish to consult:

1. IDNR Division of Fish and Wildlife and Division of Forestry - district biologists and foresters who help evaluate sites or assist in preparation of plans for fish and wildlife habitat and forest management
2. IDNR Division of Nature Preserves - county inventories of significant natural areas, and endangered and threatened species
3. IDNR Division of Water - information on water bodies, groundwater, flood plains, and permits for suitable construction in these areas
4. The Indiana Map website: <http://indianamap.org/> (Online digital GIS maps – Statewide)
5. ISDA Division of Soil Conservation or your local Natural Resource Conservation

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Service office (NRCS), which have soils data obtained from the Soil Survey prepared for each county

6. Other sources of resource information include, but are not limited to, county websites, area plan commissions, Purdue Cooperative Extension Service and biology/natural science departments at colleges, universities, and high schools

Man-made, Historical, and Cultural Features

Briefly discuss the man-made, historical, and cultural features in your planning area. Try to predict how they affect the park and recreation system now and in the future. Discuss any existing or potential cooperative efforts between any outside historic or cultural organizations and the parks. Discuss whether any man-made features affect access to the parks, businesses, and schools in the community (for better or worse; why, and what could be done about it). For example, is there a river with few bridges or a major interstate highway between your neighborhoods and your parks, preventing bike/pedestrian access?

Man-made features might include:

- Sidewalk system and/or Trails
- Farms, grain elevators, and agricultural buildings
- Highways/roads/bridges
- Industrial parks/business districts
- Residential neighborhoods and apartment complexes
- Park support buildings and maintenance/service areas
- Daycare centers, schools
- Railway corridors, switchyards, and major railroad crossings
- Schools
- Utilities (especially those that have corridors which might allow trail access)

Historic features might include:

- Historic sites/markers/buildings/districts
- Particularly significant local history events, people/groups, or celebrations
- Historic re-enactments, living history programs, or history education programs available to the community at large, and/or taking place in the parks specifically

Cultural features could include:

- A significant population of people of a particular ethnicity, religious affiliation, national origin, or culture (such as the Amish in Shipshewana, or the Burmese in Indianapolis)
- Ethnic or Culturally-based community identities or festivals (such as Native American tribal events, Indy Black Expo, or Pierogi Fest in Whiting)

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- Groups of people or organizations dedicated to cultural, musical, or artistic pursuits (such as a town band, outdoor movie series, public concert series, artist's colony, musician's union or community theater troupe)

Social and Economic Factors

When planning for parks and recreation, you need to know about the people who use your parks (or don't use them) to better understand the recreation issues facing your community. Information about social and economic issues that are important in your planning area can be obtained from many sources, including; (1) the U.S. Census Bureau's suite of data websites: <https://www.census.gov/data.html>), (2) STATS INDIANA (<http://www.stats.indiana.edu/>), (3) the Indiana State Library's "Statistics By Topic": <https://www.in.gov/library/collections-and-services/isdc/statistics-by-topic/>), (4) the Indiana Workforce Development "Hoosiers by the Numbers" webpage: (<http://www.hoosierdata.in.gov/>). Your plan should include items such as:

- Densely populated areas
- Poverty figures, and/or low income or economically distressed areas
- Race/Ethnicity statistics, age breakdowns, and gender demographics
- Population characteristics, total population, and growth trends over time (population growing or shrinking, and why)
- Populations with disabilities (not to be used to "justify" the ADA; these data are to determine priority of accessibility barrier removal, not rationalize the need to follow federal law)
- Senior citizen data, including median age (and median age trends – is your community aging, or not?)
- Major employers, unemployment data (especially trends)
- Regional or adjacent community population changes that may affect this community now or in the next five years
- What all this MEANS in terms of its effect on parks and recreation, and what you intend to DO about it

Characteristics such as population trends may also be estimated if information is available. Occupational data such as major occupation types, number of workers per job type/employment area, unemployment figures, and trends will help describe your planning area even more completely. If your figures come from sources other than the Census or STATS INDIANA, make sure they are accurate and reliable. Other places to look for information include universities, chambers of commerce, local government offices, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Cooperative Extension Service. Remember to list (cite) all sources of information.

Parks and Recreation Facilities and Programs

There are two major components to the summary of your existing facilities and programs available to the public:

1. A narrative describing the facilities and programs in the recreation system. The narrative is a written description (inventory) of all park and recreation sites and facilities. You should include:
 - a. Site address (or at least the nearest street intersection) and number of acres of local government-owned public outdoor recreation land for **each site** in the community's park system (Do NOT count public school acres unless there is a current, signed legal joint use agreement in place between the local school district and the parks. School playground use by the public after school hours without public use or legal joint use agreements in place is nothing more than unenforced trespassing)
 - b. Programs and activities available at each site
 - c. Maintenance issues
 - d. Preventive maintenance practices and concerns for each site
2. A legible map showing street names and the location of each park and facility listed in the inventory. A map will help you determine if recreation sites are well distributed throughout your jurisdiction (service gap analysis). The map must have a north arrow, scale, and street names so recreation sites can be easily located

If your park organization or local government owns undeveloped land with future recreation potential, include a description of this in the plan, along with acreage and an address.

NOTE: The more complete this section is, the more effective your master plan will be. A data table or matrix is an effective means for communicating this information.

Summarize the inventory and narrative by identifying trends in new development, land acquisition, renovation, service expansions, and/or cutbacks. Briefly describe how available facilities affect the supply and demand for recreation opportunities in your park system's jurisdiction. Address only those features that will affect the park system and recreation opportunities.

Other Recreation Providers outside the Park System

Also include information about other recreation opportunities available in your service area in your master plan. What are the major private and not-for-profit recreation programs and facilities in the area? Discuss whether these other recreation suppliers cooperate or compete with your parks, and any potential for future partnerships. Some examples of privately-owned or provided parks and recreation sites and/or programs are:

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- Apartment complex pools
- Homeowner's association (HOA) –owned parks or playgrounds
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- "Dad's Clubs" or other non-profit and/or private sports or recreation providers
- Privately-owned campgrounds
- Country clubs
- Privately-owned, pay fishing lakes
- Fitness centers
- Golf facilities
- Racquet clubs
- YMCA's, YWCA's, other private family recreation facilities
- Any other type of recreation organization which substitutes for, or supplements recreation supply, or competes for, or may attract recreation participants.

Additional Supply Information

Investigate recreation facilities or programs which could be developed jointly with other agencies, non-profits, or businesses, such as a community center at a shopping mall or a downtown park developed in conjunction with downtown revitalization projects.

Analyze where people live and how accessible (or inaccessible) your parks are by foot, bike, car, and bus. Is your community's sidewalk system complete? Is there more than one way to access your parks? Sometimes parks are close to neighborhoods, but still have no bicycle/pedestrian access due to various kinds of physical barriers; how might this affect how residents use the parks? Consider the ways that park supply/service area gaps and bike/pedestrian access to your parks might affect residents of various income levels differently. (Remember that not everyone can afford, or has access to a car, or the ability to operate one due to age, illness or a disability)

Maps illustrating land use, growth patterns, types of development (especially residential) and their locations may also be useful.

Accessibility and Federal Accessibility Standards

DISCLAIMER: This document provides guidance to assist local park and recreation planners and interested individuals in understanding accessibility issues in park planning. The following information is provided as information and guidance for IDNR planning standards only. This technical assistance does not constitute legal advice. Legal advice should be obtained from an attorney.

Park and recreation professionals recognize the positive physical, psychological, and social

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benefits for all people that come from participation in public recreation programs and services. There are several ways to ensure persons with disabilities have equal opportunity to benefit from your parks and recreation system:

- Include people with disabilities (and/or organizations for people with disabilities) in all aspects of your planning process
- Include individuals with disabilities on planning teams
- Research the latest federal accessibility standards, including those specifically for parks and recreation sites/programs/services, using sources such as www.ADA.gov
- Seek expert accessibility assistance from outside sources for evaluation and planning
- Use modified equipment, adapted rules, and creative programming in order to provide a range of programs and services that meet the needs of all people
- Explore alternative formats for effective communication, like Braille versions of brochures, large print versions, audible versions of information, and sign language interpretation
- Provide opportunities and channels of communication for persons with disabilities to request accessibility accommodations in programs, facilities, and services
- Consider providing accessible facilities, services, and programs as a best management practice, and seek continuous improvement
- Be aware of the ongoing need to monitor facilities, programs, activities, and services for changes that might create barriers for people with disabilities
- Be aware of new technologies, innovations or inventions that may be used to improve accessibility for your amenities, programs, and services

Accessibility 101 for Park Planners

There are three pieces of federal legislation regarding accessibility for persons with disabilities that may affect park master plans:

1. Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA) - first federal law created to ensure access by persons with disabilities to all facilities that were designed, built, altered or leased using federal funds.
2. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - extends access beyond architecture to include programs and employment. The Rehabilitation Act states that “no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service.” The act requires specific actions from agencies including a self-evaluation of its policies, facilities, programs, and services.
3. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, (ADA) – Title II of the Act requires state and local governments to remove barriers to access in facilities, programs, activities, and services. This includes providing modifications to policies, practices, and procedures.

