

SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS

Conference Guide

January 29-31, 2026

IAPD
Illinois Association of Park Districts

ILLINOIS
ipra
PARK & RECREATION ASSOCIATION



Hyatt Regency Chicago | 151 E. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois

ILparksconference.com

2026

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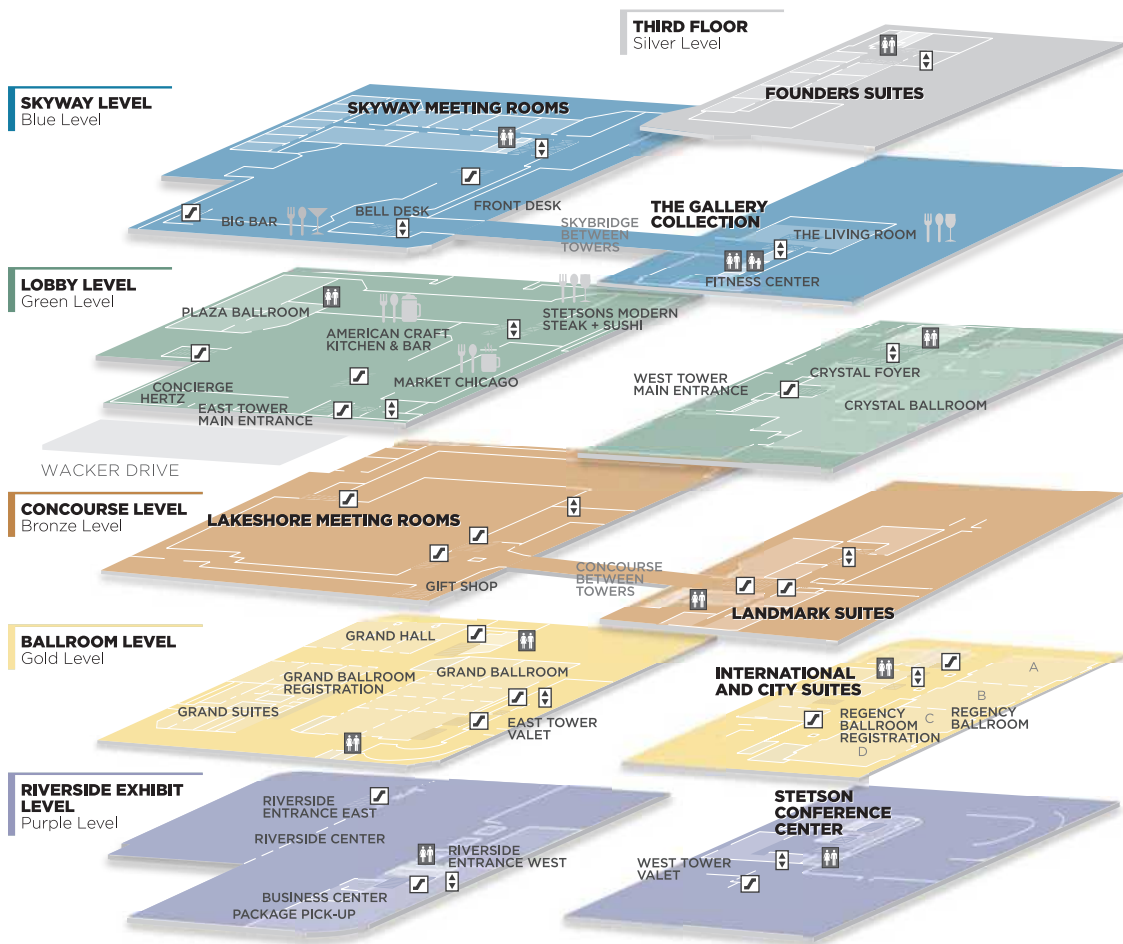
HYATT REGENCY CHICAGO

GUEST MAP

WELCOME TO HYATT REGENCY CHICAGO. Meeting rooms, ballrooms, restaurants and guest amenities are listed in alphabetical order and color coded by floor. For help, dial Guest Services at Extension 52.

EAST TOWER

WEST TOWER



ACAPULCO (*International and City Suites*)
West Tower, Ballroom Level

ADDAMS (*Founders Suites*)
West Tower, Third Floor

ADDAMS FOYER
West Tower, Third Floor

AMERICAN CRAFT KITCHEN & BAR
East Tower, Lobby Level

ATLANTA (*International and City Suites*)
West Tower, Ballroom Level

BELL DESK
East Tower, Skyway Level

BIG BAR
East Tower, Skyway Level

BURNHAM (*Founders Suites*)
West Tower, Third Floor

BUSINESS CENTER, PACKAGE ROOM
East Tower, Exhibit Level

COLUMBIAN (*Landmark Suites*)
West Tower, Concourse Level

COMISKEY (*Landmark Suites*)
West Tower, Concourse Level

CONCIERGE
East Tower, Lobby Level

CRYSTAL BALLROOM
West Tower, Lobby Level

DUSABLE (*Founders Suites*)
West Tower, Third Floor

EAST TOWER MAIN ENTRANCE
East Tower, Lobby Level

EAST TOWER VALET
East Tower, Ballroom Level

FIELD (*Founders Suites*)
West Tower, Third Floor

FITNESS CENTER
West Tower, Ballroom Level

FRONT DESK
East Tower, Skyway Level

THE GALLERY COLLECTION
West Tower, Skyway Level

GIFT SHOP
East Tower, Concourse Level

GOLD COAST (*Landmark Suites*)
West Tower, Concourse Level

GRAND BALLROOM
East Tower, Ballroom Level

GRAND HALL (ROOMS G-N)
East Tower, Ballroom Level

GRAND SUITES
East Tower, Ballroom Level

HAYMARKET (*Landmark Suites*)
West Tower, Concourse Level

HERTZ
East Tower, Lobby Level

HONG KONG (*International and City Suites*)
West Tower, Ballroom Level

HORNER (*Founders Suites*)
West Tower, Third Floor

THE LIVING ROOM
West Tower, Skyway Level

MARKET CHICAGO
East Tower, Lobby Level

MCCORMICK (*Founders Suites*)
West Tower, Third Floor

MICHIGAN (*Lakeshore Meeting Rooms*)
East Tower, Concourse Level

MONROE (*Lakeshore Meeting Rooms*)
East Tower, Concourse Level

NEW ORLEANS (*International and City Suites*)
West Tower, Ballroom Level

OGDEN (*Founders Suites*)
West Tower, Third Floor

PICASSO (*Landmark Suites*)
West Tower, Concourse Level

PLAZA BALLROOM
East Tower, Lobby Level

RANDOLPH (*Lakeshore Meeting Rooms*)
East Tower, Concourse Level

REGENCY BALLROOM
West Tower, Ballroom Level

RIVERSIDE CENTER
East Tower, Exhibit Level

ROOSEVELT (*Lakeshore Meeting Rooms*)
East Tower, Concourse Level

SAN FRANCISCO (*International and City Suites*)
West Tower, Ballroom Level

SKYWAY MEETING ROOMS
East Tower, Skyway Level

SOLDIER FIELD (*Landmark Suites*)
West Tower, Concourse Level

STETSON CONFERENCE CENTER
West Tower, Exhibit Level

STETSONS MODERN STEAK + SUSHI
East Tower, Lobby Level

TORONTO (*International and City Suites*)
West Tower, Ballroom Level

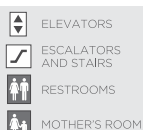
WATER TOWER (*Landmark Suites*)
West Tower, Concourse Level

WEST TOWER VALET
West Tower, Exhibit Level

WRIGHT (*Founders Suites*)
West Tower, Third Floor

WRIGLEY (*Landmark Suites*)
West Tower, Concourse Level

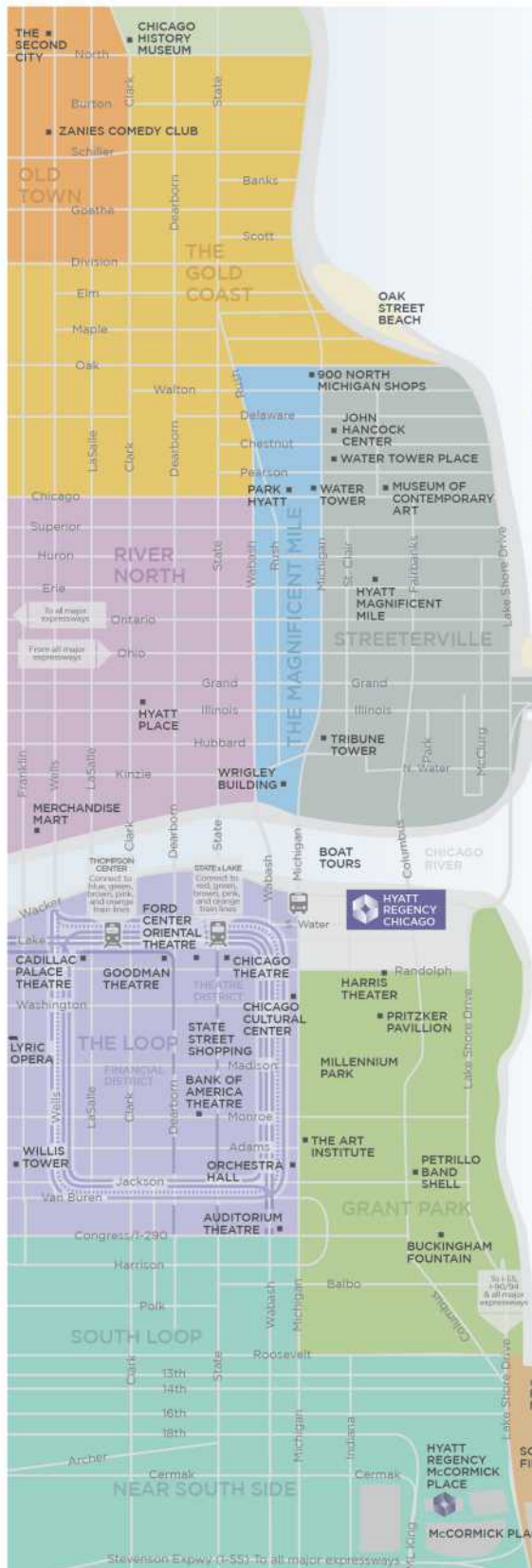
SCAN FOR MOBILE MAP



ESCALATORS, ELEVATORS AND RESTROOMS are indicated on each floor. Elevators are conveniently located throughout the hotel for guests with disabilities or where no escalator is present.

CROSSING BETWEEN TOWERS: Cross between towers via the Skybridge or the Concourse. You may also cross from the lobby level via the crosswalk on Stetson Drive.

HYATT REGENCY CHICAGO | AREA MAP



THEATRES

- ARIE CROWN THEATER
312-791-6000
- AUDITORIUM THEATRE
312-341-2310
- BANK OF AMERICA THEATRE
312-977-1710
- CADILLAC PALACE THEATRE
312-384-1502
- CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER
312-595-5600
- CHICAGO THEATRE
312-462-6300
- FORD CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS ORIENTAL THEATRE 312-977-1700
- GOODMAN THEATRE
312-443-3800
- HARRIS THEATER
312-334-7777

MUSIC

- CHARTER ONE PAVILLION
Concert venue on Northerly Island.
- LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO
Chicago's international opera company. 312-332-2244
- ORCHESTRA HALL AT SYMPHONY CENTER
The Chicago Symphony Orchestra. 312-294-3000
- PETRILLO BAND SHELL
Special events, concerts, fireworks and more.
- PRITZKER PAVILLION
Outdoor band shell and special events venue
- SKYLINE STAGE
On Navy Pier. 312-595-PIER

SHOPPING AND ATTRACTIONS

- BOAT TOURS
River and lakefront tours. At Michigan & the river.
- BUCKINGHAM FOUNTAIN
Spectacular lakefront fountain in Grant Park.
- CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER
Visual & performing arts. Classic architecture. 312-744-6630
- CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM
Chicago's history. In the park at Clark & North. 312-642-4600
- FINANCIAL DISTRICT
Board of Trade, Chicago Mercantile and stock exchanges.
- JOHN HANCOCK CENTER
Breathtaking views of the city. 888-875-VIEW
- MCCORMICK PLACE
Chicago's trade show complex. 312-791-7000
- MERCHANDISE MART
Business to business center. 800-677-6278
- MILLENNIUM PARK
City front park, ice skating and "The Bean" sculpture.
- NAVY PIER
Children's museum, ferris wheel & theatres. 312-595-PIER
- OAK STREET BEACH
Chicago's beach experience. 312-915-4101
- SECOND CITY
Comedy club, theatre and school of improv. 312-337-3992

MUSEUMS

- ADLER PLANETARIUM AND MUSEUM
Our universe. Museum and learning center. 312-922-STAR
- ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
Chicago's premier collection of fine art. 312-443-3600
- DUSABLE MUSEUM (OFF MAP)
African-American history. Hyde Park. 773-947-0600
- FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Natural history museum. Dinosaurs & more. 312-922-9410
- MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
Chicago's modern art museum. 312-280-2660

SPORTS

- SOLDIER FIELD
The Chicago Bears. On the lakefront. 312-235-7000
- U.S. CELLULAR FIELD (OFF MAP)
RED TRAIN-SOUTH Chicago White Sox. 312-674-1000
- UNITED CENTER (OFF MAP) BLUE TRAIN-WEST
Chicago Bulls & Chicago Blackhawks. 312-455-4500
- WRIGLEY FIELD (OFF MAP) RED TRAIN-NORTH
Chicago Cubs. Clark at Addison. 773-404-2827

TRANSPORTATION

- SUBWAY & ELEVATED TRAIN STATIONS
Train lines are color coded. Train information: 312-836-7000
- TO O'HARE AIRPORT (OFF MAP) BLUE TRAIN-NW
Train information: 312-836-7000
- TO MIDWAY AIRPORT (OFF MAP) ORANGE TRAIN-SW
Train information: 312-836-7000
- BUS TO MCCORMICK PLACE (No. 3-SOUTH)
Michigan Avenue bus stop. Bus information: 312-836-7000



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

207 STATE HOUSE
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62706

JB PRITZKER
Governor

Greetings,

As Governor of the State of Illinois, I am pleased to welcome everyone gathered for the Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) and the Illinois Park and Recreation Associations' (IPRA) 2026 Soaring into New Heights Conference. This occasion offers an exciting opportunity for everyone in attendance to join fellow members of IAPD and IPRA and generate ideas that implement solutions. I commend the work you continue to do to help make Illinois a stronger and more enjoyable state.

An event proven vital to network building and information sharing among the Illinois Park and Recreation professional community. Chicago is proud to host the 2026 Soaring to New Heights Conference. Through hours of workshops and policy collaboration, the achievements of this conference will shape the course of public parks and recreation in Illinois for years to come. As leaders in your field, I thank IAPD and IPRA for the vitally important work you do to sustain and protect Illinois' geographic character.

Illinois is proud to have enjoyed your service to our state. As you reflect on your accomplishments, I urge you to make plans for the future of IAPD and IPRA that will build on your past successes.

On behalf of the people of Illinois, I offer my best wishes for an enjoyable and memorable occasion.

Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JB Pritzker".

Governor, JB Pritzker



**OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO**



BRANDON JOHNSON
Mayor

January 29, 2026

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the City of Chicago, I am honored to welcome all those gathered for the 2026 Soaring to New Heights Conference hosted by the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park and Recreation Association.

The Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) and Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA) have been a vital resource for park districts, forest preserves, conservation efforts, municipal parks and recreation, and special recreation agencies across the state, offering exceptional service, research, and education. This conference brings together over 3,000 professionals and elected officials to network, inspire, and learn. With more than 200 educational sessions and workshops, over 300 exhibits, and numerous networking opportunities, attendees will gain the tools and resources necessary to continue advancing recreation and conservation efforts in Illinois' state parks. I commend the IAPD and IPRA for their unwavering commitment to protecting and promoting state parks and recreational spaces throughout Illinois.

I hope that during your stay in Chicago you take the time to see all the city has to offer. Explore our downtown and lakefront areas, tour the vibrant neighborhoods across our city, sample our diverse cuisine, visit our distinguished universities, and our world-class museums.

I hope you have an enjoyable event. Best wishes for continued success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BJ", followed by a horizontal line.

Mayor





WELCOME AND GREETINGS!

On behalf of the Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD), Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA), and the Joint Conference Committee, we are thrilled to welcome you to the 2026 IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference. With a long and successful history of uniting, inspiring and empowering professionals, commissioners, elected officials and so many other passionate people in the field of parks, recreation and conservation, **this Conference is THE place to be every January.**

What's in It for You?

- Three powerful days of professional education and connection.
- Expertly designed programs and hands-on workshops that provide immediate take-aways.
- Opening and closing keynote sessions to kick off and wrap up with inspiration and excitement.
- A celebration of achievements at the Awards Luncheon.
- Hundreds of exhibitors sharing their products and perspectives.
- "Outside the classroom" experiences and opportunities to meet new people and learn new things.

"Everyone you'll ever meet knows something you don't." – Bill Nye

Whether you learn in a large session, smaller rooms, in the hallways of the Hyatt, or the House of Blues, quite simply, you will experience something new and gain fresh perspectives. Conference is the perfect time to reconnect with people you haven't seen in a while and meet new peers across the state who all have one thing in common: the desire to strengthen and advance the field we all love.

During your time at Conference, remember that we are all part of something bigger: a community committed to lifting up the quality of life in our neighborhoods and preserving the vital role of parks in Illinois. Thank you for your dedication to the industry. Thank you for taking the time for your professional development and connection. Thank you for being here ... together.