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There are two accessibility standards to follow for the built environment: the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), and the newer 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design. The 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design went into effect on March 15, 2012 for all new or altered facilities or buildings, from that time forward.

Keep in mind that there is no “grandfather clause” in any accessibility legislation or standard. A common misconception is that facilities built before accessibility standards are “grandfathered” and do not have to comply with accessibility modifications. This is not true. Any significant alteration of a facility, building, or amenity triggers the use of the accessibility standards. All government entities are required by Title II of the ADA to have conducted (and kept up-to-date) a self-evaluation of the accessibility of their programs, services, and facilities and created a transition plan to fix any identified accessibility deficiencies. All new facility or building construction or significant alteration is required to comply with the new ADA standards.

There are many facets of park facility, service, and program planning to consider when implementing ADA and other accessibility laws, such as:

- Parking and accessible park ingress/egress
- Accessible routes; beginning at accessible parking or other accessible routes outside the park or public facility, sidewalks & trails outside the park, then connecting all accessible site amenities
- Restrooms
- Picnic and play areas
- Advertising
- Registration
- Scheduling
- Facilities
- Safety/alarms
- Signage
- Parking
- Lighting
- Sound systems
- Equipment
- Supervision
- Seating/benches
- Communication
- Transportation
- Policies and procedures

Not all barriers relate to physical access. Park users and community members may temporarily or permanently experience other barriers to their recreation. Some other barriers might include:

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- Communication: Includes hard-to-read print, signs without universal symbols or Braille
- Programs or Services: Staff or volunteers may assume people with disabilities cannot participate in, or will not benefit from, the activity. Staff may also assume that people with disabilities do not have similar desires and interests as people without disabilities.
- Organization: Program staff might not be trained, willing or able to support participation from persons with disabilities or requiring unnecessarily detailed forms to request information or service that would be difficult or impossible to complete because of a disability
- Attitude: Encompasses things like fear, lack of knowledge about a disability or uncertainty about communicating with a person with a disability

Inclusion is a practice where individuals with disabilities participate in programs, services, and activities along with individuals who do not have disabilities. It is an effective strategy for removing attitudinal barriers, because one of the best ways to learn about other people is to interact with them directly.

Another method of eliminating physical and social barriers is the use of Universal Design, the design of products and environments for all people, to the widest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The concept* is based upon seven principles:

1. Equitable use
2. Flexibility in use
3. Simple and intuitive use
4. Perceptible information
5. Tolerance for error
6. Low physical effort
7. Size and space for approach and use

While master planning your park system, the IDNR-SP-CGT strongly encourages you to apply these concepts to your work sites, park sites, and programs. IDNR-SP-CGT considers the use of Universal Design in parks to be a critical best management practice.

*Universal Design as an inclusive design practice was initiated at the North Carolina State University College of Design. Due to funding issues, the Center for Universal Design at NCSU is not active. Copies of NCSU's original "Principles of Universal Design" may still be found here: https://projects.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/about_ud/udprinciples.htm

Federal ADA Requirements Affecting Parks and Recreation

As stated earlier, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (as amended) Title II applies to state and local governments, including parks and recreation departments. The following are basic federal administrative requirements toward ADA compliance for all local governments,

across the United States.

For local governments that have less than 50 employees (in the entire government unit):

1. Complete an accessibility self-evaluation or update a previous self-evaluation created under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
2. Provide notice to the public about the entity's ADA obligations, non-discrimination requirements and accessible services and facilities

For local governments that have 50 or more employees, add the following obligations:

3. Designate an individual to coordinate ADA compliance
4. Develop a transition plan identifying the physical changes/modifications that will be made to achieve program access
5. Develop an ADA grievance procedure for those who feel that they have been discriminated against because of their disability or their friends or family with disabilities

These federal requirements can be fulfilled at the local government executive level, but some local governments pass this responsibility down to the department level, such as parks and recreation departments. Parks and recreation administrators should verify the level at which their community fulfills these legal obligations. Administrators of parks and recreation departments may wish to directly fulfill these Federal requirements at their level as a best management practice to ensure that they are making the best possible effort to provide access to all citizens.

Accessibility Self-Evaluation

All park boards and departments are covered by Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It is essential to identify any architectural, transportation, communication, or service barriers. The IDNR-SP-CGT strongly encourages all park boards and departments to regularly self-evaluate their programs, activities, policies, and practices to determine what barriers exist and what actions need to be taken in order to comply with all federal accessibility laws. This process should involve interested persons with disabilities and/or their advocacy organizations. **Note: A self-evaluation that only covers streets and curb cuts (the "INDOT Self-Evaluation") is NOT COMPLETE, and does not meet the self-evaluation requirements for local governments under Title II of the ADA!**

A copy of the self-evaluation must be made available for public review. The ADA requires that the self-evaluation be available for public inspection for three years after completion. It should include:

- A list of individuals and organizations consulted
- A description of areas examined
- A list of problems identified
- A list of modifications made/planned

- An Assurance of Accessibility Compliance document with original signatures

Accessibility Transition Plan

This is a federal requirement for local governments under Title II of the ADA. This is not a requirement for IDNR park plans. If the self-evaluation indicates that changes to facilities or programs are necessary, a transition plan to accomplish the changes or modifications should be prepared. The plan should be developed with the assistance of persons with disabilities, or organizations representing people with disabilities. At minimum, a transition plan should identify physical obstacles in the recipient's facilities that limit accessibility of its programs or activities to persons with disabilities. It should describe in detail the methods to be used to:

- Make facilities or programs accessible
- Specify the schedule for taking the steps necessary to achieve full program accessibility
- Estimate the potential costs to reach compliance
- Explore possible funding sources for each modification
- Indicate the person responsible for implementation of the plan

A copy of the transition plan must be made available for public inspection for three years after completion. The transition plan can be included with the priority and action schedule of your master plan. As with the action plan, a matrix or table format is highly effective to organize this information.

IDNR Accessibility Requirements for Local Plans

Consider the ADA [1990], ABA [1968], and the Rehabilitation Act [1973]. IDNR recommends that you seek expert accessibility help if you are unsure about compliance. The following is the **minimum** that IDNR will accept for the required accessibility section of local 5-year parks and recreation master plans.

- Identify the designated ADA coordinator (required only if the government entity has 50 or more employees), for either the local government entity or for the park department in particular; OR an individual to act as an ADA information contact for the public (if the local government entity has 49 employees or less).
- Provide a commentary on currently accessible facilities, programs, etc.
- Provide a commentary on currently inaccessible facilities, programs, etc. with a suggested timeline for improvements, estimated costs, and potential funding sources
- Give information about your community's public notice of ADA requirements, and of public information about accessible facilities, amenities, programs and services in the

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park system in particular (short discussion of methods, formats, locations, etc.) How do people find out what's accessible in your parks?

- Give information about your community's ADA grievance procedures and grievance point of contact for either the local government entity or park department
- Submit a completed ABA/Rehab. Act (504)/ADA assurance of accessibility compliance sign-off sheet with original signatures (**must be submitted as hard copy**)

The Assurance of Accessibility Compliance sign-off sheet is available from the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails or Online at: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/planning/park-planning-information-and-guidelines/>

Accessibility Information Sources (National, State, and Local)

The U. S. Department of Justice is a good source for technical assistance on applying the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (as amended):

(800) 514-0301 [voice]

(800) 514-0383 [TTY]

www.ada.gov

www.adachecklist.org [New Readily Achievable Barrier Removal Checklist]

The U.S. Department of Education provides ten regional centers that provide technical assistance on applying ADA; this is the center that Indiana can call:

Great Lakes ADA Center

University of Illinois – Chicago

Institute on Disability and Human Development

1640 West Roosevelt Road, Room 405

Chicago, IL 60608

(800) 949-4232 [voice/TTY]

(312) 413-1407 [voice/TTY]

(312) 413-1856 [fax]

www.adagreatlakes.org

The United States Access Board (otherwise known as the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board) provides technical assistance on the federal ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).

United States Access Board

1331 F Street, NW, Suite 1000

Washington, DC 20004-1111

(800) 872-2253 [voice, toll-free]

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(800) 993-2822 [TTY, toll-free]
ta@access-board.gov
www.access-board.gov/

2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (Includes Play Areas)
https://www.ada.gov/2010ADASTandards_index.htm

The Library at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University – Bloomington is a lending library of thousands of volumes on many aspects of accessibility that are available to anyone in Indiana:

Indiana Institute on Disability and Community Center Library
Indiana University – Bloomington
2810 East Discovery Parkway (previously 1905 North Range Road)
Bloomington, IN 47408-9801
(800) 437-7924 [toll-free]
(812) 855-9396 [fax]
libiidc@indiana.edu
www.iidc.indiana.edu/?pageId=34

The International Play Equipment Manufacturer Association (IPEMA) has created a free online resource for those who are working toward compliance with the new 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, the IPEMA Checklist for Access. It can be found as a free downloadable PDF at this website:

<http://ipema.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ADA-Checklist-Reference.pdf>

The New England ADA Center's Institute for Human Centered Design has created some online "ADA Recreational Checklists for Existing Facilities" under the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design. This checklist offers some useful free information for Title II government entities who are seeking program recreation accessibility compliance. The website is:

<https://www.adachecklist.org/checklist.html#rec>

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The Arc of Indiana is the state's largest organization advocating for people with cognitive and developmental disabilities. It can be a valuable source of information about issues and answers concerning people with developmental disabilities:

The Arc of Indiana
143 W. Market St., Suite 200
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(800) 382-9100 [toll-free]
(317) 977-2385 [fax]
www.arcind.org/

The Governor's Council for People with Disabilities offers a "Resources" webpage that has dozens of links covering information about topics such as disability information; arts and recreation; assistive technology; community inclusion; data and statistics; grants and non-profit resources; and much more:

www.in.gov/gpcpd/2331.htm

The Governor's Council also supports a website with ADA trainings, audio conferences, webinars, and more, called "*ADA Indiana; Implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act in Indiana.*" The webpage address is:

<http://www.adaindiana.org/>

The Self-Advocates of Indiana is a non-profit that helps people with developmental disabilities self-advocate in their local communities. Their webpage lists local groups statewide that can provide information and contacts:

<http://www.arcind.org/self-advocates-of-indiana/resources/>

The National Center on Accessibility at Indiana University – Bloomington provides free technical accessibility assistance via phone and e-mail, as well as more in-depth fee-based contract services:

National Center on Accessibility
501 North Morton Street – Suite 109
Bloomington, IN 47404-3732
(812) 856-4422; TTY: (812) 856-4421; Fax: (812) 856-4480
E-mail: nca@indiana.edu Web: <http://www.ncaonline.org>

Accessibility Ideas and Tips for Planners

- Think of accessibility in your parks “from the outside in”:
 - Start outside the park site, and think of how a person with a disability will enter the park, both in a vehicle (using signed & marked, hard-surface, accessible parking), as well as using their usual pedestrian mode from an accessible route outside the park
 - Then add an accessible route from that parking or outside accessible route to the nearest accessible restrooms
 - Then add accessible routes to the nearest accessible site amenities, such as accessible play areas (connecting directly to accessible safety surfacing underneath the accessible play equipment), sports bleachers and fields, pools, water fountains, trails, etc.
- Also think of accessibility as a fully interconnected system, not just a bunch of unconnected bits and pieces
 - If the bits and pieces of your park amenities that are accessible are missing connections (such as accessible routes) or critical additional accessibility modifications (such as accessible safety surfacing underneath all accessible play equipment), then many of your park amenities will not actually be accessible. EG – an accessible restroom or swing set surrounded by a sea of grass and dirt is NOT accessible
 - Ordinary, typical 3'- 4' wide municipal sidewalks are NOT ADA-compliant, and should not be considered as “accessible routes” unless they meet all the 2010 ADAAG Standards for accessible routes (includes things like 5' wide minimum, no gaps greater than ½”, “firm and stable” surface, minimum grades and cross slopes, etc.)
 - Accessible playground equipment not only needs to be connected to the rest of the site by an accessible route, but it needs accessible safety surfacing underneath it (ordinary wood mulch, gravel, sand, dirt, grass, or pea gravel are NOT ADA-compliant). The safety surfacing needs to meet ASTM F1951-99 “firm and stable”, and ASTM F1292-99 “impact attenuating” standards, and also should connect the accessible route to an accessible mini-ramp or gap through any surrounding perimeter mulch/safety surface barrier, railroad ties, or landscape timbers to provide access all the way to the play area safety surfacing from the accessible route.

Public Participation

It is important to make a sincere effort to solicit public opinion. Using several methods to gain public input will give you the best results. If one method does not produce enough feedback, document it completely, and then try another. The key is to let the public know they have an opportunity to express their needs and concerns. Be sure to keep the public informed while you create your plan and priorities; a very visible and 'transparent' planning process prevents many problems in the long run.

Citizen involvement is a fundamental part of the planning process that ***must be*** documented and incorporated into the plan. Public input ensures that the park board is listening to the people in the planning area, and gives you, as a recreation provider, important information to make choices among various priorities and actions. Your public input process should strive to find common ground between the local government, the park board, and the public. Public participation should:

- Educate the general public about park and recreation department concerns, problems, and potential solutions
- Identify the public's perception of parks and recreation issues, their impacts, and opportunities
- Document the needs, opinions, and goals of affected individuals and communities within the planning area; both park users, and non-users (non-users may offer clues to why they do not use parks; which may provide ways to convert them to users later on)
- Inform the park board and other decision makers of the impacts, publicly perceived benefits, etc. that are associated with each proposed or potential future action
- Recognize conflict with/within the community, while providing motivation, opportunity, and a process for conflict resolution

Public input can be obtained in *many* different ways.

NOTE: IDNR-SP-CGT requires at least one random public input method (such as a survey) and one non-random method (such as stakeholder interviews, public meetings, etc.). IDNR-SP-CGT also requires at least one additional public meeting take place near the end of your planning process to share the results of your planning efforts with the public.

Interviews can be held with park employees, stakeholders, community groups, local government officials, park users, and many others. Surveys may be conducted by mail, telephone, newspaper, in person or via the internet. A combination of several of these methods will produce a more realistic picture of the community's recreational needs.

To ensure you see all points of view, solicit input from a diverse cross section of local citizens. Include people from:

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- A variety of age groups, occupations, races, ethnicities, and income levels
- Individuals with disabilities
- Groups or enclaves of people who may be unique to your planning area
- Parents, including single parents
- Park agency staff and volunteers
- Park users **and** non-users
- Seniors
- Youth (Schools are a priceless resource for input from kids; talk to the Superintendent and Teachers for the best ways to do this)

Random samples of people are best. The more people in your sample, the more reliable your information will be. Meetings, surveys, questionnaires, or internal work with your park staff and/or board allows you to gain input from the people who deal first-hand with recreation issues on a daily basis.

NOTE: When you document your public input effort in your plan, you must include the following information even if the methods are not successful:

- Methods used (questionnaire, public meetings, etc.)
- Date(s) and location(s) of the survey start/finish, meeting, or interviews
- Number of surveys sent
- Number of surveys returned (if using both paper and electronic report results for both)
- Number of people/groups interviewed; identify the specific groups participating
- Number of members of the **public** attending public meetings (public meetings should **NOT** count members of the media, park board, government officials, local government employees or staff, consultants, or their families toward their total attendance figures)
- A synopsis of the comments gathered from **each** method
- Summary of all the input. Recording your public input's recurring or emerging themes, ideas, and expressed needs in this summation will provide you the basis for the start of the needs assessment section of the plan.
- A copy of all newspaper stories, advertisements (and/or proof of publication), or community calendar entries pertaining to your input process
- Look through the public input for public ideas and opinions about aspects of the scoping sections of the plan (Natural, man-made, etc.); then make the connection between what the public said, and the data in those sections. (EG – “we want more trees for shade” would be an important addition to the natural features section, or “we need more restrooms in the park” would go well in the man-made section)

The following sections describe in more detail how to go about collecting public input. If you have further questions contact a member of the IDNR-SP-CGT planning staff.

Public Meetings

The best way to find out what members of the community want is to ask them. Public meetings can be conducted as part of regular park board meetings or they may be held outside the regular board meeting schedule. The purpose is two-way communication with the public. At public meetings, try to seek out the issues your residents feel are important. Be particularly alert for residents' perceived complaints, requests or issues in the parks, and their suggestions for solutions to park problems in your current system, and add them to the plan.

Using several methods of advance advertising as well as actively inviting stakeholder groups and existing community organizations directly should improve attendance at your meetings. The following are some examples of both formal and informal public input meetings:

- Neighborhood meetings - educate, inform and solicit input on a block/neighborhood level
- Individual stakeholder(s) and key community leader(s) meetings - provide local officials with insight into community needs and desires
- Service organization(s) and community group(s) meetings - allow direct contact with special interest groups
- General public meetings - all residents of the planning area are invited to attend

NOTE: At least one general public meeting must be held during the planning process, and all results fully documented. One additional meeting and/or public comment period must take place at the end of the planning process. This allows the public access to the final draft of the plan, and to verify that they agree with the recorded public input, and the goals, needs assessment, and actions listed in the plan.