TED SCHULZ

President
New Lenox Community Park District
IAPD Chairman of the Board

ERIKA STROJINC, CPRE

Executive Director
Buffalo Grove Park District
IPRA Board Chair

Published by:

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Carolyn Ubriaco, *Elmhurst Park District*
Melissa Victor, *Cary Park District*
Dr. Kristin White, *Decatur Park District*



ILLINOIS PARK & RECREATION ASSOCIATION

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2026 JOINT CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

JOINT CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

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Lauren Koszola, Channahon Park District
Brittany Meschewski, Hoffman Estates Park District
Kevin Miller, Park District of LaGrange
Tim Reinbold, Warrenville Park District
Bob Schmidt, Schaumburg Park District
Sue Triphahn, IAPD
Kim Wascher, South Elgin Parks and Recreation Department
Mark White, Park District of Franklin Park

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm Conference Registration Open

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Conference Registration Open
8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Quiet Room
9:45 am – 11:00 am	Opening Keynote with Joe Fingerhut (0.1 CEUs)
11:00 am – 5:00 pm	Grand Opening of the Exhibit Hall
11:00 am – 12:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hour
12:00 pm – 12:30 pm	Speed Sessions (0.05 CEUs)
12:30 pm – 2:00 pm	Conference Workshops (0.15 CEUs)*
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
2:30 pm – 4:00 pm	Conference Workshops (0.15 CEUs)*
3:00 pm – 4:00 pm	General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
4:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hour
5:00 pm – 6:00 pm	IPRA Section Meetings
5:00 pm – 6:00 pm	Professional Connection
6:00 pm – 7:15 pm	IPRA Conference Kick-Off: Tailgate!
9:00 pm – 11:30 pm	Welcome Social featuring The Breakfast Club

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

7:00 am – 5:00 pm	Conference Registration Open
7:00 am – 7:45 am	WERQ Dance Fitness
8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Quiet Room
8:30 am – 9:30 am	Conference Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
8:30 am – 4:00 pm	Agency Showcase
9:00 am – 12:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Open
10:00 am – 11:00 am	General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
11:00 am – 12:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hours
12:00 pm – 2:00 pm	All-Conference Awards Luncheon*
12:00 pm – 12:30 pm	Speed Sessions (0.05 CEUs)
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Conference Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Open
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Dessert in the Exhibit Hall*
3:30 pm – 4:30 pm	General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
5:00 pm – 6:30 pm	IPRA Annual Business Meeting
5:00 pm – 6:30 pm	Commissioners' Reception
9:30 pm – 11:00 pm	Leadership Reception**

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31

7:00 am – 7:45 am	Core & More Fitness Class
7:45 am – 11:00 am	Conference Registration Open
8:00 am – 3:00 pm	Quiet Room
9:00 am – 10:15 am	Closing Keynote with Jan McInnis (0.1 CEUs)
10:45 am – 11:45 am	General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
12:30 pm – 1:30 pm	General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
3:30 pm – 5:00 pm	IAPD Annual Business Meeting
7:00 pm – 10:00 pm	Closing Social at House of Blues with No Turn On Red*

* Ticketed Event

** By Invitation Only



ACCESSIBILITY

Meeting Rooms, Parking, Restaurants, Restrooms, Sleeping Rooms: All are accessible at the Hyatt Regency Chicago and the Swissôtel Chicago. If you need an accessible room, please be sure to notify the respective hotel when making your reservation.

ADA AND SERVICES FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the IAPD/IPRA Joint Conference Committee will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate persons with disabilities. Please indicate any special needs on your registration form or contact Cindy Galvan at IPRA at Cindy@ilipra.org **no later than January 12, 2026**. If you have special needs regarding hotel accommodations, please contact the Hyatt Regency Chicago at (312) 565-1234 or the Swissôtel Chicago at (312) 565-0565. Individuals who require TTY may call (800) 526-0844 and the Illinois Relay Center will transmit the message to IAPD or IPRA.

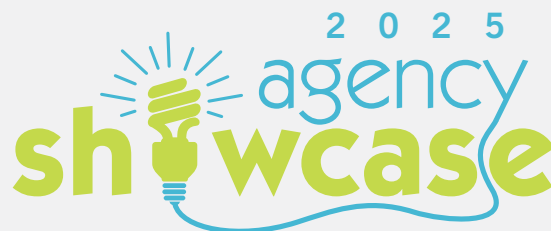
ADMISSION

Admission to the Exhibit Hall and all conference sessions and workshops require a name badge for the duration of the conference. Security guards will be stationed at the entrance to the Exhibit Hall where name badges will be checked. Name badges will also be checked at all conference sessions and workshops. Individuals without a name badge will be required to register at Conference Registration.

ALL-CONFERENCE AWARDS LUNCHEON

Grand Ballroom, East Tower/Gold Level

Delegates who register for the conference "Full Package" will receive a ticket for this event (includes dessert ticket). Additional tickets may be purchased through your registration or on-site. Please join us as we recognize and honor the leaders and volunteers of park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation, and special recreation agencies.



Grand Hall MN, East Tower/Gold Level

Since 2009, Agency Showcase has highlighted the brightest ideas exhibited by parks, recreation, and conservation agencies. This professionally judged competition recognizes Illinois agencies for their marketing and communication efforts ranging from print to multimedia.

Agency entries and winners will be on display in Grand Hall MN, East Tower/Gold Level on FRIDAY, JANUARY 30 until 4:00 pm. Vote for the People's Choice Award in the mobile app. Winners will be announced Friday morning, 8:30am-9:30am in Gold Coast, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level. The People's Choice Award winner will be announced at the IAPD Annual Business Meeting on Saturday, January 31 at 3:30 pm.

Category Sponsors:

Sponsor: Brochure Series - Print
JSD Professional Services, Inc.

For more information on the Agency Showcase competition, please visit ILparksconference.com.

Proudly brought to you by IPRA and IAPD.



ALL-CONFERENCE AWARDS LUNCHEON PREFERRED AGENCY SEATING (Includes Legislator Tables!)

DEADLINE: Monday, January 12, 2026

Preferred Agency Seating is available for all delegates from the same agency/organization who wish to be seated together at a table during the Friday All-Conference Awards Luncheon. An agency that opts to attend must indicate so on the registration form on page CX or at the time of online registration. There is a \$60 nonrefundable fee (per table) to participate, which must be paid when registering for the conference. **If you plan to invite your legislator(s) to join you at your table(s), then you should indicate/register for a Legislative Table following the same process, above.** The individual who registers/pays for the table(s) will be the designated agency contact (table host) and will receive all emails with details and instructions on the seating process. The table host will be responsible for notifying those seated at their table(s) of the table assignment(s). After **January 12, 2026**, table reservations WILL NOT be accepted, and **no on-site requests will be taken.** All tables will be set for twelve people. Non-reserved tables for open general seating will be noted. There is no guarantee that you and your agency will be able to sit all together in open, general seating. These seats are first-come, first-served, and will be set for twelve people.

ANNUAL MEETINGS FOR IAPD AND IPRA

The Illinois Park & Recreation Association's (IPRA) Annual Meeting will be held on FRIDAY, JANUARY 30 at 5:00 pm, **Regency CD, West Tower/Gold Level**

The Illinois Association of Park Districts' (IAPD) Annual Meeting will be held on SATURDAY, JANUARY 31 at 3:30 pm, **Grand Ballroom AB, East Tower/Gold Level**

The associations have staggered their annual meetings to accommodate elected officials and professionals who would like to attend both meetings.

ATTENDEE GIVEAWAY

The conference attendee giveaway will be handed out at our Sponsor's booth, Cunningham Recreation, booth #703 in the exhibit hall! You can pick up your giveaway during open exhibit hall hours. One giveaway per attendee is allowed.



COMMISSIONERS' RECEPTION

Crystal Ballroom, West Tower/Green Level

Attention all IAPD members! Please join us for the Commissioners' Reception on FRIDAY, JANUARY 30 at 5:00 pm. The reception is an excellent opportunity for commissioners, directors, and corporate members to exchange ideas, network, and socialize. The IAPD board and staff will be present to answer questions and visit with IAPD members.

IPRA CONFERENCE KICK-OFF: TAILGATE!

Attention all IPRA members!

Crystal Ballroom, West Tower/Green Level

Please join us on THURSDAY, JANUARY 29 at 6:00 pm. Be a part of our 2nd Annual IPRA Conference Kick-Off to network with your fellow conference attendees, enjoy light bites, and tailgate to kick off an amazing first day of conference! IPRA Board and Staff will be in attendance to celebrate with members.

CONFERENCE ETIQUETTE

As a courtesy to speakers and other delegates, please turn the volume down on your phone or set it to vibrate during sessions and workshops.

IAPD and IPRA endorse responsible drinking policies for all delegates. Persons under the age of 21 or those who appear intoxicated will not be served at IAPD/IPRA functions. Delegates may be asked to produce valid identification for age confirmation. For more information, please refer to the Conference Policies and Protocols on page C14.

CONFERENCE EVALUATIONS

Session evaluations are required to receive CEU & CLE credit. Session evaluations also offer attendees the opportunity to provide valuable feedback and are helpful for us in understanding if your educational goals and objectives have been met. Ensure you receive CEU & CLE credit and help us continually improve and ensure a quality program by submitting a session evaluation for each session you attend. Surveys are quick and easy and are available electronically in the mobile app.

Following the conference, attendees will receive an email with a link to the overall event survey where they can provide additional feedback on their conference experience. This information is important to us and will help shape the direction of future conferences.



CONFERENCE FORMAT

This year, the conference format includes nine sets of 60-minute sessions spread across Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Two sets of workshops will take place Thursday afternoon and are ticketed programs that require pre-registration. There is one set of speed sessions on both Thursday and Friday. Be sure to view the Schedule-At-A-Glance on page C11 for the full conference schedule.

CONFERENCE INFORMATION DESK

Grand Ballroom Foyer, East Tower/Gold Level

The Information Desk provides attendees general information on conference activities, session locations, and mobile app assistance. Staff will be available throughout the conference to answer your questions.

Information Desk Hours

Thursday, January 29	8:30 am – 4:30 pm
Friday, January 30	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Saturday, January 31	8:30 am – 3:00 pm



CONFERENCE POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS

MEETING SAFETY AND RESPONSIBILITY POLICY

IAPD/IPRA are committed to providing a safe, productive, and welcoming environment for all conference participants and staff. All participants, including, but not limited to, attendees, speakers, volunteers, exhibitors, staff, service providers, and others are expected to abide by this Meeting Safety and Responsibility Policy. This Policy applies to all conference-related events, including those sponsored by organizations other than IAPD/IPRA but held in conjunction with the *Soaring to New Heights Conference*, in public or private facilities.

RESPONSIBLE DRINKING

At some networking events both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages are served. IAPD/IPRA expect participants at our events to drink responsibly. IAPD/IPRA and host venue staff have the right to deny service to participants for any reason and may require a participant to leave the event.

PERSONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY

IAPD/IPRA work diligently to provide a safe and secure environment at their meetings and events by working with venue staff to make sure meeting participants are safe. We ask that all attendees report any questionable or concerning activity to IAPD or IPRA staff so that they can take immediate action. No concern is too small, if you see something, say something.

- Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Use the buddy system when walking to and from the event venue, networking event locations during early or late hours.
- Don't wear your meeting badge on the street. Take it off as soon as you leave the building/venue.
- Don't carry a lot of cash or credit cards. Leave in your hotel room safe.
- Don't leave personal property unattended anywhere, anytime.

If it is an emergency or if you need immediate assistance, you should ask any IAPD or IPRA staff member or the on-site security personnel to help you.

UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

- Harassment, intimidation, or discrimination in any form.
- Physical or verbal abuse of any attendee, speaker, volunteer, exhibitor, staff member, service provider, or other meeting guest.
- Examples of unacceptable behavior include, but are not limited to, verbal comments related to gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, religion, national origin, inappropriate use of nudity and/or sexual images in public spaces or in presentations, or threatening or stalking any attendee, speaker, volunteer, exhibitor, IAPD/IPRA staff member, service provider, or other meeting guest.
- Disruption of presentations at workshops, sessions, in the Exhibit Hall, or at other events organized by IAPD/IPRA at the meeting venue, hotels, or other IAPD/IPRA-contracted facilities.

IAPD/IPRA have zero-tolerance for any form of discrimination or harassment, including but not limited to sexual harassment by participants or our staff at our meetings. If you experience harassment or hear of any incidents of unacceptable behavior, we ask that you inform either Sue Triphahn, CMP, IAPD's Educational Services and Conference Director, striphahn@ilparks.org or Cindy Galvan, CMP, IPRA's Manager, Conference & Sponsorships, cindy@ilipra.org, so that we can take the appropriate action.

IAPD/IPRA reserve the right to take any action deemed necessary and appropriate, including immediate removal from the meeting without warning or refund, in response to any incident of unacceptable behavior, and IAPD/IPRA reserve the right to prohibit attendance at any future meeting.



BE SURE TO CHECK THE MOBILE APP FOR THE LATEST UPDATES ON THE CONFERENCE!



CONFERENCE PROGRAM SPECIAL AREAS OF INTEREST

Green/Eco-Friendly

For eco-friendly ideas and programs to incorporate into your agency, be sure to attend sessions displaying the green logo next to their listing in the conference program.



Health & Wellness

Sessions with a focus on health and wellness will be easily identifiable with the health and wellness logo appearing next to the session title/listing in the conference program.



Newly Elected Officials

Are you a newly elected commissioner? The IAPD Program Committee has put together a great line up of sessions for you to attend! Look for the thumbs up icon throughout the conference brochure for sessions that are recommended for a newly elected official to attend.



Small Agency/Small Staff

Small agencies/staff often face having to do more with less, or sometimes having to do it all. We've identified sessions that are geared specifically to small agencies/staff to help address the unique needs of this demographic.



Students/Early-Career Professionals

Students and early-career professionals require a strong foundation across multiple disciplines to be effective practitioners in the early stages of their career. Find the ____ logo for sessions that provide the foundational knowledge needed for early-career success.



CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS (CEUs)

Attendees will be able to earn up to 1.3 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) by attending a variety of workshops and general sessions. CEUs can be earned based on the number of sessions attended during the Soaring to New Heights Conference. Both Keynote General Sessions and all sessions in the Therapeutic Recreation Track have been pre-approved by NCTRC for CTRS certification.

- Concurrent sessions and the Keynote General Session scheduled for 60 minutes award 0.1 CEUs.
- Conference workshops scheduled for 90 minutes award 0.15 CEUs.
- Speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.
- No additional CEU fees for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday sessions apply.
- Track CEU progress on demand in the mobile app. Official CEU transcripts will be emailed 3-4 weeks after conference. No hard copies will be distributed.

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION (CLE)

The CLE credit is educational credits that attorneys elect to earn by attending educational offerings certified by the Supreme Court of Illinois.

Sessions scheduled for 60 minutes award 1.0 CLE. Please note not all sessions are eligible for CLE credits. If you would like to apply for CLE credits, you must register, provide your ARDC number and pay for the CLEs with your conference registration. See page CXX. Four different CLE packages are offered:

- Four different CLE packages are offered:
 - (3) CLE credits: \$60 plus registration
 - (4) CLE credits: \$80 plus registration
 - (7) CLE credits: \$140 plus registration
 - (8) CLE credits: \$160 plus registration

Attorneys will receive their CLE attendance receipt(s) within 2 weeks of the conclusion of the conference.

CONFERENCE TRACKS AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

To help attendees identify sessions and workshops relevant to their field/interests, the conference program is organized around twelve different topic tracks: Boardmanship, Diversity, Facilities, Finance/Information Technology, Forest Preserve/Conservation, Governance/Legal, HR/Risk Management, Leadership/Management, Marketing/Communications, Parks/Natural Resources, Recreation, Therapeutic Recreation.

Additionally, a numbering convention is used to provide attendees another avenue for identifying sessions/workshops that may be beneficial to them. The numbering system indicates the host sponsoring the session/workshop. Attendees can use the numbering system to quickly identify any session/workshop pertaining to a specific host across the multiple tracks. The following is the numbering system legend:

0-9:	IAPD & IPRA
10 – 99:	IPRA
100 – 199:	IAPD
200 – 299:	Parks & Natural Resource Management Section (PNRMS)
300 – 399:	Administration & Finance Section (A&F)
400 – 499:	Recreation Section (REC)
500 – 599:	Therapeutic Recreation Section (TR)
600 – 699:	Facilities Management Section (FM)
900 – 999:	Communications & Marketing Section (C&M)
1000 – 1099:	Diversity Section (DIV)
1100 – 1199:	Forest Preserve & Conservation (FPC&CONSV)



CEUs and CLE

CEUs and CLEs are contactless and fully digital through the conference mobile app. Attendees are required to attend entire sessions and complete each session survey to obtain CEU credit.

You will not need to sign up for CEUs during the registration process. You will need to ensure that you provide a valid email so that you will be able to access the mobile app. Attendees will be able to log into the app at any time during the conference to manage, earn, and track their CEUs.

To get CEU and CLE credit, you **MUST** fill out the survey at the end of **EVERY** session in the mobile app to earn applicable credit(s) for CEUs or CLE.

To earn CEUs through the mobile app, please note the following procedures:

- Be sure you are logged on to the conference Wi-Fi and log in to the mobile app.
- At the end of the session/workshop, fill out the survey.

Approximately four weeks after conference, attendees will receive an email from Bravura, our conference mobile app company, with a link to your official transcript. No hard copies will be distributed. You must register and pay for CLEs. See details under CLEs.

CORE AND MORE FITNESS CLASS

Michigan ABC, East Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

Get ready to ignite your Saturday morning with a Core and More class, designed for every level of fitness enthusiast!

Expect a dynamic blend of core-focused exercises that target your abs, back, and glutes so that you can tone, strengthen, and enhance overall endurance. This morning class brings infectious energy and motivational vibes, ensuring you feel empowered and engaged from start to finish. Join us for an inclusive, fun-filled session where you'll sweat, smile, and celebrate every achievement. This session is tailored to accommodate and challenge all fitness levels, providing modifications and progressions to match your pace. Come as you are, leave feeling invigorated and accomplished. See you in class and start the morning with a step towards a healthier, happier you! Please bring a towel/yoga mat as we will be on the floor for a portion of the class. Register online.