Structure the meetings to educate the public and get their reaction to parks and recreation issues. Depending upon where you are in the planning process, you may want to introduce the goals of the plan. It is a good idea to describe your current facilities and programs (possibly using a short slide program). Ask for their suggestions on:

- Changes to existing services
- Facilities improvements
- Funding options for long-term parks acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance (Remember - grants and donations are NOT a realistic or sustainable funding option for parks, especially operations and maintenance)
- Locations for potential new projects or expansions
- New programs
- Park system issues and problems
- Potential multiple use opportunities
- Renovations, rebuilds, replacements, and rehabilitations

REMEMBER: Record the date, time, place, number of members of the actual public present (do NOT count media, park board members, consultants, elected/government officials, or park staff), material presented, discussion and public comments made in the public participation portion of your plan.

It is your responsibility at public meetings, focus groups, etc., to keep things moving and to encourage attendees to think about issues and ideas that extend beyond their individual special interest. When you record meeting events, be aware of the fact you will be using this information long after the meeting is over. Keep an accurate record of all comments and suggestions generated at the meeting. Record the comments with notes, video or audio recordings. Keeping a detailed paper trail is not only a good idea, but it also provides useful rebuttal to any citizens protesting later on that they did not have enough opportunity to give their feedback or that the feedback wasn't recorded accurately.

An additional technique that has proven to be very useful is to have a "workbook" or comment sheet. Generally, this is a handout the audience fills out as each topic or issue is discussed during the meeting. At the end of the meeting, the workbooks/comment sheets are collected. In this way, everyone's comments are received even if they choose not to speak during the meetings. Another option is to hand out printed sheets or cards that give an online website or social media page address, or e-mail address for those that wish to send in their feedback electronically. All these options help those members of the public who are too shy or intimidated to speak out at a public meeting or focus group, or who may have a disability that prevents effective in-person communication.

Low attendance can be a problem for public meetings. There are many things you can do to overcome this, including:

- Internet web page/Twitter/Facebook/Instagram page announcements/advertisements
- Call and invite individual stakeholders, key neighborhood and community leaders, special interest groups, and activists to the meeting
- Hand out or post flyers or posters in public places such as libraries, schools, or grocery stores
- E-mail or text message announcements or invitations
- Telephone invitations and reminders
- Special announcements read at in-person or online school, club, or community organization meetings
- Mass media/advertising, both paid and unpaid
- Send notices (or even paper copies of surveys) in municipal utility bills
- Send fliers home with school children
- Invite local media reporters to write advance stories about the upcoming meetings, attend the meetings, then write follow-up stories to share info with the public afterward

Advertise and invite, and they will come. Tell the public what you want to accomplish at the

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meeting by printing the agenda in the local newspaper. Tell the public you want their input. At minimum, announce the meeting at least once in the local newspaper. A better strategy is to have two announcements. The first should appear ten to fourteen days in advance of the meeting, and the second should run one to three days before the day of the meeting.

NOTE: Include a copy of the public meeting announcement/advertisement that appeared in the newspaper or other media outlet in the master plan. (Either a copy of the ad or a “proof of publication” notice are acceptable).

To promote public meetings, it is recommended that you also take advantage of multiple types of media coverage, including local TV/cable access channels, the internet, and local radio stations. Social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram can be very effective at sharing meeting times/locations.

A press release, properly formatted and sent to these sources, is a very effective method of announcing your message. A few news release guidelines to remember are:

- Issue the release on official stationery, place a centered headline at the top of the first page
- Write “For Release”, along with the date to be released in the upper left hand corner
- Place the name of a contact person in the upper right hand corner
- Include the most important information first by using “Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How”
- State your message briefly in double-spaced text, do not exceed two pages
- Mail, email, or hand deliver the release at least four days in advance of the scheduled release date
- Follow-up by telephone to verify if a reporter will be available to cover the meeting
- Share additional opportunities for public comment or online comment websites with the media, so that they can write them into their reported stories

Interviews (Focus Groups)

Personal interviews tend to get the most reliable information. This is a good option for those planners who have more time, staff, or volunteers available to conduct the interviews. This is an option that is often used as an additional public input method when low turnouts for public meetings and low response rates to traditional surveys occur. Types of personal interview include:

- **Individual stakeholder interviews** Collect information from individual people that have a ‘stake’ or some kind of personal involvement in some aspect of parks and recreation in your community. Including agency representatives from competing organizations and groups often provides different perspectives and can encourage potential cooperation/partnerships.

- **Park employee interviews** are useful since they gather information directly from the people that work with park and recreation users on a daily basis, and know about successes and failures of current policy/procedures/facilities/programs.
- **Focus group interviews at your parks**, in this case refer to interviews of small-to-medium sized groups of people, often gathered from community organizations. One way to find these groups is to speak with the administrators of various social, governmental, service, and recreation-related agencies from your community (such as Area Council on Aging, city council, Kiwanis, Lions, Boy's and Girl's Clubs or YWCA). Request permission for your interviewer to ask a group of 5 to 30 of their members a short series of questions.
- **Attend regularly-scheduled local organization meetings, and (with advance permission), interview their members on the spot.** Even really small towns have community organizations that have their own meetings of some sort: PTO/PTA, Kiwanis, Lions, Public Schools, Garden Clubs, Political groups, Hobbyist Groups, Private Schools, Churches, Sports leagues, Historical societies, Colleges/Universities, Senior Centers, Single Parent support groups, United Way organizations, etc. Call them up, and ask their advance permission to sit in on their next scheduled meeting, and take ten minutes of their time to ask the group as a whole a short list of your best survey questions; tally the answers, and how many folks were there. Attend 3-5 diverse meetings around town for 15 minutes each, and you'd be amazed how good a survey sample you get. This can also be done at popular local coffee shops/cafes (with the owner's advance permission/cooperation).
- **Special events/parades/festivals/community celebrations** Whenever your community has a special event/celebration/parade, it's a golden opportunity to get a couple folks from your board out there to ask the citizens at the event if they'd be willing to answer some questions. (You can use existing random public input surveys as a guide.) Take notes about what folks say, and how many responded, and write it up afterwards as part of your public input. This could be easily done at a clearly-marked 'booth', or by interviewers walking around with surveys on a clipboard.
- **Leverage food as a means to attract a crowd** Food is a wonderful way to attract a crowd; hold an ice cream social/chili supper/pancake breakfast (or even better, partner/work with one that an established community group in town already has; any school, church, or scout 'fundraiser meal' events coming up?), and 'work the crowd' asking questions as noted above. Record the answers, and approximately how many folks responded. You'd be amazed how many people \$75 worth of ice cream and sundae toppings can attract.

A helpful tip is to use the same short, basic questionnaire for both the interviews and the random public survey, which allows you to statistically cross-compare the results from the two different public input methods.

Surveys

Conducting a survey is a very useful way of collecting information about your planning area. Surveys are a major source of information about the attitudes of the community toward parks and recreation in your area. The process of administering a survey involves several steps requiring careful preparation. The more organized and prepared you are before you begin your survey, the more smoothly the whole process will run.

The kind of information you want to collect and the resources you have available to devote to the survey will largely determine the type of survey you do. There are four basic ways to conduct your survey: mail, phone, internet, and user-intercept.

- **Mail surveys** - generally considered to be the easiest to administer. They can be as simple as a brief questionnaire mailed out, printed in a local paper, or included as a newspaper/municipal utility bill insert. Some problems associated with mail surveys include:
 - Respondents must return them
 - Low response rate
 - Responses are usually heavily biased towards park users
- **Phone surveys** - provide a better chance of getting responses from a broad range of people, are labor intensive, and can be very expensive to conduct. Phone surveys present additional problems not only for the respondent, but also for the interviewer. Caution must be used in order to prevent influencing the participant's responses. Try to convince them their input is important, but do not force them to answer a question they do not want to answer. A bad or false answer is worse than no answer at all. Try not to call during established mealtimes or on Sundays.
- **Internet (web-based) surveys** - becoming more popular, offer an alternative to traditional survey methods, can have skewed respondent demographics. Be aware that this kind of survey tends to appeal to a younger, wealthier, more technology-savvy respondent. Web-based surveys tend to exclude residents who are: low-income, speak English-as-a second-language, the elderly, and those who don't have high-speed internet access.
- **User-intercept surveys in your parks** - a time-honored low-cost method. They take a lot of time, interrupt personal time of park users, and quality of the result depends on the skills of the person administering the interview. In this method, the interviewer randomly chooses users in park system settings and asks them to participate in a short survey/interview. The two most common methods involve either the person being surveyed filling out their own paper survey, or the interviewer asks questions and writes down the user's answers as they are given. Courtesy and professionalism are musts! A variation of this method is to simply hand out written invitations for

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respondents to go do an online survey or online comment site. The demographic limitations described above apply to any online survey.

- **Public intercept surveys at special events** – similar to user-intercept surveys, but are done by interviewers working at community special events, either in a marked booth or by wandering surveyors working the crowd. The same limitations and methods apply. The advantage to this sort of thing is having a larger crowd available to invite to take the survey than would usually be available in most parks during an ordinary day. Another advantage is the possibility of surveying people who don't actually use the parks, and finding out why.