EVENT LOCATIONS

Agency Showcase:

Grand Hall MN, East Tower/Gold Level

All-Conference Awards Luncheon:

Grand Ballroom, East Tower/Gold Level

Closing Social:

House of Blues, 329 N. Dearborn Street

Conference Headquarters:

Grand Ballroom Foyer, East Tower/Gold Level (across from Conference Registration)

Conference Registration:

Grand Ballroom Foyer, East Tower/Gold Level

Exhibit Hall:

Riverside Center, East Tower/Purple Level (Lower Level)

IAPD Annual Business Meeting:

Grand Ballroom AB, East Tower/Gold Level

IPRA Annual Business Meeting:

Regency Ballroom CD, West Tower/Gold Level

Keynote General Session:

Grand Ballroom CF, East Tower/Gold Level

Conference Workshops and Sessions:

Grand Hall rooms, East Tower/Gold Level, Regency Ballroom, West Tower/Gold Level and other meeting space throughout the hotel

Professional Connection:

Crystal Ballroom A, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

Silent Auction:

Grand Ballroom Foyer, East Tower/Gold Level

Welcome Social:

Grand Ballroom, East Tower/Gold Level





EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE AWARD

Agencies that submitted an application and met the criteria for the Exceptional Workplace Award (EWA) will receive their award at the IPRA Annual Business Meeting taking place in Regency Ballroom AB, West Tower on FRIDAY, JANUARY 30 at 5:00 pm. Agencies receiving the Exceptional Workplace Award are recognized for a five-year term.

Questions regarding the Exceptional Workplace Award and the work of the Health and Wellness Committee can be directed to Shannon Tovey, Human Resources Manager, SEASPAR at stovey@seaspar.org.

EXHIBIT HALL INFORMATION

Riverside Center, East Tower/Purple Level (Lower Level)

The Exhibit Hall will be open on Thursday and Friday, with [dedicated hours](#) on Friday.

Come visit more than 325 commercial manufacturers, distributors, designers, and educational booths. The exhibits will showcase the newest equipment, supplies, ideas, and services available to park, recreation, forest preserve, conservation, and therapeutic recreation agencies. Plan to spend several hours in the exhibit hall viewing the displays and visiting with exhibitors.

Each registered delegate will have multiple opportunities to win great prizes. Drawings will take place throughout the day Thursday and Friday. Entry blanks will be in the registration materials that you must pick up at conference registration. You must be present to win. Rules and regulations will apply.

The IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference has one of the largest exhibition of any state park and recreation conference in the country. Be sure to visit!

EXHIBIT HALL HOURS

Thursday, January 29:

11:00 pm – 5:00 pm, Grand Opening

11:00 am – 12:00 pm; 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Dedicated Hours)

Friday, January 30:

9:00 am – 12:00 pm

11:00 am – 12:00 pm (Dedicated Hour)

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm (Dessert Reception and Dedicated Hours)



HOTELS – NEED TO KNOW

Hyatt Regency Chicago

- **Housekeeping:** For the safety of all guests and staff, the hotel will not be providing daily housekeeping services. *The hotel will provide services to your guest room after your third night, on the fourth day.* Simply dial “0” for contactless room delivery of any items, including towels or guest room amenities you may need during your stay.
- **Onsite Dining:** Includes American Craft Kitchen & Bar, Big Bar, Market Chicago, and Stetsons. Hours and availability vary. Please call the Front Desk for more information. In-room dining (room service) will not be available.
- **Fitness Center:** Skyway Level, West Tower. Hours are 5:30 am to 11:00 pm. Must be 18 years or older and have a guest room key to enter.

Swissotel

- **Housekeeping:** The hotel offers *housekeeping services on the third day of the guest's stay.* Additional services (e.g. trash being taken out, extra towels, toiletries, etc.) are provided upon request. Guests should contact the Front Desk for assistance.
- **Earth Day, Every Day (EDED):** Swissotel takes pride in providing environmentally sustainable accommodations. Guests with a 2-or-more-night stay (no housekeeping) will receive a \$10 food & beverage credit. This offer applies to individuals for use at Amuse and room service, however, it does not apply to The Palm.
- **Dining Options:** Includes The Palm Restaurant, Amuse, and In-room dining. Hours and availability vary. Please contact the Front Desk for more information.
- **Fitness Center:** The Penthouse Fitness Center is open to guests daily from 5:00 am until 10:00 pm.

Pedway: Hyatt-Swissotel

Guests staying at the Swissotel (conference overflow hotel), can access the Hyatt through the Chicago Pedway, a system of underground tunnels that connects public and private buildings, CTA stations, and commuter rail facilities. During conference, the hours of operation for the Pedway doors connecting the Hyatt to the Swissotel are as follows:

Pedway Hours

- Thursday, 1/29: 7:00 am – 10:00 pm
- Friday, 1/30: 7:00 am – 6:00 pm
- Saturday, 1/31: 7:00 am – 11:00 pm



MOBILE APP

Go mobile and enhance your conference experience with the 2026 conference mobile app powered by Bravura. Attendees can use this powerful, content- and feature-rich tool for the following:

- Receive important announcements and last-minute schedule changes,
- Create a personalized agenda (*Please note: "starring" a session does not secure a spot in the session; it is for the purpose of building an agenda of interested sessions. Hot topics tend to fill fast, so please be sure you have back up session starred in case your first choice is full*),
- Plan your Exhibit Hall visit,
- Search for speakers,
- Earn and track CEU and CLE credits,
- Complete session evaluations and more!

To access the IAPD/IPRA conference mobile app, follow these simple steps:

- Search **"IAPD/IPRA Conference 2026"** in the Apple App Store for iPhone/iPad users or the Google Play Store for Android users.
- Log in by entering the **email address you used to register for the conference** - no password required.

PARKING

Overnight Attendees: Attendees staying overnight at the Hyatt Regency Chicago will receive a 50% discount off the existing published parking rate for overnight valet (no self-park on-site). Attendees staying overnight at the Swissôtel will receive a 50% discount off the existing daily parking rate (not applicable to self-park).

Daily Commuters: Delegates not staying at the hotels can park in any of the downtown garages at regular rates. Additional parking in the area can be viewed at www.chicagoparkingmap.com.

PHOTO RELEASE

By registering for, participating in, or attending the IAPD/IPRA conference, meetings, or other activities, an individual irrevocably agrees to the use and distribution by IAPD/IPRA of his or her image or voice in photographs, video recordings, audio recordings, and any other electronic reproductions of such events and activities for any purpose without inspection or approval and without compensation, right to royalties, or any other consideration now and in the future.

POLICY ON CHILDREN

To preserve a professional business environment and ensure a quality educational atmosphere at the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference, no one under the age of 18 will be allowed to participate in pre-conference workshops, conference sessions, the Welcome Social or the Exhibit Hall. An exception will be made if the person is a speaker or a registered full or part-time college or university student, and is attending the conference for the purpose of professional development and networking opportunities.

QUIET ROOM

Location: Randolph 2, East Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

The Quiet Room is intended as a quiet, calm space where conference attendees can spend time away from noise, lights, and other stimuli of conference spaces. The quiet room is not available for conversations or meetings.

RECORDING/VIDEOTAPING

Recording or videotaping from attendee smartphones or other electronic devices is not permitted during any part of the educational program, including the conference workshops, sessions, or the Keynote General Session.

REGISTRATION

Grand Ballroom Foyer, East Tower/Gold Level

Wednesday, January 28	3:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Thursday, January 29	8:00 am – 5:00 pm
Friday, January 30	7:00 am – 5:00 pm
Saturday, January 31	7:45 am – 11:00 am

Pre-registered delegates may pick up their name badge and event tickets at our new self-serve kiosks at the registration desk. There is a \$5 charge to reprint your name badge if lost. **EVENT TICKETS WILL NOT BE REPRINTED.** If you lose your tickets, new tickets must be purchased at the current on-site price to attend any ticketed event. Access to the Exhibit Hall, conference workshops, and sessions requires a name badge. Attendees without the proper name badge will not be permitted at these events.

SAVE-TH-DATE

Mark your calendars now to attend future IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights conferences.

2027: January 28-30, Hyatt Regency Chicago
2028: January 27-29, Hyatt Regency Chicago



Soar in sessions and beyond Conference!

Follow the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference on our **brand new social media accounts!**



@ IAPDIPRASoaringtoNewHeightsConference



@ IAPDIPRASoaringtoNewHeightsConference

SPECIAL DIETS/ACCOMMODATIONS

Attendees with special needs requirements or meal requests should indicate their needs on their conference registration form. If you have questions or need additional assistance, please contact Cindy Galvan at cindy@ilipra.org **no later than January 13, 2026.**

SPOUSE/GUEST PROGRAM AND REGISTRATION

All spouses or guests must register to participate in the conference, visit the Exhibit Hall, and attend special programs. **Spouses or guests must have no affiliation with or be employed by any park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation, or special recreation agency.** Registration will include a name badge for admission to the Exhibit Hall and Welcome Social on Thursday, all 60-minute educational breakout sessions, and the Keynote General Session on Saturday. Tickets for the All-Conference Awards Luncheon and the Saturday evening Closing Social will be available for purchase.

SILENT AUCTION

*Grand Ballroom Foyer,
East Tower, Gold Level (across
from Conference Registration)*



Stop by the Silent Auction hosted by the Illinois Park and Recreation Foundation (IPRF). The Silent Auction allows you to bid on terrific gift baskets and items donated by park and recreation agencies, professionals, and advocates. Dollars raised are used to fund scholarships for the continuing education and development of students and professionals seeking to increase their knowledge of parks and recreation and provide best practices to the citizens of Illinois.

The mission of the IPRF is to serve as a philanthropic and support organization of the IPRA and its members. The IPRF is committed to investing in today's students and professionals within the Illinois park and recreation industry by promoting and supporting the continuing education and professional development of its members and the development of future leaders within the association through the various scholarship programs managed by IPRF.

Silent Auction Hours

Thursday, January 29

Viewing and Bidding 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Friday, January 30

Viewing and Bidding 8:00 am – 3:00 pm

Winner Pick-Up 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm





STUDENT EVENTS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

Professional Connection

Crystal Ballroom A, West Tower, Green/Lobby Level

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

You won't want to miss this unique opportunity to network with professionals in the field. The Professional Connection provides a relaxed social atmosphere and an informal setting for talking with and getting to know professionals currently working in your area of interest. It also provides a great opportunity to learn about current and upcoming internships. Everyone who attends will enjoy complimentary pizza and soda.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

Mock Interviews/Resume Review

Haymarket, Picasso, and Columbian, West Tower, Bronze/Concourse Level

10:00 am – 11:00 am

The Mock Interviews/Resume Review offers students the opportunity to receive critique on their resume, along with practice to improve their interviewing skills by being paired with a professional who will engage them in a simulated interview experience. At the conclusion of the interview, students will receive constructive feedback and advice that will help them be more prepared and to do well in a real-life interview.

Matched student-professional pairs will be communicated with prior to the conference. Dedicated meeting space will be available in the Haymarket, Picasso, and Columbian, West Tower, Bronze, Concourse Level on Friday, January 26 from 10:00 am – 11:00 am for the Mock Interviews/Resume Reviews to take place. However, since the goal is to help students connect and gain career advice from professionals, matched student-professional pairs are welcome to meet at a time and location that is most convenient for them.

In order to participate and be matched in the program, advance registration is required.

VOLUNTEERS... CALLING ALL COMMISSIONERS, PROFESSIONALS, AND STUDENTS!

Volunteering at conference offers numerous benefits, including the opportunity to expand your professional network by connecting with industry leaders and peers. It provides a platform to enhance your skills, gain hands-on experience, and demonstrate leadership qualities. By contributing your time, not only do you become an important part of the conference team, but you also gain visibility within your industry, which can lead to future career opportunities and personal development.

QUESTIONS?:

Registration: Alan Howard, ahoward@ilparks.org

Moderator: Kim Laper, kim@ilipra.org

Luncheon or Expo Hall: Heather Rabbitt, heatherr@vhparkdistrict.org

Students: Student volunteers are needed in additional operational roles at conference, including the All-Conference Awards Luncheon, Exhibit Hall Dessert Reception, conference sessions, and more! Students that are registered attendees of the conference, a full-time student in a park and recreation program, and a current IPRA member can receive a refund of their registration fee if they complete four volunteer hours at the conference. For more information, please contact Heather Rabbitt, 2026 IPRA Operations Chair, at heatherr@vhparkdistrict.org.

WERQ DANCE FITNESS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2026

Acapulco, West Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

WERQ Fitness is the wildly addictive cardio dance class based on today's hottest pop and hip hop music. The workout is nonstop with repetitive athletic moves and fresh dance steps, so you get the best sweat - all while challenging your inner diva! Please wear comfortable clothes, gym shoes, and get ready to WERQ!

WHAT TO WEAR

Exhibit Hall Grand Opening:

Thursday Welcome Social:

Friday All-Conference Awards Luncheon:

Saturday Closing Social:

Casual business attire

Casual business attire

Business attire

Casual attire

WI-FI

Complimentary Wi-Fi at the Hyatt Regency Chicago will be available in the following areas: guest sleeping rooms (for overnight guests), the hotel's public spaces, which consists of the first floor lobby, Market Chicago, and American Craft Restaurant, and the second floor hotel registration area, including the walkway connecting the East and West Towers, Big Bar, and The Living Room and Gallery Collection lounges. Wi-Fi will also be available in meeting rooms located in the Gold, Bronze, and Green levels of both towers of the hotel compliments of Team Reil.



For meeting room Wi-Fi access:

- > Logon to the network SSID: Hyatt Conference
- > Enter the password: REILROCKS35

Cheers to 60 Years of Play!

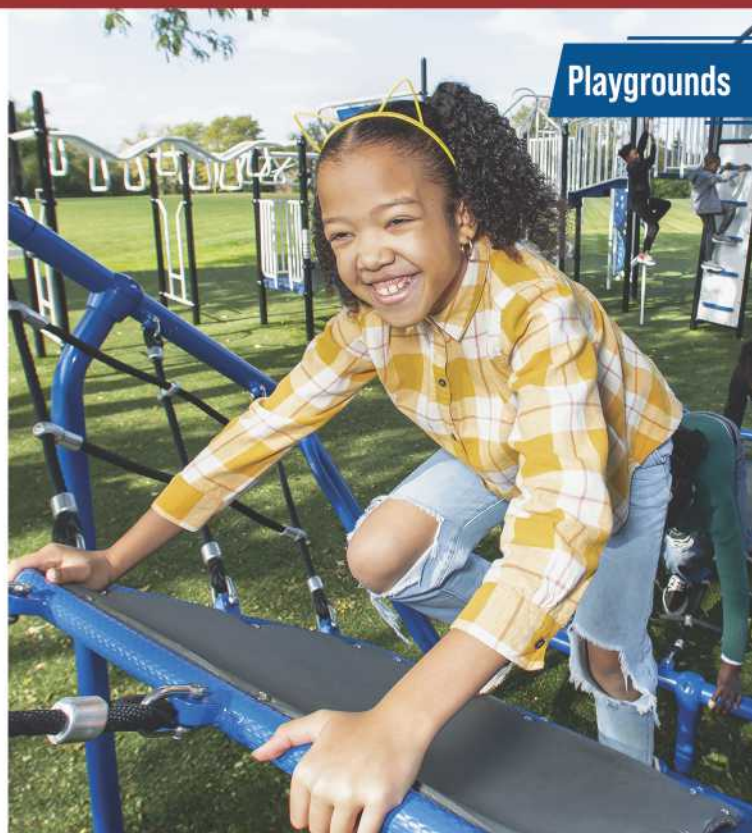
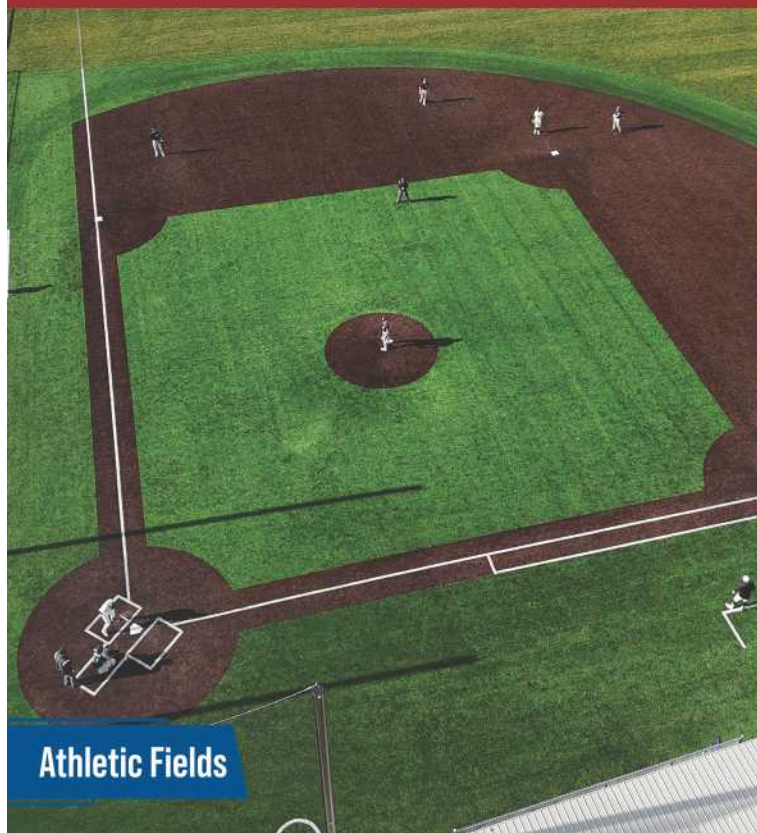


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We're honored to have partnered with architects, municipalities, schools, churches, housing communities, and civic organizations to make play more inclusive, active, and meaningful. As we celebrate this milestone, we want to thank you for your partnership and we're grateful for the opportunity to serve you.