Once you have decided which method you will use to conduct your survey, you are ready to prepare the questionnaire:

- Write down all of the questions you *would like to ask* the members of your community.
- Prepare a draft questionnaire with all of the questions from that list that you *would like to have answered*.
 - As you create each question, ask yourself how the responses will be used
 - If you are not sure if the responses will provide useful information (Remember: interesting is not the same as useful!), then reword the question, or remove it entirely
- Keep the questionnaire short while still asking for the information you need
 - It should be no longer than two or three pages (20 to 25 questions maximum; 10 questions is far better)
 - The shorter your questionnaire, the better your return rate will be. It will need to be even shorter if you have the survey printed in the newspaper.
- Never give "grants and donations" as a multiple-choice selection for a "how should we fund our parks" question, as those are not sustainable or realistic ways to pay for operations and maintenance of a park system. Use some variation of "after first having applied for all available grants and donations, what types of funding sources should Schmoville use to pay for our parks?" People falsely assume that grants and donations are "free money" that magically puts the burden on paying for public parks on someone else.
- Have members of your staff review the draft survey for question clarification.
- Test it on several random members of the community.
- Re-word or drop any questions that were repeatedly misunderstood or left unanswered.

You are now ready to choose your sample. For the sample to be random, every individual in the planning area has to have an equal chance of being selected to participate in the survey. Random sampling can be systematic, for example:

- Stratify your sample by selecting equal proportions of people from different areas or "segments" within the planning area.
- Draw numbers out of a hat, or use a random numbers table.

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- There are companies that will quickly provide randomized survey contact lists, in areas that you designate, for a fee.
- You may consider using statistical equations to help you select the type and size of sample you use based on the total population of your planning area.

Your goal should be 50 to 70% of the questionnaires returned in a usable (fully completed) form. This takes planning and organization, but it is possible. Your primary goal is to get enough responses to draw reliable conclusions about public recreation opinions. If you get fewer than 35% of the returns back, it will be risky to draw conclusions that apply to the entire population in your planning area. This does not, however, mean that the information is useless. Your survey can still give insight into recreation issues.

You are now ready to administer the questionnaire. You *want* people in your planning area to be aware of your public input process, *so use mass media to advertise the survey.*

NOTE: If people are alerted ahead of time, they will be more prepared to participate when the survey is conducted. Include in the announcement the date the survey will be conducted, the types of questions that will be asked, the anonymity of the survey, and how the results will be used. Newspaper and TV news stories are a great way to do this.

Most surveys are conducted so that the respondents remain anonymous, and the data is only reported in aggregate. Include this in the advertising. Stress the anonymity of the questionnaires. Make it clear that the respondents are helping you by returning or completing the survey *and* that their privacy will be respected. Using code numbers instead of names on each survey response will help keep track of the returns while maintaining anonymity.

Once you have the survey returns you are ready to analyze the data. Begin with calculating basic statistics such as averages and percentages for each question. It will also be beneficial to calculate the percentages of people who responded in a particular way to certain questions. This may be especially helpful when you try to identify facility needs and predict future participation. During data analysis, it can be helpful to cross-tabulate answers across the various types of public input; this is why you may wish to re-use the same basic survey questionnaire for all types of public input (except public meetings).

If the results from multiple surveys or survey types are extremely different, it may indicate that further research is needed. If results are comparable across different types of surveys and across different demographics, your results can be considered valid, complete, and accurate.

For more information related to survey methods, please see the IDNR Master Planning Frequently Asked Questions document online at: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/planning/park-planning-information-and-guidelines/> under the “Relevant Documents” link.

Needs Analysis

One of the most important and difficult tasks in parks and recreation planning is to analyze the recreation needs of your community. Think of this section as “distilling” down all the analysis and strategies created in each of the earlier sections of the plan into common themes, broad analytical ideas, and strategic options. Needs analyses describe and project:

- Recreation behavior and need
- Participation and user preference
- Causes of nonuse or lack of public engagement
- The needs of unique or underserved populations

Communities differ in their recreational needs and priorities; therefore, IDNR-SP-CGT does not endorse one needs assessment method or set of standards over another, but encourages communities to discover what best suits their interests, finances, and decision making. Your master plan must include a description of the method (or methods) used to establish your recreation needs, and why a chosen method best applies to your community. From these needs (facilities, programs, and administration), you will identify priorities and recommend actions to satisfy the need. The actions suggested should agree with the goals listed earlier in the park board information gathering section.

Measuring public need requires a combination of thorough analysis, a defined method and common sense. Analysis of public need, in part, should include consideration of the results of your previous public *input* processes.

Some examples of needs analysis methods are:

1. Level of Service (LOS) Standards for Parks and Open Space
2. Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)
3. Issue Analysis.

Level of Service (LOS) Standards for Parks and Open Space is a method developed by the National Recreation and Park Association. It guides communities to set local standards based on expressed public need, values, and expectations, and is expressed in acres/1000 people. The method requires an assessment of existing facilities, public input, and the ability to measure and prioritize needs. LOS allows communities to establish what is best for its citizens, what they can afford, and how to strategically plan for the cost of needed facilities. The process is described in *Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines* by James D. Mertes and James R. Hall, (edited by Roger Lancaster) and first published by the National Recreation and Parks Association in 1983.

The IDNR has also adopted its own aspirational Level of Service standard as published in the Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). See the latest SCORP for IDNR LOS recommendations and discussions of statewide supply of outdoor recreation acres by both County and Region, including IDNR’s “Critical Counties” data. The

latest Indiana SCORP can be found here: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/planning/scorp/>

The Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) was established by the USDA Forest Service to determine the types of recreational opportunities needed to achieve their recreational goals. It is based on six rating classes that range from urban to primitive, and on indicators such as access, social encounters and visitor impacts. ROS is best suited for large scale, natural resource based recreation sites. A description of ROS is available on various web sites, or is available in Charles I. Zinser's book "Outdoor Recreation: United States National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands" (published by John Wiley and Sons, 1995).

Issue Analysis uses the information collected for the master plan to identify and resolve needs, problems and conflicts (e.g., a park is not accessible, there are not enough soccer fields for a growing community, or residents want a kids summer day-camp program). Some issues may already be evident to the park board and the park administration, or they may appear in the public participation process. Briefly analyze each issue and discuss options and opportunities for resolving them. This particular analysis process is best when it uses a breakdown of where each issue came from, a brief synopsis of where in the planning process the issue/analysis emerged, and any potential strategic answers (obtained from the earlier sections of the plan, and keyed to those sections) came up in the overall planning process over time. It often helps to document in this section which needs and attendant strategies came from the park board, park staff, stakeholders, general public, or special interest groups. Weighting or starting a basic prioritizing of these issues, analytics, and strategies can also be helpful, but be sure to include your detailed weighting methodology and math to maintain clarity and transparency of the process.

New Facilities Location Map

Include a map showing the location of proposed parks and expansions to existing parks. You may wish to be site specific or show the general vicinity needing a new park.

NOTE: The map of proposed future park sites may be combined with the map of existing recreation sites required in the inventory section.

Priorities and Action Schedule

So far you have examined the planning area, incorporated public input, identified needs and issues and recommended strategies to accomplish the park board's goals. You can now designate priorities to be achieved over the next five years. The priorities should be limited to a workable number which can be realistically accomplished. Consider time, money, and resources carefully. Each priority should be achievable by completing your specific actions.

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Briefly state the priorities in narrative form. Refer to the Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), and if any of your priorities correspond to the priorities listed in the state plan, it should be noted. You should also list any necessary accessibility modifications/additions to your park facilities, programs, activities, services, and policies to ensure your agency is in compliance with the ABA/ADA/Rehab. Act.

NOTE: Remember, projects for which you intend to apply for grant funding should be listed in this schedule. Local park department grant applications receive additional points for projects that were listed in the priority and action schedule of their master plan.

Using the action schedule format, provide the following information:

- **Year:** Include the estimated start date. If the project duration will exceed one year, note the completion date.
- **Site:** Indicate the name of the park, or if unnamed, indicate the future park location. You may wish to identify the general area to avoid land speculation.
- **Action:** List the specific task to be accomplished (such as: capital improvements, land acquisition, renovation, etc.)
- **Cost estimate:** Estimate the cost of completion for the action or project. Be sure to take inflation into consideration.
- **Potential source of funding:** Identify the probable origin of money for completing the action. Do not depend totally on the availability of grant funds. To be realistic, local funding sources and potential donations should be the primary fund sources.