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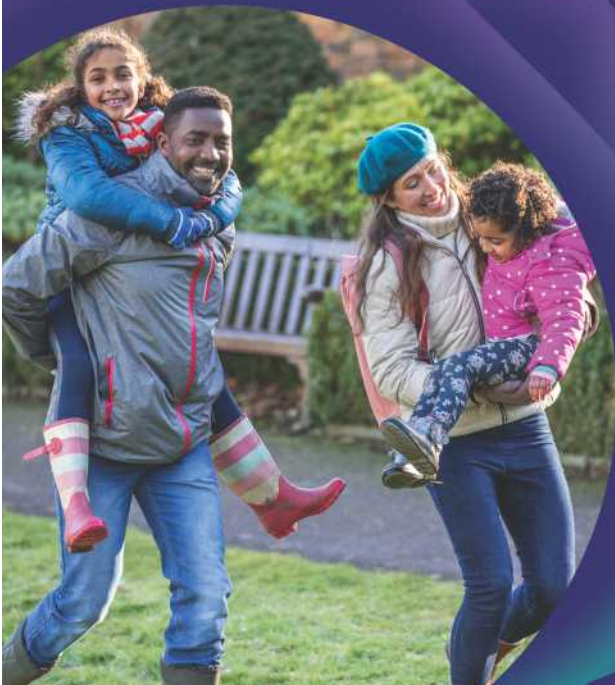
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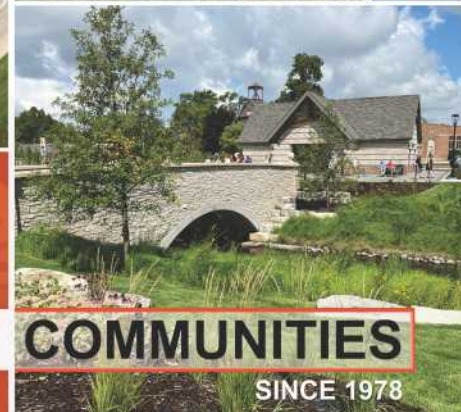
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Opening Keynote with Joe Fingerhut

Thursday, January 29, 2026

9:45 am – 11:00 am

Grand Ballroom, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

CEUs: 0.1, NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.1



The "How Can I?" Mindset: Unlocking Potential and Creating Contagious Joy

In a world where challenges can seem insurmountable, the "How Can I?" Mindset transforms obstacles into opportunities for growth, innovation, and success. This dynamic opening keynote introduces a powerful framework that helps professionals shift from "I can't" thinking to a mindset of possibility that creates tangible results in both professional and personal environments.

Joe Fingerhut combines captivating storytelling, practical strategies, and interactive experiences to demonstrate how the three elements of Grit (perseverance), Grace (compassion), and Gratitude (appreciation) can supercharge the "How Can I?" approach. Attendees will learn how to apply this mindset specifically to parks and recreation challenges, empowering them to enhance program offerings, improve community engagement, and strengthen team dynamics throughout the conference and beyond. This high-energy presentation provides the perfect foundation for embracing new ideas and possibilities throughout the entire conference experience.

About the Speaker

Joe Fingerhut is an international speaker, author, and mindset specialist who inspires audiences to unlock their potential through his signature "How Can I?" approach to life's challenges. With over two decades of experience speaking and performing across six continents, Joe combines storytelling, humor, and practical strategies that help attendees transform obstacles into opportunities. His journey from college mascot to teaching English in Japan to riding unicycles with his family demonstrates his philosophy of embracing possibilities rather than accepting limitations. Joe's bestselling book "Permission to Play" and his transformational keynote speeches blend the powerful elements of Grit, Grace, and Gratitude to help professionals reimagine what's possible in their careers and organizations. A master at creating contagious joy, Joe delivers high-energy presentations that leave audiences with actionable tools to implement immediately and inspiration that lasts long after the event ends.

Learning Objectives:

1. Attendees will be able to identify the three key components of the "How Can I?" Mindset and understand how to apply them to overcome specific parks and recreation challenges.
2. Participants will discover how to use the HOW-CAN-I framework to transform "I can't" barriers into actionable possibilities that enhance program innovation and community engagement.
3. Attendees will learn specific techniques to cultivate Grit, Grace, and Gratitude to improve team dynamics, boost resilience, and create a culture of possibility within their organizations.

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THURSDAY AT-A-GLANCE

8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Conference Registration Open

8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Quiet Room

9:45 am – 11:00 am

Opening Keynote (0.1 CEUs)

11:00 am – 5:00 pm

Grand Opening of the Exhibit Hall

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hour

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Speed Sessions (0.05 CEUs)

12:30 pm – 2:00 pm

Conference Workshops (0.15 CEUs)*

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Conference Workshops (0.15 CEUs)*

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

4:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hour

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

IPRA Section Meetings

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Professional Connection

6:00 pm – 7:15 pm

IPRA Conference Kick-Off: Tailgate!

9:00 pm – 11:30 pm

Welcome Social featuring the Breakfast Club

*Ticketed Event

THURSDAY MORNING SPEED SESSIONS

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

All speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.

11

Reimagining Leadership: Cultivating Connection, Creativity, and Commitment

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom B

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): Concitta Cavin, Senior Program Specialist, Chicago Park District

In a time of rapid change, traditional leadership no longer meets the needs of parks and recreation professionals whose work centers on people and community. This speed session invites participants to reimagine leadership by grounding it in intention, values, and human connection. Through real stories, reflective prompts, and practical tools, we'll explore how to lead with heart and creativity—building trust, motivation, and a sense of belonging across teams and programs. Attendees will leave with renewed energy and simple strategies to lead with presence, creativity, and purpose—every day, in every interaction.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will assess their leadership styles and identify the type of support their teams may require.
- Participants will learn tips to create a collaborative environment where teams are connected and invested in their work, regardless of position.
- Participants will leave with practical training tips to enhance communication within their teams.

13

The UN - Keynote: Breaking the Mold with Innovation and Creativity

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): Nir Bashan, CEO and Founder, The Creator Mindset

This dynamic and highly interactive un-keynote begins with a concise learning segment that equips participants with practical frameworks for creative problem-solving. The session fosters an energetic, participatory atmosphere rich with thoughtful dialogue, cross-group insights, and an appreciation for the diverse problem-solving approaches needed to tackle shared challenges across Illinois park and recreation agencies. 5 key issues will be shared that can only be overcome with a creative mindset, and participants leave inspired, connected, and ready to immediately apply new ideas and solutions within their own Parks and Recs organizations.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify practical techniques for creative problem solving applicable to diverse parks and recreation challenges.
- Develop innovative solutions to real-world scenarios in the parks and recreation field.
- Evaluate and integrate diverse problem solving approaches shared by peers to enhance professional practices across Illinois park and recreation agencies.

THURSDAY MORNING SPEED SESSIONS 12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

All speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.



202 Sunnyside Park: Revitalizing Communities with Nature-Based Solutions



Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom A

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Cecily Cunz**, Senior Environmental Planner, Baxter & Woodman; **David Lamb**, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation, City of Bloomington, Parks and Recreation

The Sunnyside Park Sustainability Initiative is a collaborative effort between the City of Bloomington and the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District to transform a historically underserved area into a 12-acre hub for recreation, education, and environmental stewardship. Designed to serve nearby public housing residents and the broader community, the park will feature ADA-accessible trails, an outdoor classroom, amphitheater, gym, and native plantings. These elements aim to improve water management, reduce flooding, and enhance public understanding of the water cycle through nature-based solutions.

Aligned with Bloomington's Comprehensive Plan 2035 and Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the initiative addresses long-standing disparities in health, air quality, and access to green space. By revitalizing a disinvested area, the project promotes environmental justice and community well-being. The park will also act as a natural buffer to the BNWRD West Plant, improving aesthetics and reducing disturbances. With its blend of active and passive recreation, educational features, and ecological benefits, Sunnyside Park exemplifies a holistic approach to sustainability and quality of life enhancement.

Learning Objectives:

- Innovative approaches to park development, community revitalization, and nature-based solutions.
- The importance of strong community partnerships in revitalizing communities.
- How a holistic approach to park design can improve environmental, access, and equity outcomes.

301 Critical Moments: An Interactive Breakdown of a Crisis

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Michigan 1

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Melanie Santostefano**, President, Vicarious Multimedia | St. Steven Public Relations

This session delves into a crisis case study of a real-life crisis that engages attendees to jointly identify successes, neutral actions and failures of the subject organization in managing the crisis. The session starts with the facilitator setting the stage and laying out the crisis situation – through sharing of the details of the crisis along with media coverage and other relevant information. This portion is followed by session attendees breaking into small groups 10 minutes to discuss their thoughts and opinions about how the crisis was managed, and then the group will come back together to share thoughts and opinions and discuss how the situation could have been managed better, or what they believe should have been done differently to achieve a more positive outcome.

Learning Objectives:

- Be able to objectively understand missteps and appropriate steps taken during the crisis (case study).
- Strengthen the understanding of the process needed to successfully manage a crisis.
- Understand the psychology behind perception related to the crisis case study.

401 From Parks to Places: Transforming Community Spaces

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Anthony Iracki**, Professional Development Manager, PlayCore

Discover the latest trends and transformative ideas shaping the future of parks and recreation. This session invites you to explore fresh, innovative strategies that maximize the impact and value of green spaces in your community. Learn how park and recreation agencies are responding to shifting demographics, changing recreational preferences, and growing expectations for inclusive and equitable access. From revitalizing existing parks with new amenities to designing entirely new outdoor destinations, we'll highlight creative approaches that address emerging community needs. Explore how to engage families across generations, build partnerships that amplify your impact, and foster community spirit through inclusive, culturally relevant, and accessible programs and facilities. Whether you're enhancing a neighborhood park or planning a large community space, leave with actionable ideas to inspire positive change.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify emerging trends and innovative strategies that enhance the impact of parks and recreation spaces.
- Analyze ways to adapt park design and programming to meet evolving community needs and demographics.
- Develop actionable ideas to foster engagement, inclusion, and community spirit through accessible and culturally relevant outdoor spaces.



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THURSDAY MORNING SPEED SESSIONS

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

All speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.

502

From Classroom to Day Camp: Strategies for Summer Success

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.05

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Becca Reidenga Talbot**, Recreation Supervisor, Special Recreation Association of Central Lake County (SRACLC); **Emily Venezio**, Program Specialist, Lincolnway Special Recreation Association; **Rosalie Solak**, Talent Recruitment, St. Marcus School

Campers arrive at summer camp after spending ten months in a structured classroom environment, where routines, expectations, and supports are a part of their daily experience. While camp is designed to be a more relaxed and recreational setting, incorporating elements of structure and intentional strategy can enhance camper success and enjoyment. This presentation will explore strategies commonly used by special education teachers during the school year and how those approaches can be adapted for the dynamic, fast-paced world of summer camp. Attendees will gain practical tools and techniques that can be taught to camp counselors for effective group management, proactive behavior support, and fostering camper engagement, all while maintaining the fun, flexible spirit of camp.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn about a variety of strategies teachers use in the classroom.
- Participants will understand how to use the teaching strategies in a camp environment.
- Participants will learn how to teach camp counselors new strategies and tools.

901

Connecting Communities: Mastering Communication for Park District Success

Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom C

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Steve Ryan**, CEO, RYTECH

In today's digital world, effective communication is essential for park districts to connect with their communities, promote programs, and build lasting public trust. This session will provide park district professionals with practical strategies for using social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and modern communication tools to increase visibility and engagement.

Participants will explore how to create meaningful content, improve website search rankings, and develop inclusive messaging that resonates with diverse audiences. Whether you're a communications novice or looking to sharpen your digital strategy, this presentation will equip you with the knowledge and tools to elevate your district's outreach and impact.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn how strategic use of social media and digital platforms can enhance community engagement, increase program participation, and elevate your district's public image.
- Gain foundational knowledge of search engine optimization (SEO) to improve your website's visibility and help residents easily find events, facilities, and services online.
- Discover best practices and tools for creating consistent, accessible, and inclusive communication across all channels—tailored to meet the needs of diverse community members.

1001

Everybody Moves: A Policy Scan of Disability and Diversity in Leisure

Topic Track: Diversity

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Roosevelt 3AB

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Delphine Labbé**, Assistant Professor, Disability and Human Development Department, UIC, University of Illinois Chicago; **Juan C Acevedo**, Superintendent of Marketing & Communications, Wheeling Park District; **Pierre Paul**, PhD Student, Department of Disability and Human Development, UIC, University of Illinois Chicago; **Piyush Mishra**, PhD Candidate, Department of Disability and Human Development, UIC, University of Illinois Chicago

Despite growing awareness of the importance of inclusion, individuals with disabilities, particularly those from Black/African American and Latinx communities, continue to face significant barriers to participating in leisure-time physical activities (LTPA). As part of our "Everybody Moves project, we seek to identify how policies can either support or hinder access to LTPA.

This session presents the findings from a scan of 11 federal and 12 Illinois state-level policies, analyzing how these policies define and describe disabilities and racial diversity, what they cover, and their intended outcomes. Participants will learn about key gaps identified in the policies and receive recommendations on how to improve them to support LTPA programs. Additionally, the session will explore how these policies may affect the programs offered to people with disabilities from different cultural backgrounds in Illinois.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify how LTPA-related policies address disability/diversity.
- Recognize key state/federal policy gaps affecting inclusive recreation.
- Discuss recommendations on improving policies to support programs in Illinois.



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THURSDAY MORNING SPEED SESSIONS

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

All speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.

1101

Stronger Together: Expanding Reach & Programming w/o Expanding Your Budget



Topic Track: Forest Preserve & Conservation

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom D

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Emily Kenny**, Volunteer Services Supervisor, Forest Preserve District of Will County

Is your organization facing challenges in community engagement, program variety, or resource limitations? Discover how partnering with regional, national, or even international organizations can open doors to fresh opportunities. Even teaming up with a nearby organization with an established audience can create win-win outcomes. In this speed session, you'll hear about unique collaborations that brought added value to actual events—think exclusive swag, engaging demos, and memorable experiences you couldn't offer on your own. You'll also learn how these partnerships can benefit both your public-facing and internal audiences. Walk away with practical strategies to align with mission-driven partners, extend your reach, and better serve your community.

Learning Objectives:

- Evaluate real-world examples of collaborations that enhanced participant experience with demos, swag, or a unique twist on an ordinary event.
- Identify characteristics of potential partners that align with your organization's mission and audience.
- Apply partnership strategies that benefit both external customers and internal stakeholders (e.g., staff, volunteers).

THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

12:30 pm – 2:00 pm

All pre-conference workshops award 0.15 CEUs.

Pre-registration is required.

1

Elevate Your Team: Become the Coach Your Team Can't Wait to Follow

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall I

Time: 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Nan Gesche**, Authentic Encourager

What if the biggest threat to your team's performance... is you?

Research shows that 70% of team engagement hinges on the manager. That means your leadership style is either fueling performance—or quietly driving people out the door.

In this high-impact, interactive session, you'll uncover the hidden habits that sabotage motivation and learn how to flip the script—fast. You'll discover what it takes to go from boss to coach—the kind of leader your team raves about, rallies behind, and remembers for life.

This isn't fluff. This is your moment to master the mindset and tools that separate high-performing leaders from everyone else. Packed with real-world strategies, surprising insights, and coaching skills you can use immediately, this session will leave you saying, "Why didn't I learn this years ago?"

Leaders who attend this session will walk away with the playbook to ignite engagement, loyalty, and results—while everyone else keeps wondering why their teams are burned out and disengaged.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to identify three behaviors that instantly increase motivation and trust.
- Participants will be able to outline a simple coaching framework that will help boost engagement and accountability.
- Participants will be able to list smart methods for tailoring feedback, support, and recognition without adding time to the day.

200

Can Grass be Greener? Native Lawn Alternatives as a Conservation Tool



Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall L

Time: 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Lauren Umek**, Senior Project Manager, Chicago Park District; **Liz Anna Kozik**, Research Scientist-Rethinking Lawns, Chicago Botanic Garden; **Rebecca Barak**, Conservation Scientist, Chicago Botanic Garden

While lawns within parks are important for recreation, not all of these grassy spaces are actively used. The conversion of non-recreational turf lawns to natural areas can yield significant environmental benefits. However, transforming these spaces into areas with tall-growing plants can raise concerns related to visibility, safety, aesthetic, and management. Accepting this reality, how might we alter these spaces to enhance their utility for both people and the natural world.

This session will introduce a suite of middle-ground landscape options featuring native plants that are shorter and more lawn-like than a typical tallgrass prairies, yet capable of delivering ecosystem services, including pollinator support, stormwater management, carbon storage, and air cooling. These services are critical to sustain urban and suburban communities. In partnership with local research institutions, the Chicago Park District has installed multiple test sites, exploring a variety of landscape options and will present preliminary data on installation, maintenance, public perception, educational opportunities, and key ecosystem services provided by lawns and other "native lawn alternatives".

Learning Objectives:

- Gain better understanding of potential ecosystem services provided by native plants in a park landscapes and how those are measured.
- Recognize the costs, challenges, and methods of site preparation, installation, and maintenance associated with converting existing turf grass into more sustainable options.
- Explore techniques to engage, communicate, and educate park visitors on the sustainability value of native plants in public spaces.



THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

12:30 pm – 2:00 pm

All pre-conference workshops award 0.15 CEUs. Pre-registration is required.

300

Yes, And...We're Ready: Heroic Improv to the Rescue

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall K

Time: 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Mary Tyszkiewicz**, Founder - Heroic Improv, Heroic Improv; **Paula Marr**, Sponsorship & Marketing Coordinator, Worth Park District

Build reflexes and not just plans through using improv exercises for emergency training that stick. Parks staff are often first responders when things go wrong at public events, yet a “practice gap” exists between safety drills and real-world readiness. Heroic Improv (HI) bridges this gap with engaging exercises based on the 5-step HI Cycle: Alert, Ready, Connect, Focus, Move. This cycle, developed from research on hundreds of rapid rescues, shows how small groups naturally respond in emergencies. HI training helps everyone practice the 5 abilities you need to effectively respond in an emergency.

HI exercises are imaginative, interactive, and brief—5 to 15 minutes—easily fitting into staff meetings or training days. They build “sticky” abilities like communication, adaptability, and decision-making that transfer to real crises. Used by Navy SEALs, educators, and recreation professionals, HI exercises require no special equipment and are simple to lead, making them ideal for busy teams. Come to our session to experience focused, flexible emergency training that delivers immediate value without disrupting your schedule—and boosts your team's ability to respond effectively when it matters most.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn how Heroic Improv bridges the gap between routine safety drills and real emergency response by building adaptable small group abilities for all staff.
- Participants will learn how using imagination and interaction makes training sticky and valuable in actual emergency response.
- Participants will experience boosting emergency readiness and teamwork using quick, high-impact improv exercises that build essential response abilities.

500

Looking at Sticky Problems from New Angles

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.15

Location: Grand Hall GH

Time: 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Bobbi Nance**, President, Recreation Results LLC

Some problems don't ever seem to go away. They resist quick fixes, frustrate teams, and leave us stuck in the same old conversations. This interactive workshop is designed to help you tackle those sticky challenges from fresh perspectives. You'll learn techniques that encourage you and your teams to get the issues out of your head and down on paper so that you can reframe complex issues, spark new thinking, and uncover hidden assumptions that may be holding you back. Through hands-on exercises tackling real-world problems, you'll leave with practical techniques you can use to work through and collaborate on your own sticky problems you're facing now and those that you will face down the road.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and reframe persistent challenges in a way that helps open up new possibilities for action.
- Apply creative thinking frameworks to generate innovative approaches.
- Recognize and challenge hidden assumptions that may be limited problem solving efforts.

600

The 10¢ Decision: Small Change Elevates Service and Community Experience

Topic Track: Facility Management

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall J

Time: 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Laurie Guest**, Laurie Guest, CSP, CPAE, Guest Enterprises, Inc

In a field where passion meets public service, it is easy to feel grounded by tight budgets, staff fatigue, and growing community demands. But what if your biggest wins came not from sweeping change, but from the smallest shifts? In this high-energy workshop, Hall of Fame speaker Laurie Guest introduces The 10¢ Decision—a game-changing approach to customer service and team morale built on tiny, intentional choices that cost little but deliver big results. Through relatable stories and real-world strategies, Laurie shows how park and rec professionals can boost guest satisfaction, staff engagement, and community trust without adding more to their plates.

Attendees will walk away with practical, easy-to-implement tools to improve the service experience, re-energize their teams, and build a culture people want to be part of. This session delivers laughter, lightbulbs, and lasting impact—perfect for anyone looking to reignite their “why” and help their agency soar above the status quo. Laurie's interactive style invites participation while her insights inspire action, making this workshop the perfect launchpad for meaningful change in your organization.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify small, cost-free actions that can immediately improve guest and team interactions.
- Apply the “10¢ Decision” framework to boost morale and reduce service fatigue.
- Every attendees receives a digital resource for Busting Out of Service Fatigue.



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THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend the 60-minute sessions on Thursday.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (*pending approval*) are noted in the session listing.



THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2026

15 Charting the Course: Strategic Planning for the Journey Ahead

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **David Mohr**, Executive Director, Lindenhurst Park District; **Melissa Henriksen**, Assistant Director, Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies; **Sameera Luthman**, Director of Marketing, Naperville Park District

This panel presentation will serve as a “guided tour” of the practical and fundamental components of a sound strategic planning process, while sharing some advanced tools and techniques that experienced facilitators use to undertake a holistic review of an organization's strategic direction.

It will include an overview of what a strategic planning process looks like and answer important questions such as: What are the options to consider in designing your process? What are the advantages and pitfalls of different plan aspects? What roles do participants play, including the facilitator, the project leader, organization members, governing boards, and stakeholders? How can you keep the plan fresh? What's next – what does implementation and action planning look like? Participants will hear from our team of experienced process designers and facilitators as well as panelists who have created strategic plans for their respective parks and recreation organizations.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the core components and potential variations of the process, including advantages and disadvantages.
- Identify options and the pros and cons of different input, discussion, and action planning components and approaches.
- Learn how strategic planning fits into other organizational functions, such as budgeting and accountability.

112 Real Estate 101

Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Roosevelt 3AB

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **David Silverman**, Equity Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; **Scott Puma**, Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.

How do you acquire real estate and develop it for your residents, and how do you sell property that's no longer needed? This session will focus on the acquisition and development of park property and will provide tips and information regarding best practices for acquiring and creating useful property, including working with developers to acquire property. We will discuss how to navigate the development process from planning through municipal approval. Additionally, the statutory methods and requirements for the sale of park property will be reviewed with tips as to how to avoid pitfalls.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the various ways to acquire property.
- Gain insight on how property is developed and how to develop property through the municipal zoning review process.
- Address issues regarding the sale of property.

120 Can We and Should We Have Video Surveillance in Park and Facilities?



Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom C

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Megan Mack**, Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; **Tyler Smith**, Associate, Ancel Glink, P.C.

Video surveillance cameras are everywhere. What policies and procedures do park districts and recreation associations need to have in place before they start recording in parks and recreation facilities? You will learn the best practices for utilizing video surveillance systems, the implications of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Local Records Act on video surveillance recordings, and legal duties associated with video surveillance recordings. We will also provide updates on recent case law related to the use of video surveillance cameras at park district facilities.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the potential benefits and legal implications of using video surveillance.
- Understand the need for policies governing the use of video surveillance systems in your parks and facilities.
- Learn best practices for implementing a video surveillance system in your parks and facilities.



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THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend the 60-minute sessions on Thursday.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (*pending approval*) are noted in the session listing.

126

From Ballot to Victory: Strategies for Successful Referendums

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Gold Coast

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Keri-Lyn Krafthefer, Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; Lauren Raspanti, Director of Marketing and Community Engagement, Lemont Park District; Paul Hanley, Managing Director, Beyond Your Base

Join the Lemont Park District for an in-depth look at the journey to passing a successful referendum. This session will walk you through the strategies used to engage the community, build trust, and effectively communicate the vision for future projects. Learn about the planning process, outreach methods, and lessons learned along the way. Whether you're considering a referendum or looking to strengthen community relationships, this session offers practical insights and proven tactics for achieving success. Learn from a team that did it first hand-with a successful and well received message.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify strategic approaches to prepare their district for a potential referendum.
- Understand the legal guidelines, requirements, and limitations that shape referendum communication.
- Evaluate when and how a consultant can support planning, messaging, and community engagement efforts.

137

Understanding Your Tax-Capped Levy

Topic Track: Boardmanship

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Michigan 3

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Andrew Kim, Director, Public Finance, PMA Securities, LLC; Mitch Bowlin, Director of Business Operations, Park District of Oak Park

This session will provide an overview of the factors that determine your district's tax-capped levy and how those factors can impact future property tax revenues. These factors include metrics such as CPI, EAV reassessment rate, New Property valuations, and the impact of a limiting rate increase referendum. Understanding how property tax revenues are determined allows a district to plan for its future financial profile, including both budgetary and capital needs. Specifically, we will look at the Park District of Oak Park's (PDOP) levy to see how PDOP has utilized its levy projections to inform its capital planning.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the various factors that impact how a tax-capped levy might change from one year to the next.
- Learn how the Park District of Oak Park incorporated its levy into its capital planning efforts.
- Learn how a referendum for a limiting rate increase will impact your District's financial future.



209

Rethinking the "Services" in Park Services

Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Michigan 1

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Corrie Guynn, Superintendent of Parks, Planning and Facilities, Skokie Park District

This session will cover additional ways, some well-known and some unique, that a park services department can enhance and engage with the community, provide volunteer services and programs and even...generate revenue?! From adopt-a-parks to a twist on public gardens to little free libraries and a very unique birthday party package, there are lots of ways the Skokie Park District parks department provides services beyond the norm. Finally, there will be time allotted at the end of the session for participants to ask questions and hopefully volunteer their own unique programs to the group.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees should come away with additional programs/ideas that their park services department can incorporate.
- Attendees will receive detailed info on how to get these programs up and running.
- Discussion at the end will allow for other districts to share additional ideas, ask questions, and collaborate on best practices.



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THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

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Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (*pending approval*) are noted in the session listing.



308 Financial Policy Revamp: Policies for Lasting Impact

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Water Tower

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Dalena Welkomer**, Managing Director, Raymond James & Associates; **Kevin Wachtel**, Senior Manager-Consulting, Government Finance Officers Association; **Michelle Binns**, Director, PFM Asset Management/ IPDLAF + Class

Strong financial policies are the foundation of sound fiscal management and sustainability. This session will explore why all park districts - regardless of size - should adopt formal financial policies to guide decision-making, enhance transparency, and promote long-term planning. Attendees will gain insights into the core financial policies commonly implemented by Illinois local governments, including fund balance, investment, and debt management policies. The session will also highlight best practices, practical examples, and key resources to assist in drafting effective and adaptable policies tailored to your organization's needs.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the importance behind adopting formal financial policies, including what rating agencies consider in their evaluation.
- Learn best practices for those financial policies commonly used in Illinois, including GFOA's best practices.
- Know what resources are available to write and/or update financial policies.

404 Build Your Bash

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Jess Day**, Recreation Supervisor, Village of South Elgin; **Jill Kowalyszyn**, Recreation Manager of Athletics & Special Events, Huntley Park District

During this session, the presentation will begin with an introduction to the six essential goals for creating a successful special events. These goals are: 1) Planning and Goals, 2) Logistics and Budget, 3) Program and Entertainment, 4) Marketing and Promotion, 5) Vendor/Community Organization Management, and 6) Event Execution. In addition to these objectives, participants will focus on two key concepts that enhance special event creation: the 5 P's (Person, Place, Product, Price, Promotion) and the 5 C's (Concept, Coordination, Control, Culmination, Closeout). Utilizing these foundational ideas will facilitate the planning of impactful events. Given the diverse backgrounds of the recreation professionals attending this workshop, participants will collaborate in groups to design a special event and present their concepts to their peers. This collaborative effort will foster group dynamics and networking skills, allowing participants to gain insight into the challenges and considerations other professionals face in organizing and executing special events. By the conclusion of the session, all participants will depart with innovative event ideas and strategies ready for implementation.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the the six essential goals for creating a successful special events.
- Collaborate in small groups to design a special event concept, applying the 6 Essential Goals, 5 P's, and 5 C's to realworld scenarios that reflect the diverse needs of park and recreation agencies.
- Strengthen professional communication and networking skills by presenting group developed event concepts, gaining insight into the challenges, perspectives, and strategies used by peers across the field.

417 The Wild World of Affiliates

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom D

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Mak Dolphin**, Athletics Manager, Palatine Park District

This presentation explores how park district affiliate partnerships—such as those with youth sports leagues and community nonprofits—are evolving in response to modern challenges. Traditionally, these relationships were informal, volunteer-driven, and loosely managed, often leading to inconsistent program quality, liability risks, and communication issues. However, demographic shifts, increased regulatory demands, tighter budgets, and new digital tools are pushing park districts toward more structured and accountable affiliate models.

Districts are now formalizing agreements, setting clearer performance standards, and using technology to streamline operations like scheduling, registration, and feedback. Tiered affiliate systems, where benefits are tied to compliance and impact, are also becoming more common.

The session will include peer discussion, where attendees will be asked to share challenges, success stories, and how they operate their affiliate groups. Overall, the presentation will emphasize that as community needs evolve, so must affiliate partnerships—requiring districts to adopt more strategic, transparent, and mutually beneficial approaches.

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss current trends in how park districts are working with Affiliate groups.
- Identify best practices for structuring effective affiliate relationships, such as formal agreements, performance expectations, and tiered support models.
- Gain practical strategies to improve collaboration and accountability with affiliates, ensuring programs are equitable, sustainable, and aligned with district goals.



THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend the 60-minute sessions on Thursday.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (*pending approval*) are noted in the session listing.

605

Creating a Safety Plan: Mitigating Risks and Ensuring Safety

Topic Track: Facility Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom A

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Johnathan Nies, Project Director, Counsilman-Hunsaker

Empower your staff to become champions of safety in the aquatics industry through a deep dive into the essential components of effective safety planning. This session will explore the various types and benefits of safety plans and highlight their vital role in protecting patrons. Participants will learn how to assess risks with confidence, identifying potential hazards before they escalate into incidents. The workshop will also guide attendees through the process of crafting and implementing a comprehensive, regulation-compliant safety plan. Finally, participants will develop the skills needed to continuously evaluate and refine their plans, ensuring their approach to safety remains dynamic, responsive, and effective year-round.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the benefits of an aquatic safety plan for patron and staff protection.
- Learn to conduct safety assessments to identify and mitigate potential aquatic hazards.
- Know the process of creating, implementing, and evaluating a compliant aquatic safety plan.

904

Bridging the Gap: Turning Parks Projects into Powerful Social Media Stories

Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom B

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Connor Bangs, Digital Marketing Specialist, Naperville Park District; Jesse Barr, Park Specialist II, Naperville Park District; Tiffani Picco, Park Operations Manager, Naperville Park District

Through real-world examples, this session explores how marketing professionals can build strong working relationships with parks staff to tell stories of impactful projects and initiatives that might otherwise go unnoticed. Attendees will learn how to identify the types of parks projects that resonate with the public and lend themselves to engaging social media content. We'll also share strategies for turning these projects into informative, educational, and engaging stories that highlight the expertise of parks staff and deepen community understanding of the work happening behind the scenes. Participants will leave with a clear process for collaborating across departments to create mission-driven content that adds value and builds trust with their audience.

Learning Objectives:

- Develop relationships and foster open lines of communication with parks staff to manage a process that highlights projects of all types.
- Identify parks projects that translate to engaging social media content.
- Create dynamic content based around those projects that inform, educate, and engage the audience.

1006

Know Your Rights in Public Spaces

Topic Track: Diversity

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Fred Tsao, Senior Policy Council, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

This session will provide an overview of know-your-rights information in interactions with law enforcement, including ICE. As the pace of immigration enforcement continues to increase, and concerns among immigrant communities about potential arrest discourage public participation, learning about how immigrants and allies can protect ourselves and each other is becoming more crucial. This session will inform audience members about basic constitutional rights that apply to all of our neighbors, and how these rights apply in public non-public spaces. This session will also provide guidance on how to document and report incidents and what other resources are available to educate and empower immigrants.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about the basic rights that the US Constitution guarantees to all people in the US.
- Get clarity regarding the distinctions between public and private spaces, and how different policies apply in these spaces.
- Learn about resources that are available for immigrants and people who work with immigrants.



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THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend the 60-minute sessions on Thursday. All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (*pending approval*) are noted in the session listing.

1105

Beyond Access: Inclusion Standards for Meaningful Engagement

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Suite 3

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Amanda Kloo**, Director of Inclusive Recreation, National Inclusion Project

Together we will dive into the national Standards for Inclusive Recreation Programs and unpack the implementation criteria and process for becoming a fully inclusive provider. Interactive small groups will analyze standards alignment examples to discuss how programs can enhance their services to promote best inclusionary practices across all settings. We will engage in sample assessments measuring readiness and in goal setting exercises to inform program planning. Reflections and discussions will help apply practical strategies for serving individuals with disabilities at all levels of an organization. Participants will leave with action points to move beyond accessibility toward meaningful inclusion of the diverse populations they serve.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will explore the nuts and bolts of the national Standards for Inclusive Recreation.
- Participants will engage with assessment measures and criteria to become a fully inclusive recreation provider.
- Participants will plan inclusion forward action items to implement in their programs/settings right away.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

All pre-conference workshops award 0.15 CEUs.

Pre-registration is required.

2

The Solution Mindset: How To Use Innovation From Other Industries In Yours

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall I

Time: 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Nir Bashan**, CEO and Founder, The Creator Mindset

Some of the most game-changing ideas aren't born in your own industry—they're borrowed from somewhere completely different. Think about it: what if the breakthrough your organization needs is already out there, thriving in another field, just waiting for you to bring it home?

In this high-energy, hands-on workshop, innovation expert Nir will take you on a fast-paced tour of creative problem solving like you've never experienced before. You'll discover his proven 10-step approach—sharpened through years of work with top consulting firms, powerhouse companies, and influential associations nationwide. And here's the best part: you won't just listen, you'll *do*. You'll roll up your sleeves, try the techniques in real time, and see how quickly you can turn fresh ideas into action.

Whether you're a seasoned leader, a rising star, or somewhere in between, you'll walk away with tools you can use immediately—tools that will make you the “go-to” person in your organization when challenges arise. Expect to laugh, think differently, and leave buzzing with ideas you can't wait to try. Because when you learn to see beyond your own walls, there's no limit to what you can create.

Learning Objectives:

- Discover and practice a proven 10-step creative problem-solving method used by top innovators across industries.
- Apply these techniques to everyday workplace challenges—turning routine tasks like emails, meetings, and projects into opportunities for innovation.
- Leave equipped with practical, easy-to-share tools that empower colleagues and spread a culture of creative problem solving throughout the organization.

400

Staff Well-Being Before Burnout

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall J

Time: 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Megan Owens**, Independent Scholar



Each generation approaches the work-life balance uniquely and younger employees are challenging historical beliefs. Younger employees may recognize the feeling of stress, but their understanding of the underlying causes and techniques for addressing stress are becoming less predictable in the workplace. This situation inevitably creates more stress for park and recreation managers, as you try to find the balance between maintaining workplace expectations and employee well-being and growth. This session will present a broader approach to employee well-being and provide managerial techniques that address general well-being before employees burnout.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will enhance their understanding of employee well-being.
- Participants will develop a new strategy to assess workplace expectations within an evolving scope of employee well-being.
- Participants will identify managerial techniques to address employee well-being while maintaining workplace expectations.



THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

All pre-conference workshops award 0.15 CEUs.

Pre-registration is required.

900 Next-Level Digital Marketing: Strategies to Elevate Your Impact



Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall K

Time: 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): Len Davis, President, PUREi

Ready to supercharge your digital marketing game? This session dives into cutting-edge tools and tactics designed to elevate hyper-local marketing for park and recreation agencies of any size. Learn how to automate social media like a pro, create and leverage engaging video content with confidence, and streamline your workflow with powerful tools like Make.com. Discover smart ways to maximize paid advertising on a budget, harness the power of analytics to drive results, and unlock DIY tricks to boost your website's SEO. Get ready to work smarter, amplify your reach, and make a bigger impact with your marketing efforts!

Learning Objectives:

- Learn how to create a digital marketing plan that maximizes impact while working with limited resources.
- Gain practical knowledge of key digital marketing platforms, data analytics, and automation strategies to enhance engagement and efficiency.
- Learn how to leverage social media automation, video content, SEO, and paid advertising insights to drive measurable results with minimal time and budget.

1000 Culture That Performs: Organizational Agility That Lifts Productivity 30%



Topic Track: Diversity

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall GH

Time: 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): David Myles, Keynote Speaker + Self-Oppositional Resiliency Specialist, David Myles Group Inc.