Sample Priority Action Schedule:

Year	Site	Action	Cost Estimate	Potential Source of Funds
2022	All	Administrative Priorities ADA Compliance	\$5,000 \$7,500	Operating Budget Operating Budget
2023	System	Develop Five Year Master Plan	\$1,000	Operating Budget
2024	Central Park	Construct New Soccer Fields and Parking.	\$25,000	Donations, Operating Budget, Fundraising, IHT Grant
2025	O&R Rail Corridor	Purchase and Develop Bike Trail	\$125,000	Operating Budget, RTP Grant
2026	Memorial Woods Park	Develop Nature Trail, Restrooms, and Playground	\$100,000	Bond Issue, LWCF Grant

Final Public Presentation of the Plan

The public should be provided one last opportunity to provide feedback and comment on the draft plan prior to its adoption by the park board. Another name for this last public input step is the final public comment period. Several weeks prior to the park board's scheduled plan adoption meeting, the latest version of the draft plan should be made available for public feedback. This provides a final opportunity for the public to check the accuracy of, and verify their agreement with the reported public input results, needs assessment and priorities.

Several possible methods of doing this are:

- Hold a last public meeting, where the plan's results are shared, and the attendees are asked to verify them
- Place multiple copies of the draft plan at strategic locations in your area, along with blank comment sheets, a reporting website or email address, or a telephone number for comment submission
- Place multiple copies of the plan on different websites, such as the local government's site, the park system's site, the local library's site, the local school district's site, and take digital or written comments via e-mail, social media, or comments made to a specific webpage.

Make sure that your method is carefully advertised, to ensure that the community has full opportunity for last-minute feedback. No matter what type of final plan presentation or comment period takes place, note the date/place/time/method, gather up the last comments, and the number of public responses (in the same manner as in the main public input section), at the end of the public input section of your master plan.

Plan Evaluation

Finally, explain how and when the park board will continue to evaluate its progress over the next five years. Evaluation of the effectiveness of your plan will help your park department maintain its ability to provide quality services and facilities. A periodic review of the master plan and consideration of continual public input will help determine where to focus your efforts while you complete your priority projects, and can help determine future projects.

NOTE: IDNR LOVES ELECTRONIC PLAN SUBMISSIONS!

Please send IDNR-SP-CGT an electronic copy of your plan via e-mail (WORD or PDF). Do NOT use "Dropbox", "Syncplicity", or similar document exchange websites, as the State's Office of Information Technology has barred IDNR from accepting documents from those sites for security reasons. Large files may be broken up and e-mailed separately, in several pieces of up to 20MB in size, usually with no problem. If you save your plan using low-resolution images, the file size becomes more manageable, and can usually be kept under 20 MB. Contact IDNR-SP-CGT's planning

staff if you have difficulties e-mailing your plan copy, and we will work out alternatives.

Updating the Plan between Planning Cycles

Sometimes circumstances change the priorities for your five-year planning period. Significant budget changes, for one example, may cause you to reevaluate your priorities and make an amendment to your plan. When this happens, plan amendments incorporating the revised priorities may be submitted to the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails at any time.

NOTE: Please keep in mind that amendments alone will not extend the five-year LWCF eligibility of your recreation master plan.

Formal amendments to your plan are required if they involve projects proposed in grant applications requiring a five-year master plan. The competitiveness and eligibility of a grant application depends in part on the project being included as a priority in the park board's master plan. If a project is not originally in the plan, it is important that the project be added by a plan amendment. In general, master plan amendments may be submitted at any time. **Amendments must be approved in writing by IDNR-SP-CGT planning staff; contact us directly for arrangements.**

NOTE: Master plan amendments submitted to IDNR-SP-CGT for the purpose of a adding or modifying a community's future grant project within the existing approved master plan must be submitted and approved by IDNR-SP-CGT planning staff prior to the grant program's application deadline. Amendments, like updates, will NOT re-set the 5-year plan's timing or expiration date.

To amend the master plan, several items need to be submitted to the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails:

1. A brief explanation of the reason(s) for the amendment
2. Documentation of the public input which went into the amendment process
3. The new plan pages, containing any changes or additions
4. A resolution passed by the park board adopting the plan as amended. This will make the revised plan an official document of the park board

How to go from a “good enough” park plan to a terrific one!

DNR hopes that each new plan will improve on the last one, and become more detailed, complex, and better analyzed (which tends to result in better action plans that better serve real community needs).

The best future hint DNR can give for these plans is that the plans can always use more of the ‘backbone’ items, which ultimately make the plans more utilitarian to the community:

- More input opportunities and more diverse public input (it’s almost impossible to have too much or too diverse a set of input)
- Additional types of needs assessment/scoping: such as benchmarking of similar communities, a SWOT assessment, and locally-created Level of Service standards (or improvement/alteration of previous locally-created LOS standards). Not all of these are necessary, but over time through many planning cycles, adding more datasets can make your scoping more accurate and reflective of the overall park system context, including a regional view.
- More detailed analysis of all the data contained in the plan (answer “why is this data important?” as well as “if it’s important, what should I do about it?”)
- More detailed brainstorming of strategic possibilities. Take the issues emerging from the analysis, and carefully think about potential solutions and how you could implement them.

“**Acceptable**” park plans meet DNR’s minimums. Truly **good** plans meet the minimums and go beyond to seek more detailed understanding of the overall fabric of the park system and the community as a whole. **Exceptional** plans are the ones that go to the highest level of awareness of community attributes, then deeply analyze those attributes and strategically utilize that analysis to inform and guide the action plan, both short and long-term.

Example of shallow data gathering, analysis, and strategizing:

1. Data point: Schmoburg’s average resident age is 45 years old, and 45% of their population is over 55.
2. Bare minimum analysis: “Our Schmoburg population is aging, so the department should consider senior programs.”
3. Bare minimum strategic action based on analysis: “Schmoburg will create two new regularly scheduled senior-oriented programs beginning next April.”

Brief example of deeper (and therefore much more meaningful and useful) data gathering, analysis, and strategizing: “The population of Schmoburg above 45 years of age has increased 22% over the past ten years, and shows indications that the percentage of senior population of the town will likely increase significantly for the next twenty years at a minimum. Given that the park department has never had more than one or two senior programs in any single year, it is recommended that the department train the staff to offer programs of both more diverse generational appeal, and more specifically senior oriented programs and services. The census data also shows that the majority of the senior population in Schmoburg is aging “in place,” likely in response to the high cost of nursing homes and specialized senior living options. This would indicate that the dispersed nature of “aging in place” seniors will have significant effects on many community-derived services

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and programs, such as the Meals on Wheels program operated out of the Schmoburg Parks community center kitchen, the Greater Schmoburg Area on Aging mobility bus system for access to all public park programs and services across Schmoburg, and the sidewalk/trail network in Schmoburg for park access. The town should keep in mind that older these seniors get, the more their mobility is likely to be affected (making both facility AND program accessibility and universal design into a very critical issue), as well as the increasing likelihood that they will eventually have to give up their cars due to vision/hearing/judgment/reaction time problems (which makes them very dependent in bicycle/pedestrian options and mass transit). The Schmoburg parks should anticipate the increasing costs of operations and maintenance/staffing for the needed infrastructure to support these changing demographics, and proactively respond to this growing need area in the community. See the needs assessment for cost estimates for supporting these operations and maintenance and staff adjustments.”

Optional Additional Park Planning Tools: SWOT and Benchmarking

The following park planning tools are NOT required for IDNR approval of submitted park plans. However, these tools, or similar methods of park system analysis, can offer a community priceless opportunities to measure themselves against other communities, and better anticipate future strategies to effectively manage and grow their community and park system.

Additional Planning Tools: the S.W.O.T. Analysis

The “S.W.O.T. Analysis” is commonly attributed to a business consultant named Albert S. Humphrey, during the 1960s. “SWOT” is an acronym; it stands for: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. A SWOT analysis is nothing more than an assessment tool that looks at both the internal and external environments and factors that face organizations, and allows users to analyze them strategically.

In a nutshell, SWOT is used like this: an organization will list all the strengths and weaknesses that exist within the organization itself (internal factors; mostly pre-existing, and/or current). Then the organization will list all the opportunities and threats that exist or come from outside the organization (external factors; mostly current and future potential). Once all these internal and external factors are listed, it becomes fairly easy to cross-compare the two lists, and brainstorm ways to minimize, fix, or eliminate the weaknesses and threats, and expand and capitalize on the strengths and opportunities. The secret to success in a SWOT is to keep it simple (starting with concise, bulleted lists works well), and be unflinchingly honest in assessing your organization. A SWOT should bluntly acknowledge the real-world deficiencies and threats faced by your organization, and conservatively estimate your strengths and opportunities. An unrealistic, “rose-colored glasses” SWOT not only gives you no real solutions, it may aggravate existing organizational problems by ignoring otherwise manageable changes or situations. Here is an example of a simple SWOT analysis using the “Anytown, Indiana Park and Recreation Department (APRD)” (From the IDNR “Anytown, Indiana Example 5-year Parks and Recreation Plan”) as the organization:

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INTERNAL FACTORS

Strengths:

- Small, tightly-focused department with only 8 parks to maintain/operate
- Enthusiastic friends group and volunteer base to draw help from
- Three professional, degreed/trained full-time park staff
- Dedicated park board with long-serving members who truly love the APRD
- Heavily-used park system, with popular programs and services