In today's rapidly shifting landscape, park and recreation agencies face mounting pressure to do more with less—while serving increasingly diverse communities and managing diverse teams. But without cultural agility, communication breaks down, morale suffers, and innovation stalls.

This interactive session introduces a breakthrough framework: Organizational Intercultural Agility—the key to unlocking stronger collaboration, smarter leadership, and measurable results. You'll learn how leveraging cultural awareness and inclusive team design can yield up to a 30% boost in productivity within 90 days, based on real-world implementation and proven strategies. Through live storytelling, reflective discussions, collaborative dialogue, and tech-enhanced activities like Slido and scenario-based learning, attendees will leave with ready-to-use tools that help reduce misunderstandings, energize staff, and build resilient workplace cultures.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the core principles of Organizational Intercultural Agility and how it goes beyond traditional diversity and inclusion efforts to meet the demands of today's evolving workforce.
- Discover and apply three actionable strategies to reduce cultural friction, foster inclusive communication, and build high trust, collaborative teams.
- Develop a 90-day action roadmap to create a culturally agile workplace environment that boosts team productivity, innovation, and morale by up to 30%.

1100 Calling All Educators: 10 Inclusion Tips to Meet All Needs

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

CEU: 0.15

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall L

Time: 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): Amanda Kloo, Director of Inclusive Recreation, National Inclusion Project

Together we will explore powerful, practical strategies that will make educational programming more inclusive, from design, to registration, to implementation and every step in between. Interactive small groups will apply inclusion frameworks to lessons and activity plans. Participants will collaborate on accommodation planning and adaptation making to meet diverse ranges of strengths and needs. We will discuss, reflect, and propose common barriers to engagement. Then, we will brainstorm solutions that are universally beneficial. Participants will walk away with ready-to-implement ideas, resources, and tools to put into practice right away. Each session activity reinforces the belief that inclusion is an action not an idea and that inclusive programming benefits everyone—not just “some” one.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will apply the BEST design framework to evaluate the inclusivity of program lessons and activities.
- Participants will develop CAN plans to maximize engagement in programs.
- Participants will use the ADAPT strategy to implement accommodations and make adaptations to increase access and foster inclusion.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:00 pm –4:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend the 60-minute sessions on Thursday.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (*pending approval*) are noted in the session listing.



THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2026

21 Story-Driven Leadership: Unlocking Engagement, Accountability, and Results

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Aleya Harris**, CEO, The Evolution Collective Inc.

Transformative storytelling strategies for leaders who want to connect authentically, inspire action, and drive measurable outcomes.

Imagine walking into a team meeting where enthusiasm is low, communication is sparse, and motivation feels like a thing of the past. As a leader, you're left wondering how to re-ignite purpose, foster alignment, and inspire real accountability. The answer? Storytelling.

In today's fast-paced workplace, authentic, purpose-driven storytelling is a powerful tool for leaders seeking to rebuild trust, spark engagement, and lead with impact. This engaging and actionable session reveals how to embed strategic storytelling into your leadership approach to create clarity, connection, and momentum.

Award-winning speaker and Radically Authentic Strategic Storytelling expert Aleya Harris introduces The Story-Driven Leadership Framework™, combining her SPARK Philosophy™ and StorySpark™ techniques to help leaders build a culture of connection and performance.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the key principles of Story Driven Leadership and how storytelling can enhance leadership effectiveness by increasing engagement and fostering deeper connections.
- Learn how to craft and deliver authentic, compelling narratives that inspire accountability, motivate teams, and drive measurable results in a leadership context.
- Explore practical strategies for using storytelling as a tool to overcome common leadership challenges, such as employee disengagement and resistance to change.

113 Bidding and Managing a Successful Construction Project

Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Water Tower

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Nicole Karas**, Senior Counsel, Robbins Schwartz; **Matthew Gardner**, Attorney, Robbins Schwartz



Navigating a construction project, regardless of size, can be overwhelming. This program will provide attendees with knowledge of how your agency can successfully manage a construction project from team selection to project closeout. The presenters will highlight important planning considerations for a construction project. Attendees will learn important elements of the bid process, including essential terms to include in bid and contract documents, how to determine the lowest, responsible bidder, and address common bid problems. Guidance on the use of government joint purchasing cooperatives as an alternative to the formal bid process will be discussed. The presenters will then provide key strategies on how to mitigate construction phase problems.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn essential planning considerations for construction projects.
- Learn important elements of the bid and contract process, including use of government joint purchasing cooperatives as an alternative.
- Learn key strategies on how to mitigate construction phase problems.

123 Policies in Practice: Preparing for Shifts in Anti- Discrimination and Harassment Enforcement

Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Gold Coast

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Elizabeth Wagman**, Partner, Tressler LLP; **Kathleen Gibbons**, Senior Counsel, Tressler LLP

This training equips Illinois park district leaders and staff with the tools to uphold strong anti-discrimination and harassment policies amid potential shifts in federal priorities under a new presidential administration. Participants will review current legal obligations under Illinois and federal law, explore how changes in federal enforcement may impact workplace protections, and learn proactive strategies to maintain inclusive, compliant, and respectful environments. The session will include policy review checklists, case studies, and guidance on reinforcing a culture of equity and accountability.

Learning Objectives:

- Review tools and best practices for strong anti-discrimination and harassment policies in the current regulatory environment.
- In depth discussion of current state and federal laws impacting the workplace.
- Participants will leave with real world guidance and policy review checklist to navigate the current workplace.



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THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:00 pm –4:00 pm

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136

Bonds 101 – Legal Requirements and Best Practices

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Suite 5

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): Anjali Vij, Partner, Chapman and Cutler LLP; Melissa O'Connor, Partner, Chapman and Cutler LLP; Jessica Cannaday, Executive Director, Community Park District of La Grange Park

This presentation will provide an introduction to municipal bonds and will guide you through the legal framework of issuing bonds. We will discuss borrowing limitations, different types of bonds, the timeline for a bond issuance, federal tax law rules and securities law disclosure requirements. We will also cover what compliance obligations continue after the bonds are issued and remain until the bonds are finally paid off. Lastly, we will provide a case study of successful park district projects funded with referendum and non-referendum bond proceeds.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about different types of bonds and the related legal requirements and timelines for bond issuances.
- Learn about compliance with federal tax law related to bond issuances.
- Learn about disclosure and reporting obligations related to bond issuances.



208

Nature Play and Play Spaces: Learning from the Past, Planning for the Future

Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Roosevelt 3AB

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): Suzanne Quinn, Manager, KOMPAN Play Institute

We are seeing a trend toward nature-based play and play in nature in parks and outdoor spaces. In this session we will look at the history of dedicated play spaces for play in nature and play with natural elements, review the current research on the benefits of nature and nature play for health and wellness and share ideas on designing a built environment that works with nature to support the benefits of active outdoor play. This session will include a review of research and case studies of successful designs for active play spaces that work with the natural environment and enhance nature play, and will involve a discussion of how we can plan for the future of nature play in Illinois.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will discuss historic and contemporary trends in outdoor nature based play and play in nature.
- Participants will be able to identify design features in outdoor play environments that support play in nature.
- Participants will learn how to critique playground design to make the most out of natural features while also being compliant with safety criteria.

305

Change Your Organization's Safety Culture In Sixty Minutes!

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom C

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): Chuck Misner, Safety & Wellness Coordinator, Forest Preserve District of Kane County

In this interactive and thought provoking session, learn how to define, develop, and improve your safety culture. We will examine the personal and organizational safety values that drive your safety results. Ask yourself what is your risk tolerance and how does it affect your decision making. Learn ways to instill safety values amongst your team and coach them to work safely. Leaders take action and empower their team to own their personal safety. Measure your team's safety score with leading and lagging indicators to achieve excellence. Plan to be engaged with questions and answers to take your safety program to a new level.

Learning Objectives:

- Define and develop safety culture. What are the elements of a safety culture and how do they drive results?
- How do safety leaders hold themselves and others accountable? Empower your team to change the safety of your organization.
- Measure safety success. How do you improve your team's safety score?



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THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:00 pm –4:00 pm

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310 Look Ma, No Wires!

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Suite 3

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Phil Tom**, Sr Project Manager - IT, Chicago Park District; **Alman Ruiz**, Director IT, Chicago Park District; **Enrique Morales**, Deputy Director IT, Chicago Park District

Today, IT networks have evolved into a mission critical ecosystem that supports every park department, including, security, facilities, revenue, human resources and programs.

The challenge we're going to focus on in this session is how to extend the network to support these departments when they're scattered across your park. For example, security needs access to remote cameras, revenue is adding a point of sale system and facilities needs to monitor HVAC systems across the park district.

In the past, when the network needed to be extended, the common practice was to install a cable to the equipment. This is standard practice if the new equipment and existing network are located within the same building. But what if the need request is located in a building across the parking lot or on the other side of the park?

This session will discuss how the Chicago Park District addressed these challenges and saved thousands of dollars in construction costs, reduced the implementation time from weeks to less than a day and minimized disruptions to park activities, visitors, and property.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn how Millimeter wave technology can help extend their networks while reducing costs and time.
- Participants will understand the requirements for implementing millimeter wave technology.
- Participants will evaluate the suitability of this approach for their respective parks.

407 Embracing Life One Step at a Time Through Line Dancing

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Plaza Ballroom

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Stephanie Fairbanks**, Marketing Manager, Bartlett Park District



Let's step out on the floor and dance through every stage of life bringing you joy, keeps your memory intact, and helping you stay healthy. Perhaps you need healing from a traumatic personal experience, maybe you are in a new stage of life and could use a way to meet new people or are looking for a way to exercise without really having it seem like exercise. Line dancing is an activity that you can do without a partner, without dance experience, at a variety of locations, and at every age and stage of life. Diversity, cultural differences, body types, personalities, styles and everything that makes you "you" bring a collective energy to the floor. Who is ready to bring this to your fitness groups, senior centers, and recreation special events to elevate lives.... let's dance!

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the power of moving and how it affects your well-being mentally and physically. Reduce stress by moving your body to music and releasing endorphins, which have mood-boosting effects.
- Improve brain fitness and memory while learning steps. Line dancing offers protection against dementia with a 76% reduced risk among participants.
- Learn how to break down each dance for anyone to be successful.

416 The Power of Plain Language

Topic Track: Recreation

Special Interest Category: Students/Early-Career Professionals

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Erin Classen**, Superintendent of Marketing/Communications, Glencoe Park District; **Grant Gilchrist**, Humans Resources Manager, Glencoe Park District; **Shannon Stevens**, Facility Manager - Glencoe Beach and Ice Rink, Glencoe Park District

Even the smallest shifts can significantly improve how accessible and welcoming our communications are for all audiences. In this session, we explore how using plain, simple language is not just a writing style—it's a powerful tool for equity and inclusion.

In a recent collaboration between the Glencoe Park District and Clear Language Labs, full-time managers and department heads participated in an engaging training that challenged traditional communication norms and offered practical strategies to make written materials clearer and more inclusive.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the foundational principles of plain language and its relevance to DEI.
- Learn how everyday communication—emails, policies, signage, and forms—can be barriers or bridges.
- Discover other ways you and your park district can learn and provide similar trainings to your staff.



**BE SURE TO CHECK THE MOBILE
APP FOR THE LATEST UPDATES
ON THE CONFERENCE!**



THURSDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS 3:00 pm –4:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend the 60-minute sessions on Thursday.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (*pending approval*) are noted in the session listing.

509

Tough Conversations Don't Have to Be Tough

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.1

Location: Michigan 1

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Lisa Santoria**, Director of HR and Staffing, Western DuPage Special Recreation Association

In every workplace, community, and relationship, there will come a time when a difficult conversation becomes necessary. Whether it's addressing underperformance, resolving conflict, correcting behavior, or providing honest feedback, many of us dread these moments. We worry about how the other person will react, whether we'll be misunderstood, or if the conversation will damage the relationship.

But what if we shifted our mindset? What if we approached tough conversations with the belief that they don't have to be so tough after all?

This 60-minute presentation, *Tough Conversations Don't Have to Be Tough*, is designed to empower professionals at all levels to navigate challenging discussions with clarity, empathy, and confidence. Rather than avoid or fear confrontation, participants will walk away with the tools and mindset to see these moments as opportunities for growth, stronger communication, and deeper trust.

Learning Objectives:

- A Mindset Shift: We'll begin by unpacking why we often view difficult conversations with dread. Participants will be encouraged to reframe them as courageous conversations and not dreadful.
- A Simple Conversation Framework: L.E.A.D. We'll introduce a four-step model to guide tough conversations.
- Handling Resistance or Defensiveness Not all conversations go smoothly. Participants will learn how to respond when someone becomes defensive, shuts down, or pushes back.

604

Beyond Access: When "Accessible" Falls Short of Functional

Topic Track: Facility Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Brittany Johns**, Occupational Therapist, Shirley Ryan Ability Lab

What does it mean when a space is labeled "accessible," yet remains unusable, unwelcoming, or even unsafe for the very people it claims to serve? In many public and recreational environments, compliance with accessibility guidelines is mistaken for true inclusion. But ramps without rest areas, sensory overload in "accessible" spaces, and one-size-fits-all adaptations fall short of what users with disabilities actually need. This session goes beyond compliance to explore the crucial difference between technical accessibility and practical functionality. Participants will learn to identify the common gaps that arise when design prioritizes checklists over lived experience—and how to close those gaps using inclusive, user-informed approaches.

As conversations around equity and disability inclusion evolve, there's increasing demand for spaces that do more than "check the box." Communities expect accessibility that's meaningful—and this session equips professionals to meet that call with insight, empathy, and action. Through real-world examples, participant stories, and interactive problem-solving, attendees will explore what functional access looks like across physical, sensory, cognitive, and social dimensions. The session will also offer a framework for evaluating and improving spaces and programs to ensure they're not just accessible on paper—but functional, intuitive, and empowering in practice.

Learning Objectives:

- Distinguish between legal accessibility standards and functional usability in accessibility design.
- Identify at least three barriers that persist in "accessible" environments.
- Assess environments for sensory, cognitive, physical, and social accessibility.

903

Before, During & After: Communications for Every Phase of Your Referendum

Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom B

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Bianca Hervig**, Marketing & Communications Specialist, Roselle Park District; **Jacqueline Rachev**, Senior Account Supervisor | Nonprofit, Business and Government, Public Communications Inc.; **Lynn McAteer**, Executive Director, Roselle Park District; **Nicolette Orlandino**, Deputy Director, Roselle Park District

A successful referendum campaign doesn't start with ballot language — it starts with listening. This session walks participants through strategic communications at every stage of the referendum process: before the vote, during the campaign and after the results are in.

Staff from the Roselle Park District and Public Communications Inc. will offer practical strategies, messaging frameworks, cautionary lessons and successes from a campaign that passed. Presenters will share real materials, tools and a behind-the-scenes look at how to build trust, communicate legally and clearly and keep momentum going after approval. Attendees will leave with a roadmap for transparency, consistency and public engagement — whether they're starting to plan or in mid-campaign.

Learning Objectives:

- Before the Vote: Build a foundation of public trust and transparency well before a referendum is announced through community listening, stakeholder alignment, and message development.
- During Campaign: Execute an education plan that clearly communicates what the referendum means, who it impacts and why it matters using multiple platforms, messengers and legal language guidelines.
- After Approval: Maintain momentum and public confidence by communicating project updates, demonstrating accountability and reinforcing the value of the community's support as projects are completed.

BREAKFAST CLUB



Thursday, January 29 9:00 pm – 11:30 pm
Hyatt Regency Chicago, Grand Ballroom, East Tower/Gold Level

COME TEST YOUR SKILL AT LAWN GAMES!

The Breakfast Club is a high-energy rock / dance 80's tribute band, whose every song is a hit that brings the house down with spontaneous, exuberant 'I know this song!' singalongs. Moonwalk down memory lane with the Breakfast Club as they spin you right round to all the radical sounds, styles, and way cool dance steps from the 1980's in over-the-top retro 80's attire.



This is not a ticketed event... everyone is welcome!
Get to know your fellow conference attendees in a relaxed atmosphere!

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29		SESSION SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE				
	BOARDMANSHIP	DIVERSITY	FACILITIES	FINANCE/ INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	GOVERNANCE/LEGAL	HR/RISK MANAGEMENT
9:45 am - 11:00 am	OPENING KEYNOTE SESSION					
12:00 pm - 2:30 pm		1001 - Everybody Moves: A Policy Scan of Disability and Diversity in Leisure				301 - Crisis Case Study
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	137 - Understanding Your Tax-Capped Levy	1006 - Know Your Rights in Public Spaces	605 - Creating a Safety Plan: Mitigating Risks and Ensuring Safety	308 - Financial Policy Revamp: Policies for Lasting Impact 126 - From Ballot to Victory: Strategies for Successful Referendums	112 - Real Estate 101 120 - Can We and Should We Have Video Surveillance in Park and Facilities?	
3:00 pm - 4:00 pm			604 - Beyond Access: When "Accessible" Falls Short of Functional	310 - Look Ma, No Wires! 136 - Bonds 101 – Legal Requirements and Best Practices	113 - Bidding and Managing a Successful Construction Project 123 - Policies in Practice: Preparing for Shifts in Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Enforcement	305 - Change Your Organization's Safety Culture in Sixty Minutes!
	SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 2025 – SUBJECT TO CHANGE.					

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29		WORKSHOP* SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE				
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm*			600 - The 10 Cent Decision: Small Change Elevates Service and Community Experience			300 - Yes, We're Ready: Heroic Improv to the Rescue
2:30 pm - 4:00 pm*		1000 - Culture That Performs: Organizational Agility That Lifts Productivity 30%				
C 52	SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 2025 – SUBJECT TO CHANGE. * FEE-BASED WORKSHOPS, PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.					