Weaknesses:

- Ongoing budget cuts
- Political and personal infighting between park board and city council (Council has threatened to eliminate the board)
- Lack of accessible play features and playgrounds AND poor playground safety
- Only 48 acres of public outdoor recreation land for a population of almost 19,000

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Opportunities:

- Park system could use 332 more park acres to meet IDNR Level of Service recommendations (20 Acres/1,000 people recommended; or 380 acres, total for Anytown)
- Anytown still has some amount of undeveloped open space left within the City limits; some of this space is wooded, some is along Anytown Creek, and even some small prairie remnants
- The Anytown Park Fund at the Anytown Community Foundation now has over \$35,000 in it; could be used as grant match or to fund desperately needed facility upgrades
- Anytown's School District has offered to partner with APRD to create an official joint use agreement to share outdoor recreation facilities and programs, as well as programming opportunities and maintenance sharing

Threats:

- Recently elected city council persons had campaigned on the promise to "shrink Anytown government spending and taxes at all costs"; beginning with the schools and parks
- A brand new YMCA was just built next door to the aging and small Anytown Community Center building located in Anytown Park
- Heroin use in the greater Anytown area is skyrocketing, and Hoosier County has been forced to start a needle-exchange program just to attempt to stop the spread of HIV and other blood-borne pathogens

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- Hoosier County has been recognized as one of the most obese counties in Indiana by the Indiana State Dept. of Health

BRAINSTORMING ANALYSIS and STRATEGIES

Ideas from the SWOT:

- Use community economic development and population/business attraction as levers to convince the tax-averse new city council members that expanding the park system carefully over time is an investment in the city, not a waste of taxpayer money; use the Parks Fund as a springboard, and grant match.
- Seek land donations from willing donors for park expansions, especially of undeveloped land in the more “natural” areas of the city.
- Continue to leverage volunteer and friends group work to improve maintenance and safety of park features when possible.
- Consider cooperative efforts between the APRD and the Anytown Schools (Joint use agreement), and the Hoosier County Health Department (anti-drug programs, DARE, obesity programs, wellness programs, etc.)
- Consider expanding programs in APRD parks that emphasize the sports and activities that the YMCA does not offer (such as soccer, disc golf, fishing, and Tai Chi.)

Additional Planning Tools: Benchmarking

Benchmarking is another tool for park planners that permit a community to measure its own progress and infrastructure against a group of “peer” communities. The concept is pretty simple: look around your community, and select multiple communities that are at least roughly the same size and disposition as yours. In other words, if your park system is in a rural town of 8,000 people in a mostly rural county in one corner of Indiana, try to find some similar communities, both within your county, and in other counties in the region to compare yourselves against. It doesn’t hurt to pick at least one community that offers a really positive example to emulate such as a booming local economy, fast population growth, or a really well-run, professional, popular park system.

Be careful not to pick communities that are *too* different from yours (such as much larger or smaller than yours), or that have traits that your community cannot match (such as huge funding sources that you do not have), as that sets your community up to mistakenly look like a failure. It’s also better to resist adding benchmark communities from too far away, as the unique regional differences between your community and theirs create another kind of unfair comparison. Imagine comparing Fort Wayne, Indiana against Anchorage, Alaska; they’re less than 40,000 residents different in size, but comparing Indiana versus Alaska offers such huge differences in climate, geography, socio-economics, infrastructure, etc., that the comparison is nearly worthless. Benchmarking against similar communities in adjoining states may work well, so long as they are reasonably similar in most respects.

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To create a benchmark analysis, a community carefully selects a list of communities to acquire data from, researches those communities and collects the benchmark data, and arranges the data into a simple table to allow for easy comparison. For a first-time benchmark analysis, it is best to keep the benchmark criterion simple, and few in number. Some of the most basic benchmark criterion might include:

- Population of community
- Median household income in community
- Percentage population growth in that community since the last census
- Number of parks in each community/Total acres of public park land
- Number of full-time employees in the park system
- Total yearly budget of the park system
- Any finer details that you wish to explore (such as number of public pools or splash-pads, or some other specific amenity or program).

Here is an example of a simple benchmark analysis using the “Anytown, Indiana Park and Recreation Department (APRD)” (From the IDNR “Anytown, Indiana Example 5-year Parks and Recreation Plan”) as the organization completing the benchmarking:

Community:	Anytown, IN	Schmoburg, IN	Other City, IN
Population	18,500	14,799	20,007
Median household Income	\$43,000	\$52,000	\$39,000
% population growth since last Census	2.5%	-3.7%	4.8%
Number of Parks	8	5	10
Total Acres of Public Park Land	48	20	65
Number of Full-time employees	3	0 (Parks maintained by streets dept.)	6
Total yearly park budget	\$142,000	\$50,000	\$250,000
Number of softball fields	2	2	4 (set up as a “tournament cloverleaf”)

Once you have the data arranged in a table, analysis of the data becomes easy. For example, if you divide each community’s yearly park budget by their population, you get the yearly park expenditure per resident; a measure that allows you to compare how much financial support each community affords their parks: Other City spends \$12.49 per resident, Anytown spends \$7.67 per resident, while Schmoburg spends the least, at \$3.37 per resident. Cross-comparing the communities is very simple once the data is arranged like this. Anytown can now see that they are seeing good growth, and good median income,

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while somewhat behind in acreage, budget, and softball fields, when compared to Other City. Compared to Anytown, Schmoberg is wealthier, but the declining population is a red flag that Schmoberg may not be investing that wealth in its future. Benchmarking can be as long or as complex as your community needs it to be. Keep in mind that it can become too complex to easily see differences between the communities. Benchmark data is another planning analysis tool that can be added to the needs analysis in your community's plan, and offers yet another way to measure your level of success in service delivery in your park system.

Chapter Three: Sources of Funding

The Indiana State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is Part of the IDNR-SP-CGT Grants Programs

The National Park Service (NPS) requires the completion of a 5-Year Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) to remain eligible for Land & Water Conservation Funds. The statewide priorities outlined in this plan are used in the development of the LWCF grant rating formula used by IDNR-SP-CGT. This helps to objectively determine which local project grant applications receive funding. A copy of the SCORP can be obtained online at: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/planning/scorp/> . The SCORP contains lots of useful data for park planners, including public outdoor recreation acreage supply data shown by county and region.

Local Plans and Grant Sources

It may be advantageous for your community's park system to investigate a variety of funding sources. Grants or funding are available from many sources, including (but not limited to):

- State agencies
- Federal agencies
- Private agencies
- Non-profits
- Foundations and Philanthropic organizations
- Businesses or corporations

NOTE: Sources of funding available this year may not be offered next year; this is especially true with grants requiring government appropriations. You will need to verify which grants are funded and currently being offered before you apply.

Many grant programs award points in the evaluation process for having a master plan and/or a public input process. Other points may be awarded in the grant evaluation process for a potential grant project being included in your master plan. Keep in mind that ADA/ABA/Section 504 accessibility compliance is a federal requirement, and therefore is a significant consideration in rating these potential projects.

The following is a brief description of some funding sources you may want to utilize.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Since 1965, the LWCF program has been instrumental in land protection and outdoor recreation development. On the national level, it acquires land for the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the USDA Forest Service. It

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also benefits state and local governments by providing 50%/50% matching reimbursement grants for outdoor recreation and park land acquisition and facility development. The minimum grant amount is \$50,000 with a maximum award of \$250,000. Indiana has benefited from LWCF more than any other grant program. Through the program's first 54 years in Indiana, more than 530 grant projects have been approved, with over 30,000 acres of park land acquired, totaling over \$90 million dollars.

There are two eligibility requirements, which must be met in order to receive LWCF assistance:

1. The applicant must be an established town, city, township, or county park and recreation board legally established under Indiana Code, (typically under IC.36-10-3) See Chapter One for a description of the basic requirements for park board statutory compliance under Indiana Law.
2. The park board must have an IDNR-SP-CGT approved five-year park and recreation master plan on file

Indiana Trails Program (ITP; formerly known as RTP)

The Indiana Trails Program is a new trails grant program that replaced the Recreational Trails Program in 2021. The new ITP program will be similar to Indiana's former RTP and will still be administered by the IDNR's Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails. The main difference is that funds for ITP will now be state dollars rather than federal funds. The switch to state funds will streamline grant and program administration for IDNR and INDOT, saving significant time and money. This allows more of the grant money to build trails with the same funds in a shorter timeline. All units of government and agencies incorporated as 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporations are eligible to apply. A current IDNR-approved parks and recreation master plan on file with the IDNR-SP-CGT is not required, but is highly recommended. The ITP program provides 80%/20% reimbursement/match local grants for eligible projects. No funds will be disbursed up front. The minimum grant amount is \$50,000 with a maximum award of \$250,000.

Eligible land acquisition and/or development projects must provide public access to trails for user-groups, alone or in combination. These user groups are represented by the Indiana Trails Advisory Board (TAB). The TAB represents different interests including: hikers, OHV users, bicyclists, trail users with disabilities, equestrians, sport enthusiasts, snowmobile riders, and environmentalists.

Representative ITP projects include:

- Trail development
- Land purchase
- Bridges, Boardwalks, and Crossings
- Development of trailheads and other support facilities (parking, water fountains,

benches, signage, etc.)

The DNR Shooting Range Program

The DNR Shooting Range Grant Program offers assistance to all units of government, and agencies incorporated as 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporations open to the public at least 20 hours per month, for the development of rifle, handgun, shotgun, and archery facilities available to the public. The intent of this program is to train the public, hunter education, and provide additional safe places for target practice. Eligible projects include:

- Development of backstops
- Target holders
- Field courses
- Classrooms
- Sanitary facilities
- Accessible pathways

NOTE: Land acquisition is not eligible for reimbursement under this program

For additional information concerning LWCF, ITP, or Shooting Range grants, contact:

IDNR Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails Grants Manager
402 W. Washington St., Room W271
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2782
(317) 232-4075

The IDNR main Community Grants website can be found here: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/grants/>

President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust (HCT)

The Indiana General Assembly created the Indiana Heritage Trust (IHT) in 1992 for the sole purpose of buying land from willing sellers to protect Indiana's rich natural heritage. The Indiana General Assembly re-created the IHT in 2016 as the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust (HCT), with a name change, streamlined review and recommendation process, new project committee structures, and adjusted criteria for the 10 gubernatorial appointees. It is funded by the sale of environmental license plates, general appropriations, and contributions from corporations, foundations, and individuals. Representative projects include the purchase of properties that have examples of outstanding natural or cultural features, and provide areas for conservation, recreation, and restoration of native biological diversity. Since the beginning of the program, the trust has acquired more than 50,000 acres.

For additional information, contact:

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President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust
402 W. Washington St., Room W256
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(317) 233-1002

Wabash River Heritage Corridor Fund (WRHCF)

The Indiana General Assembly created the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission and the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Fund in 1990 to assist conservation and recreational development along the Wabash River corridor. The communities along the river defined the program's vision for a Wabash River Corridor that improves the natural environment, promotes recreation, increases public awareness, encourages the purchase and development of trails and recreational areas, promotes a better environmental ethic and promotes cooperation between all groups and individuals with an interest in the corridor. Visit the fund's web page at: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/grants/wabash-river-heritage-corridor-fund/>

To be eligible for WRHCF funds, applicants must be a town, city, township, 501(c)(3) non-profit, or county, and be one (or be inside one) of the nineteen counties along the Wabash River corridor. Projects must be in Indiana, and located within the strip of land abutting the Wabash River, the Little River, or the historic portage to the Maumee River. Representative projects include land purchases, trail construction, and development of recreational facilities. All project sponsors may submit one application per grant year. The WRHCF program provides 80%/20% reimbursement/match local grants for eligible projects. The minimum grant funding request is \$50,000; the maximum is \$150,000.

For additional information, contact:

IDNR Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails Grants Manager
402 W. Washington St., Room W271
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2782
(317) 232-4075

Typical Master Plan and Grant Project Application Cycle

1. **Legally establish a park board under Indiana State Code** (usually IC 36-10-3 or 36-10-4) to qualify for LWCF. A legally established park board is also highly recommended for WRHCF grant programs. The IDNR-SP-CGT LWCF grant program requires applications from a park board legally established under current Indiana law. If the local park board is recently established, a notarized copy of the ordinance doing so must be submitted to the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails. This can be done any time prior to submitting the master plan.
2. **Submit a draft master plan (November 15th deadline)**. If your park board

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intends to submit an application for IDNR-SP-CGT grants requiring a master plan, a draft of the local five-year parks and recreation master plan must be submitted to the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails by November 15th of the year before they want to become LWCF-eligible. The draft should address all the criteria listed in this guide, as well as meeting the IDNR plan first draft submission guideline minimums available on the website: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/planning/park-planning-information-and-guidelines/>

3. **Plan for the grant application.** The park board should begin working on their construction plans, estimates for land acquisition, development cost estimates, early environmental analysis and public input for the grant application. If a project is funded, many of these are eligible for reimbursement
4. **Request a Grant Application.** Applications for IDNR-SP-CGT Grant programs are available online at: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/state-parks/recreation/grants/> . Each online application contains the directions and forms necessary to submit the project application. Contact IDNR-SP-CGT for the current status of grant programs and consultation on your proposed project
5. **Make and submit master plan revisions (April 15th deadline).** In November, the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails will review and comment on the draft of your local five-year parks and recreation master plan. After receiving these comments, revisions to the master plan should be made by the park board. A copy of the final plan should be submitted to the Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails by the deadline. Signed original hard copies of both the park board resolution adopting the plan and the accessibility sign off sheet can be sent to IDNR either before IDNR's final plan approval , or soon after
6. **Submit grant project applications** for review by their individual deadline dates (see the grant information for deadline dates for each grant)
7. **Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails review.** The grant application is reviewed by the IDNR-SP-CGT for eligibility. At that time, additional information regarding the application may be requested from the project sponsor
8. **Site inspections.** The Division of State Parks, Community Grants and Trails staff will conduct a pre-award inspection of the project area
9. **Project rating.** Only complete project applications, from qualified applicants that have their share of the project costs available, will be rated. Project sponsors may be asked to withdraw a project that has not been adequately prepared or has too many unresolved issues. Only those projects, which rank high enough within the limit of available grant money, are recommended for funding
10. **State and Federal review/approval.** Depending upon the grant program, projects approved for funding are submitted to state or federal agencies for final review and approval. Acquisition or development may not begin before state and/or federal approval is received, as well as all environmental clearances and permitting

Grant writing facts and tips for beginners

The single largest issue communities likely will face in trying for grants is the match (50% in the case of the Land and Water Conservation Fund), and the fact that most federally-based grants are reimbursement grants: 100% of the cost of the project must be carried up front by the community, until the project has been completed, and the community is able to recover the reimbursable portion of the grant.

Here's some tips for successfully applying for grants:

- Have any legalities, eligibility requirements or pre-requisites to the grant application already completed prior to actual grant application.
- Fill out the paperwork on time, completely, and as instructed by the grantor. (If you don't know if something is right, ASK.)
- Provide all required information the grantor asks for.
- Meet with the grantor far in advance of the application to ensure that you understand the process, and exactly what they want and when.
- Complete any required advance planning or public input far in advance of the grant application; make sure that you can show adequate public support for the potential project, as well as the project's existence in current strategic planning. (Don't try to sell a grantor on a project that very few people in your community want or need.)
- Stay in touch with the grantor during the process and answer any queries or requests for more information in a timely manner.
- Make sure that you ask the grantor to work with you throughout the early stages of the grant-writing process, to ensure that your proposed grant project earns as many "grant criterion points" as possible; this objective numeric total is what decides the grant application competition.
- Have your match funds already prepared and waiting when the grant is applied for; especially "soft match" or potential in-kind/volunteer labor.
- Be fully prepared to show the ability to pay for the entire cost of reimbursement-based grants.
- Be fully prepared to show the ability to complete any required environmental/accessibility/financial reports required for the project.
- Be prepared for this process to take some time, but also prepared to expedite it as needed to prevent the project from running over deadlines.

Appendices

1. Five Year Park and Recreation Master Plan Checklist
2. Park Board Plan Adoption Resolution

IDNR 5-Year Park and Recreation Master Plan Checklist

Red (underlined) = Required data

***Blue (italics)* = Suggested additions**

Local Agency Name:

Plan Requirements _____ PAGE #

Definition of Planning Area	—
Goals of the Plan	—
Park Board/Department Info	—
Natural Features and Landscape	—
Man-made, Historical, and Cultural	—
Social and Economic Factors	—
Accessibility and Universal Design	—
Accessibility Compliance Sheet (original signatures)	—
Public Participation (Survey results, meetings, dates, agendas, minutes, etc.)	—
Needs Analysis (Methods and Results)	—
New/Existing Facilities Location Map	—
Priorities and Action Schedule	—
Final Public Presentation of Plan	—
Board Resolution Adopting Plan	—

General Comments:

Please feel free to call or e-mail us if you have any questions about your plan or the review process; we appreciate all your hard work, and look forward to your final draft.

SAMPLE PARK BOARD PLAN ACCEPTANCE RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the _____ Park and Recreation Board is aware of the parks and recreation needs of the residents of _____ Indiana, and

WHEREAS, the Board realizes the importance of sound planning in order to meet the needs of its citizens,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE _____ PARK AND RECREATION BOARD, by unanimous declaration, does adopt the _____ Park and Recreation Master Plan as its official plan for the next five years, for the growth and development of parks and recreational opportunities in _____, Indiana.

Passed and signed this _____ day of _____, 20____.

ATTEST:

Board President

Town Attorney