LEADERSHIP/
MANAGEMENTMARKETING/
COMMUNICATIONSPARKS/NATURAL
RESOURCES

RECREATION

THERAPEUTIC
RECREATIONFOREST PRESERVE
AND CONSERVATION

OPENING KEYNOTE SESSION

13 - The UN-Keynote: Breaking the Mold with Innovation and Creativity 11 - Reimagining Leadership: Cultivating Connection, Creativity, and Commitment	901 - Connecting Communities: Mastering Communication for Park District Success	202 - Sunnyside Park: Revitalizing Communities with Nature-Based Solutions	401 - From Parks to Places: Transforming Community Spaces	502 - From Classroom to Day Camp: Strategies for Summer Success	1101 - Stronger Together: Expanding Reach & Programming Without Expanding Your Budget
15 - Charting the Course: Strategic Planning for the Journey Ahead	904 - Bridging the Gap: Turning Parks Projects Into Powerful Social Media Stories	209 - Rethinking the "Services" in Park Service	404 - Build Your Bash 417 - The Wild World of Affiliates		1105 - Beyond Access: Inclusion Standards for Meaningful Engagement
21 - Story Driven Leadership: Unlocking Engagement, Accountability, and Results	903 - Before, During, & After: Communications for Every Phase of Your Referendum	208 - Nature Play and Playspaces: Learning From the Past, Planning for the Future	407 - Embracing Life One Step at a Time Through Line Dancing 416 - The Power of Plain Language	509 - Tough Conversations Don't Have to Be Tough	

WORKSHOP* SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

1 - Elevate Your Team: Become the Coach Your Team Can't Wait to Follow for Park District Professionals		200 - Can Grass Be Greener? Native Lawn Alternatives as a Conservation Tool		500 - Looking at Sticky Problems From a New Angle	
2 - The Solution Mindset: How to Use Innovation From Other Industries	900 - Next-Level Digital Marketing: Strategies to Elevate Your Impact		400 - Staff Well Being Before Burnout		1100 - Calling All Educators: 10 Inclusion Tips to Meet All Needs

SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 2025 — SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

* FEE-BASED WORKSHOPS, PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30		SESSION SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE				
	BOARDMANSHIP	DIVERSITY	FACILITIES	FINANCE/ INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	GOVERNANCE/ LEGAL	HR/RISK MANAGEMENT
8:30 am - 9:30 am	<p>100 - So You Want to Stay Out of Jail? What Park District Leadership Must Know About Ethics Requirements</p> <p>117 - Accountability in Action: The Board's Role in Executive Evaluation</p>	<p>1005 - Inclusion of All Sizes: Inclusive Design Strategies for Every Budget</p>	<p>609 - Sexual Predators: Creating a Safety Plan</p> <p>601 - Soft Surface Power Hour: Managing Soft Surface Playground Maintenance</p>	<p>303 - Back to Basics: Issuing Debt 101</p>	<p>110 - Legal/Legislative Part I</p>	<p>312 - P is for Prevention, R is for Risk: An Alphabet for Safety</p>
10:00 am - 11:00 am	<p>102 - Board Member to Board Leader, Part 1</p> <p>105 - Beyond the Basics: How to Respond When OMA and FOIA are Weaponized Against Your Agency</p>	<p>1007 - Master the Art of Connection: Navigating Difficult Conversations with Confidence and Compassion</p>	<p>607 - Handling Patron Complaints Like a Pro: From Frustration to Loyal Fans!</p> <p>608 - How to Speak Aquatics</p>	<p>306 - Cybersecurity in Parks</p>	<p>111 - Legal/Legislative Part II</p>	<p>314 - Supporting the Front Line: Leadership Practices for Stronger Teams</p> <p>132 - Glass Half Full - Understanding Your IMRF Benefits</p>
12:00 pm - 12:30 pm		<p>1002 - Exploring Adaptive Physical Activity Organizations: An Environmental Scan</p>	<p>602 - Wheels of Change: Urban Mobility and Parks</p>	<p>302 - Practical AI Usage for Parks</p>		
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm		<p>1009 - The Side By Side: Cross Cultural Exploration</p>	<p>610 - The Wonderful World of Facilities: An Intro to Facilities Management</p>	<p>313 - Smart, Simple, and Streamlined: Using Microsoft Forms</p>		<p>317 - Working Smarter with HR: Strategies for Mid-Level Managers</p>
3:30 pm - 4:30 pm	<p>104 - IDNR Grant Outlook 2026</p> <p>114 - Leading Together: Strengthening Board, Executive, and Staff Relations</p> <p>121 - Government Finance for Non-Finance Board Members & Professionals</p>	<p>1004 - Girls Just Wanna Have Fun: Designing Parks with Teen Girls In Mind</p>	<p>603 - Aquatic Roundtable</p>	<p>311 - Municipal Market Impact from Washington's Policies</p>	<p>119 - Regulating Controversial Park Activities</p> <p>127 - 2026 Employment Law Update</p>	<p>316 - The Switchback Career Path: Navigating Non-Linear Journeys in Parks and Rec</p>
C54		SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 2025 – SUBJECT TO CHANGE.				

SESSION SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

LEADERSHIP/ MANAGEMENT	MARKETING/ COMMUNICATIONS	PARKS/NATURAL RESOURCES	RECREATION	THERAPEUTIC RECREATION	FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION
18 - Innovate to Elevate 101 - Mining for the Golden Nugget: Uncovering Critical Insights in Survey Data 107 - Girl Power - Advice I'd Give My Younger Self	905 - How to Work with the Media	207 - IPRA Healthy Play Initiative: Celebrating Collective Park Impacts	405 - Creating Unforgettable Experiences: Elevating Service in Parks & Rec 408 - Engage, Excite, and Evolve: Modern Approaches to Adult Programming		1104 - Beavers: Partners in Climate Resilience
17 - Getting Started: Your First Five Years in Parks & Recreation 108 - Girl Power - Get Empowered Now!	908 - Name It to Claim It: Unlocking the Power of Naming Rights Partnerships	203 - An Environmentally Friendly Approach to Converting Low Use Areas in Parks	406 - Designing for Demand: Creating Programs & Services More Likely to Sell 411 - It's Not the Size of Your Agency: It's How You Use It	503 - Brain Hacks: Happiness Chemicals and Hope Molecules	1109 - The Story of Illinois' First (and only so far) Dark Sky Park
10 - Disagreement Doesn't Have to Be Divisive 12 - The Burnout Buster Bootcamp for Leaders	902 - How to Be Successful in Sponsorships When Its Not Your Full-Time Job	201 - Introduction to Early Tree Care	402 - Understanding The Role of Technology: Bridging the Generational Gap	501 - Evolving Supports: How Can We Better Serve Adults with Disabilities	1102 - Talking Trash with Your Community: Adventures in Sustainability
20 - Q&A: The Best Way to National Certification Exam Success	907 - Marketing with AI: Practical Tools for Promotion, Engagement, and Growth	205 - Integrating Equity into Park Planning - A Case Study	415 - The Art of Dealing with Difficult People in Youth Sports	506 - Inclusion 101	1103 - Adaptive Reuse and Preservation of Extant Buildings for Sustainability
3 - Executive Director Panel Discussion 16 - Department Head Training 101 106 - Agency State Accreditation - A Blue Print to Excellence	906 - Marketing & Communications Roundtable	206 - Introduction to Forensic Tree Analysis	412 - Leaders Linking Up: School Age and Day Camp Roundtable 414 - Targeting Success: Launching an Archery Program at Your Agency	505 - Designing with Sensory Needs in Mind	1107 - Forest Preserve and Conservation Roundtable

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31		SESSION SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE					
		BOARDMANSHIP	DIVERSITY	FACILITIES	FINANCE/ INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	GOVERNANCE/LEGAL	HR/RISK MANAGEMENT
9:00 am - 10:15 am		KEYNOTE SESSION FINDING THE FUNNY IN CHANGE					
10:45 am - 11:45 am		103 - Board Member to Board Leader, Part II 118 - Park District Finance - It's Not Intuitive 125 - The Process of Amending a Motion 134 - Commissioners in Conversation: Addressing Today's Top Issues	1008 - The Language Has Changed, But The Work Remains the Same		307 - DIY GPT: Building a Custom AI Assistant for Park and Rec Professionals	115 - Be Prepared for Your First Amendment Audits	309 - How to Create a Workplace Where Everyday is a Walk in the Park!
12:30 pm - 1:30 pm		109 - Planning for the Future: A Board Member's Role in Strategic and Master Planning 124 - Robert's Rules of Order 129 - Boardmanship Essentials Part I		606 - Everything's For Rent	304 - Beyond the Buzzwords: Cutting-Edge AI Technologies Explained	116 - Understanding Social Media: Facebook? Instagram? X? 131 - Solar and Green Energy Options	133 - Managing Teen Takeover Events: Strategies, Challenges, and Collaborative Solutions
2:00 pm - 3:00 pm		128 - Parks Role in Successful Planning and Economic Development 130 - Boardmanship Essentials Part II	1003 - Driving Innovation, Inclusion, and Well-Being			122 - You Really Should Read Your Board Policy Manual (And Keep it Updated) - Erin & Scott	315 - The Leadership Trailhead: Equipping New Supervisors for the Journey Ahead
C 56							

LEADERSHIP/ MANAGEMENT	MARKETING/ COMMUNICATIONS	PARKS/NATURAL RESOURCES	RECREATION	THERAPEUTIC RECREATION	FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION
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KEYNOTE SESSION
FINDING THE FUNNY IN CHANGE

19 - Ladies, What's Holding You Back? 135 - Municipal Roundtable	909 - The Marketing Playbook: Winning Strategy	204 - Leveraging OSLAD for Inclusive, Future-Ready Parks	403 - Beyond the Playground: What Millennial Parents Really Want 409 - From Chaos to Control: Transform Your Programs & Facilities	508 - Recreation Reimagined: Integrating Sensory Tools for Inclusive Fun	1108 - Making a Case for Bison: Early Wins for Wildlife and EcoSystem Health
14 - Career Development Bootcamp: How to Improve and Stand Out			413 - Scrap the Crap: Make Your Programs Greener, More Sustainable, & Purposeful	507 - Priorities and Presence: Navigating Career and Family in Special Recreation	1106 - Conservation @ Home: Supporting Biodiversity Beyond the Preserve
22 - Time Management: How Billionaires Do It!	910 - The Struggle is Real: Building A Social Plan That Actually Works		410 - From Small to Spectacular: The Power of Partnerships in Event Planning	504 - Climbing the Ladder: Navigating Growth & Balance in SRA Careers	



FRIDAY AT-A-GLANCE

7:00 am – 5:00 pm
Conference Registration Open

7:00 am – 7:45 am
WERQ Dance Fitness

8:00 am – 5:00 pm
Quiet Room

8:30 am – 9:30 am
Conference Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Agency Showcase

9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Exhibit Hall Open

10:00 am – 11:00 am
General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

11:00 am – 12:00 pm
Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hour

12:00 pm – 2:00 pm
All Conference Awards Luncheon*

12:00pm – 12:30 pm
Conference Speed Sessions (0.05 CEUs)

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm
Conference Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
Exhibit Hall Open

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm
Dessert in the Exhibit Hall*

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm
General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

5:00 pm – 6:30 pm
IPRA Annual Business Meeting

5:00 pm – 6:30 pm
Commissioners' Reception

9:30 pm – 11:00 pm
Leadership Reception**

* Ticketed Event **By Invitation Only

FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

18

Innovate to Elevate

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Debbie Woodbury**, Founder/ Managing Director, Meritology Institute

In today's rapidly changing world, innovation is a leadership necessity. This session explores how leaders who embrace innovation can drive growth, adaptability, and lasting impact across their organizations. Innovative leaders prioritize creativity, continuous learning, and strategic risk-taking. They recognize that to meet evolving challenges and seize emerging opportunities, teams must feel empowered to think differently.

Attendees will examine how cultivating a culture that supports experimentation and values new perspectives enhances both individual and team performance. When failure is seen as a stepping stone to progress rather than a threat, employees are more likely to take initiative and contribute bold ideas.

Participants will gain insights into how innovative leadership shifts the focus from reactive problem-solving to proactive opportunity-building. They'll also discuss the importance of modeling openness, embracing change, and fostering psychological safety, key elements that help teams remain agile and forward-thinking.

This session equips leaders with practical strategies to lead through change, nurture innovation at every level, and create a workplace environment where creativity and collaboration thrive. The goal: to position teams not just to survive uncertainty, but to lead confidently in the face of it.

Learning Objectives:

- Through interactive discussions, attendees will develop strategies to adapt to change.
- Attendees will be equipped with tools to lead with innovation amidst constant change through real-life examples and practical exercises.
- Participants will analyze innovation opportunities to gain actionable strategies to transform challenges into opportunities.

FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.



FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2026

100

So You Want to Stay Out of Jail? What Park District Leadership "Must Know About Ethics"

Requirements

Topic Track: Boardmanship

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall K

Day/Date: Friday / 30 January 2026

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **James Hess**, Partner, Tressler LLP; **John O'Driscoll**, Partner, Tressler LLP; **Megan Olson**, Partner, Tressler LLP

This session will provide park district leadership and employees with critical information about the Gift Ban Act, prohibited political activities, conflicts of interest, official misconduct, whistleblower protections and executive session confidentiality. We will cover updates to legal and ethical requirements, including recent opinions from the ethics commission and attorney general. This session will be interactive, with the presenters asking for attendees to participate in discussions, provide real life examples of everyday issues, and even a few pop quiz questions.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the limitations of gifts that can be received and the need for placing boundaries on certain relationships.
- Properly evaluate potential conflicts of interest and determine what steps need to be taken to avoid legal and ethical consequences.
- Understand best practices for closed session portions of meetings, as well as the importance of maintaining necessary confidentiality.



101

Mining for the Golden Nugget: Uncovering Critical Insights in Survey Data

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Randolph 1AB

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Jeff Andreasen**, President, aQity Research & Insights, Inc.; **Tessa Andreasen**, Sr. Associate, aQity Research & Insights, Inc.

Agencies regularly conduct or subcontract opinion surveys to identify the needs and desires of their community, often as part of a needs assessment for a comprehensive master plan, attitude and insight research on specific topics or facilities/parks, or voter surveys regarding a possible referendum. Hidden within these data are often critical insights and connections that add clarity and context to the overall results...if you know where to look. These nuggets can impact the interpretation and action-ability of data-driven decisions.

This session will provide a treasure trove of best practices when interpreting survey data. Whether unearthing unexpected insights or delivering the valuable "jackpot!" moment, we will share examples and case studies that demonstrate how digging deeper can result in greater understanding and clarity.

Learning Objectives:

- Differentiate true priorities for potential park/facility improvements or program needs (isolating the "must-haves" from the "nice-to-haves").
- Develop simple metrics to profile/clarify your strongest advocates vs. passives vs. detractors, those most vs. least willing to pay, and other key segments.
- Uncover critical and often unexpected insights from open-ended responses and best practices to efficiently interpret that feedback.



107

Girl Power - Advice I'd Give My Younger Self

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom D

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Carrie Fullerton**, Executive Director, Arlington Heights Park District; **Maryfran Leno**, Executive Director, Itasca Park District

How many times have you said to yourself, "I wish I knew this sooner in my life!?" Don't worry...we've all been there!

Could you use some help with: career advancement tips, setting priorities effectively, work/life integration, building confidence and more? Then this session is for you!

Join us for this empowering session featuring a diverse panel of seasoned and mid-career professionals who will each share five-minute insights reflecting on the guidance they wish they'd known earlier in their careers.

Get ready, because we will focus on honest, practical advice to help YOU become your very best self!

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will gain actionable strategies for setting and managing priorities.
- Participants will explore various approaches to achieving work/life integration.
- Participants will learn career development techniques from industry veterans.





FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

110 Legal/Legislative Part I



Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Jason Anselment**, General Counsel, Illinois Association of Park Districts; **Derke Price**, Equity Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.

In this session, legal experts will discuss new laws and recent court decisions that affect park districts, conservation districts, forest preserves, recreation, and special recreation agencies. Changes to the Park District Code and other new legal requirements affecting district operations and facilities including swimming facilities and trails, grant programs, labor and employment, and financial procedures will be discussed along with other statutory changes that may impact your agency. Recent tort liability cases that provide guideposts in your agency's day-to-day operations will also be covered. You will also receive information about the latest developments from the state capitol. Stay current on a wide variety of changes in the law and learn how these changes will affect the operation of your agency.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify recent legal changes that impact day-to-day operations.
- Understand how these legal changes and other developments will affect their agency's operations.
- Determine how to adapt to the requirements of new laws while following best practices.

117 Accountability in Action: The Board's Role in Executive Evaluation



Topic Track: Boardmanship

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall L

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Christina Codo**, Commissioner, Winnetka Park District; **Dannie Wilson**, Manager, BerryDunn; **Elsa Fischer**, Manager, BerryDunn; **Nikki Ginger**, Manager, BerryDunn

A vital role of the Board is determining the effectiveness of the agency's executive director. This is key responsibility—which should be done annually-- directly impacts the organization's performance, how you service your community, and the effectiveness and achievements of your leader. While some elected officials may have experience with this process, it can be an uncomfortable and intimidating task for those who do not.

An executive director evaluation should involve a structured approach, with clear objectives, and a transparent process. It should include identifying and utilizing key performance metrics and incorporate feedback from key direct reports.

In this session, the panel will provide tips and tools that will help you evaluate your current process, determine if it is effective, and help you refine what you are doing to improve the outcome.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will understand the importance of the evaluation process.
- Attendees will learn about the variety of evaluation tools.
- Attendees will better understand their role in the process and how to conduct a meeting with their executive director.

207 IPRA Healthy Play Initiative: Celebrating Collective Park Impacts



Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom A

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Anthony Iracki**, Professional Development Manager, PlayCore; **Jennie Sumrell**, Community Outreach Director, PlayCore

Be inspired by leadership case examples and their collective impact on community vitality! Across Illinois, communities embraced the Statewide Healthy Play Initiative to create park destinations that promote health, inclusion, physical activity, and connection to nature. By thoughtfully aligning evidence-based design practices with community needs, these projects delivered measurable improvements in physical activity levels, social engagement, and even local economic outcomes.

This session will explore how intentional investment in high-quality outdoor spaces fosters healthier lifestyles and stronger community bonds. Participants will learn how research-driven design principles were applied in real-world settings and how the outcomes were measured and reported. Additionally, we'll highlight key planning tools and resources available to help other communities pursue similar initiatives. Discover how parks became powerful catalysts for community health and well-being.

Learning Objectives:

- Summarize the collective impact findings and usage outcomes from park projects across the state.
- List five resources to assist with planning outdoor play and recreation destinations.
- Discuss case examples of community park destinations that thoughtfully turned research into practice.

FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.



303

Back to Basics: Issuing Debt 101

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Roosevelt 3AB

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Dalena Welkome**, Managing Director, Raymond James & Associates; **Seema Patel**, Senior Counsel, Chapman and Cutler LLP

Periodically, park districts will need to authorize and issue debt to fund capital infrastructure projects. In this session, we will discuss park and forest preserve district borrowing alternatives, the legal requirements for each type of borrowing, the general timeline, the various methods of sale, the credit criteria and process to request a rating, and the different parties involved in a typical bond transaction in Illinois. The panelists will also cover what to expect after the issuance of bonds, including post issuance compliance, rating surveillance and monitoring debt for potential refinancing.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn the basic borrowing options available to Illinois issuers, with an emphasis on park and forest preserve districts.
- Understand the timeline, steps and deal participants involved in a bond transaction.
- Learn post issuance best practices and procedures.

312

P is for Prevention, R is for Risk: An Alphabet for Safety

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Michigan 1

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Jenn Foreman**, Safety & Training Supervisor, Buffalo Grove Park District



Safety and training doesn't have to be a snoozefest, or only talked about after something goes wrong. In this interactive and practical session, we'll walk through an "alphabet" of real-life scenarios, lessons learned, and emerging trends in safety and risk management across park and recreation settings. From A for Awareness to Z for Zero Incidents (we wish!), we'll share safety wins worth repeating and some moments that turned into valuable teaching tools.

Whether you're a seasoned risk manager, new to risk management, or just someone who wants fewer incident reports on your desk, you'll leave with some ready-to-use ideas, and a renewed focus on prevention, training, and culture change.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify common and emerging risks in parks and recreation settings using real case examples.
- Create a culture of proactive safety and training using engaging and relevant tools.
- Build a safety "cheat sheet" from A to Z to take back to their agencies.

405

Creating Unforgettable Experiences: Elevating Service in Parks & Rec

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom C

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Marisa Hoff**, Partner, The Empower Group

Join us for an engaging session that explores the core principles of exceptional customer service, tailored specifically for the unique demands of the parks and recreation industry. Discover how to integrate the 12 Empowered Experience Essentials into every aspect of your organization — from daily interactions to long-term planning — to create memorable moments that set your agency apart.

Through actionable tips and real-world examples, you'll learn how to build stronger connections, foster loyalty, and transform everyday patrons into passionate advocates for your programs and spaces. We'll explore ways to elevate customer interactions, deepen relationships, and cultivate a service culture that inspires trust and belonging within your community. Don't miss this opportunity to revolutionize your customer service approach, build lasting relationships, and position your agency as a premier destination for recreation and enrichment.

Learning Objectives:

- Articulate the essential principles of exceptional customer service, focusing on the ten foundational tenets discussed in the session.
- Implement actionable strategies to create personalized interactions, build lasting connections, and set your organization apart with an exceptional customer experience.
- Demonstrate skills to transform satisfied customers into enthusiastic advocates for your organization.



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FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

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All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

408

Engage, Excite and Evolve: Modern Approaches to Adult Programming

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall I

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Ann Marie Buczek**, Director of Marketing & Community Engagement, Park District of Oak Park; **Susan Crane**, Historie Properties and Special Events Manager, Park District of Oak Park

Discover how to transform your facilities into hubs of innovation by creating fresh, experience-driven event concepts that go beyond traditional formats. This session will inspire you to reimagine adult programming not as routine offerings, but as dynamic platforms for creativity, connection, and personal growth. Learn how to design events that build stronger community ties, attract local business partnerships, and appeal to a wide range of adult interests—from playful social experiences to meaningful learning opportunities.

We'll explore how to break out of the mold of standard fitness classes and lectures by using your space in unexpected ways, tapping into trends, and fostering a sense of belonging. Walk away with practical strategies and fresh ideas to energize your adult programming and bring new life to your facility.

Learning Objectives:

- New ideas for programs appealing to adults.
- Identifying and creating best practices for partnering with community groups and businesses.
- "De-Programming" the program guide on reaching and engaging adults through marketing.

601

Soft Surface Power Hour –Managing Soft Surface Playground Maintenance

Topic Track: Facility Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Plaza Ballroom

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Carter Soczek**, Playground Safety Inspector, Chicago Park District; **Dan Reamer**, Facilities Manager, Chicago Park District; **Marek Stankowski**, Facility Manager, Chicago Park District

Soft surface playground systems have been in use for decades. Even though the product has improved over time, proper maintenance of this system comes with many challenges. With an obligation to maintain safe play spaces, all agencies are faced with constant budget constraints, which prompt agencies to seek cost effective solutions to prolong system lifespan avoid costly expenditure. This session will discuss the many factors that affect the decision-making process as well as how to effectively utilize the system and available funding to the fullest. Participants will gain valuable insights to support informed and effective decision-making.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify effective maintenance practices to preserve the performance and longevity of soft surface systems.
- Apply best practices for timely repairs to extend the life of the soft surface system.
- Evaluate key indicators to help decide when the system should be replaced completely.

609

Sexual Predators: Is Your Agency Prepared?

Topic Track: Facility Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall J

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **John Good**, President and Founder, JG GOOD Corporation

In recent years, park district facilities have become a haven for both Sexual Predators as well as pedophiles. This highly interactive, 60-minute presentation will cover a wide variety of critical areas, park district employees need to be aware of to stop criminal acts from occurring at their facilities. Illinois laws purposely made to prevent these offenders from being on park district property, methods and techniques offenders use to lure their victims away from the facility and finally, what other park districts are using to prevent offenders from getting on to their park district property, will all be reviewed. Time will be allowed for questions participants may have about this issue will also be allocated.

Learning Objectives:

- Techniques offenders often use to interact with their victims.
- Illinois laws park district staffs need to be aware of to prevent these offenders from being on their property.
- Information responding police officers will need to apprehend these offenders will also be presented in a chronological order.



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FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

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905

How to Work with the Media

Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom B

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Gail Gaboda**, Creative Communications Specialist, Batavia Park District; **Geneva Slupski**, Communications & Marketing Manager, Rolling Meadows Park District

This session is designed for staff who are new to leadership roles that require media interaction, as well as communications and marketing professionals who have not previously worked with the press—though anyone who may find themselves speaking with the media will benefit. Participants will learn how to build strong relationships with local media, what to say (and what to avoid) during interviews, and how “off the record” truly works. The session will also cover strategies for getting news releases picked up by outlets, writing press materials with journalistic impact, and understanding what editors wish you knew. Attendees will explore how to train staff for media interactions, how to respond if misquoted, and how to navigate sensitive situations when reporters call. Finally, the workshop will discuss when to use traditional media versus social media to ensure your message is delivered effectively and reaches the right audience.

Learning Objectives:

- How to build a relationship with local media.
- How to speak confidently to the media.
- How to handle sensitive situations.

1005

Inclusion of All Sizes: Inclusive Design Strategies for Every Budget

Topic Track: Diversity

Special Interest Category: Small Agency/Small Staff

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall GH

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Jill Moore**, Inclusive Play Specialist, Landscape Structures



As designing and integrating inclusive spaces grows in popularity, communities face the challenge of wanting to create meaningful inclusive design in smaller spaces with often limited budgets. There's a misconception that creating inclusive play spaces has to be an expensive and spacious overhaul which doesn't have to be true! Inclusion of All Sizes shares strategies to create a more inclusive park system and where we need to direct our time, energy and effort. Starting with how to find our local ability demographic, we will discuss key resources to inform us of disabilities being served in our local community. Once we know who's coming to play, we can utilize that information to guide us on which equipment to select that will be most impactful, and best solutions for the space, budget, and abilities. Every park doesn't have to have every single inclusive feature, they can answer for different things. In showing real world examples of play spaces and methodology successfully applied by communities across the US, we will see how we can continue to make our park systems impactful for all.

Learning Objectives:

- Articulate a system for obtaining the ability demographic of your own local community utilizing local resources, geographical information, and key individuals to connect with.
- Articulate how to utilize ability demographic information to select play equipment with the most impact to support physical, sensory, cognitive, and social.
- Review case studies and resources to apply best practices in selecting equipment to fit both space and budget, as well as best practices to create an inclusive park system.

1104

Beavers: Partners in Climate Resilience

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Suite 3

Time: 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Speaker(s): **Jeff Boland-Prom**, Vice President, Illinois Beaver Alliance; **Rachel Siegel**, President, Illinois Beaver Alliance

Coexisting with beavers would allow us to reap the benefits of their ecosystem services, including boosting biodiversity, building drought and flood resilience, and improving water quality by removing sediment and nutrients. Still, beaver damming can cause flooding that puts infrastructure and property at risk. Properly designed and installed culvert fencing, fence and pipe flow devices, and pond levelers are effective at preventing beaver damage and are less expensive than the continuous cycle of trapping and killing beavers. We will share information about how flow devices work; as well as their high success rates, and discuss permitting issues. We will also provide instructions on how to wrap specimen trees. We will discuss the benefits of developing a beaver management plan for your entity. We'll also discuss beaver programming for children and adults that allows the public to understand how ecosystems function with the help of these charismatic animals.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the ecosystem services that beaver habitat provides and the value of coexistence versus lethal management.
- Recognize a culvert protection system and pond leveler and identify the scenarios for which it is the appropriate solution.
- Learn how a written beaver management plan can benefit your entity.



17

Getting Started: Your First Five Years in Parks and Recreation in Illinois

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall J

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **Andrew Kerins**, Associate Professor, Eastern Illinois University; **Bailey Hecker**, Recreation Supervisor, Tinley Park-Park District; **Jake Galauner**, Recreation Manager, City of Yorkville (IL); **Jake Pawlak**, Facility Manager, Madison Meadow Athletic Center, Lombard Park District

The early years of a career in parks and recreation are filled with both enthusiasm and steep learning curves. This panel brings together young professionals from across Illinois to share honest reflections on their entry into the field. Panelists will discuss what they loved—and what they struggled with—in their first jobs, from community impact and creative programming to burnout, bureaucracy, and navigating limited resources. They will also share lessons they wish they had known earlier, such as how to manage their time, advocate for themselves, and find mentors. These insights offer valuable takeaways for current students, educators, and supervisors working with new professionals.

Looking ahead, panelists will reflect on what's next in their careers and the factors influencing their future decisions, including job satisfaction, organizational culture, and long-term goals. The session will include a moderated discussion and audience Q&A. By centering the voices of those newest to the profession, this panel highlights the needs, expectations, and potential of the next generation of parks and recreation leaders—and offers a timely perspective for a field focused on workforce development and retention.



FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify common challenges and opportunities experienced by young professionals in entry-level parks and recreation roles.
- Analyze strategies used by emerging professionals to navigate the transition from student or intern to full-time practitioner.
- Evaluate key factors—such as mentorship, organizational culture, and work-life balance—that influence early career satisfaction and long-term career decision-making in the parks and recreation field.

102

Board Member to Board Leader, Part 1

Topic Track: Boardmanship

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Randolph 1AB

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **Dannie Wilson**, Manager, BerryDunn

At the heart of every Park Board and Foundation Board is a good-intentioned citizen who wants to give back to their community. Whether a new eager-beaver or a seasoned veteran, board members share the same desire to do a fantastic job. This session will help individual board members ensure that they are being impactful in a positive way. If you're looking for a session that goes beyond the nuts and bolts and digs into real, meaningful, and applicable board topics, then look no further! As a former park board secretary and a current park board commissioner, practical experience on both sides of the table will be shared with an engaging, insightful, and lighthearted approach. This is just what you need to acquire new skills and energize yourself for a successful Board tenure!

Learning Objectives:

- Participant will be able to identify tactics they would like to employ in their boardmanship.
- Participant will be able to explain their peers' number one leadership strategy.
- Participant will be able to display renewed energy and enthusiasm in their leadership role.

105

Beyond the Basics: How to Respond When OMA and FOIA are Weaponized Against Your Agency

Topic Track: Boardmanship

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Roosevelt 3AB

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **Andrew Paine**, Partner, Tressler LLP



We live in an increasingly polarized world, and local government is no exception. And these days when faced with controversial topics, it is becoming more and more common for members of the public to try and use (abuse?) OMA and FOIA to further their personal agendas. This session will provide Park District Board members and staff with tools to combat this practice. We will discuss managing public comment, who is and is not “news media,” recurrent requesters, voluminous requesters, and how to use those and other strategies to make your interactions with challenging members of the public more manageable and efficient.

Learning Objectives:

- In depth discussion on the ways FOIA and OMA can be weaponized against public agencies and tips and tricks for minimizing its impact.
- Using statutory tools, like voluminous requests and the recurrent requester designation, to better handle FOIA frequent flyers.
- Key strategies for dealing with challenging members of the public.

FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:00 am – 11:00 am

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108

Girl Power - Get Empowered Now!



Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom D

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): Carrie Fullerton, Executive Director, Arlington Heights Park District;

Maryfran Leno, Executive Director, Itasca Park District

Let's face it...some situations can just suck the life out of us! Join us for an inspiring session focused on helping participants build confidence and reclaim a sense of empowerment in the workplace. Learn about what empowerment looks like at work, how to recognize when and how we give our power away, and how to build practical skills to stay empowered in challenging situations.

Whether it's navigating tough conversations, negotiating, or stepping into new opportunities, this session addresses the common stress and anxiety many professionals feel - and offers tools to overcome them!

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will understand the meaning of empowerment in a professional context.
- Participants will learn verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to project confidence.
- Participants will develop a greater self awareness and confidence to remain empowered in the face of workplace challenges.

111

Legal/Legislative Part II



Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): Steven Adams, Partner, Robbins Schwartz; Maura Freeman, Director of Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives, IAPD

This session will review the many new federal and state statutes, regulations, court decisions and PAC opinions affecting park and forest preserve districts in 2025. We will explain what the new laws are, why they were enacted, how they function, and how they will impact and change your agency's current policies, practices and procedures. We will share practical tips and strategies for achieving and maintaining compliance with the new laws, rules and regulations, and provide advice for notifying your stakeholders. We will also review statutes that have already gone into effect and discuss compliance to date.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about new federal and state laws, rulings, and regulations impacting your agency including rules and decisions pertaining to OMA/FOIA, social media use, employment law, and more.
- Identify policies, practices and procedures impacted by new statutes, cases, and regulations, and steps needed to get into compliance.
- Maintain compliance with changes in the law.

132

Glass Half Full - Understanding Your IMRF Benefits



Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): Rebecca Alanis, Member Education Counselor, Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund

The Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) is a public pension fund that administers retirement, disability, and death benefits for employees of local government in Illinois. Created by the Illinois General Assembly, IMRF began operating in 1941 with five original employers and \$5,000 in assets. Today, IMRF serves more than 3,000 employers and manages about \$55.2 billion in assets. With a funded status of 95.8%, IMRF is one of the best-funded public pension systems in the country.

An Education Counselor will explain how to qualify for a Tier 1 and Tier 2 pension, how the pensions are funded, which benefits are available to IMRF members, and the importance of having more than one savings as members prepare for retirement.

Learning Objectives:

- Understanding how your pension is calculated.
- Understanding how the Voluntary Additional Contribution Plan works.
- Understanding what benefits are available to you.



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FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2026



FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

203

An Environmentally Friendly Approach to Converting Low Use Areas in Parks

Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom A

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **Jacob Kuban**, Supervisor of Park Horticulture & Recreation Maintenance, Peoria Park District; **Jacob Mol**, Land Steward, Peoria Park District; **Kristi Shoemaker**, Supervisor of Environmental & Interpretive Services, Peoria Park District

Join staff from the Peoria Park District to learn about our successful conversion of low use, high maintenance areas of our parks into havens for wildflowers, pollinators, and appreciation of nature. Learn how you can use "No Mow" techniques to enhance your space by taking it out of intense mowing and herbicide use, lessening the negative impact on the environment and improving the park patron experience. Hear from the Supervisor of Environmental services, the Land Steward and the Supervisor of Park Horticulture and Recreation Maintenance at the Peoria Park District.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn why some traditional landscaping practices have detrimental effects on the environment including frequent mowing, herbicide, and artificial fertilizer use.
- Learn the decision making process behind which areas are candidates to be converted to "No Mow" and the process for doing so.
- Learn about our results of No Mow conversion, such as the impact on wildlife, successes (and tips to avoid), and how it has impacted our budget/staff time and patron experience.

306

Cybersecurity in the Parks: How to Protect Your District

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **John Marta**, Principal & Senior IT Architect, GO Technology Group

Cybersecurity threats are growing, and park districts are not immune. In this session, participants will learn how to identify common cyber risks facing public-sector organizations and discover practical strategies for protecting sensitive information, public Wi-Fi networks, and internal systems. Real-world examples and an easy-to-follow cybersecurity checklist tailored specifically for park and recreation agencies will be shared.

Attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of basic cybersecurity principles, actionable steps to strengthen their district's defenses, and the knowledge needed to build a culture of security awareness among staff. Whether your district is large or small, this session will help you proactively address today's evolving cyber threats.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify common cybersecurity threats facing park districts.
- Apply practical security measures to protect networks and sensitive data.
- Build a basic cybersecurity action plan tailored to park district operations.

314

Supporting the Front Line: Leadership Practices for Stronger Teams

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall K

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **Sam Jenkins**, Culture and Community Strategist, Empowering Communities

Front-line staff are the heart of our parks and recreation services. From maintaining welcoming spaces to delivering meaningful programs, these team members keep our communities running. Yet their needs are often overlooked, which can lead to burnout, turnover, and low morale. This session will explore how leaders at all levels can build strong, inclusive teams by fostering psychological safety, trust, and belonging. Attendees will learn practical strategies to support staff well-being, recognize and address burnout early, and create a culture where all voices are valued. Real-life examples and simple tools will be shared to help leaders strengthen connections across teams and improve overall service delivery. Whether you supervise full-time staff, seasonal employees, or volunteers, you'll leave with actionable steps to help your team thrive.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify leadership practices that promote psychological safety, inclusion, and staff well-being.
- Recognize early signs of burnout and apply strategies to support front-line staff before turnover occurs.
- Implement practical tools to strengthen team culture, trust, and communication across all levels of staff.



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FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:00 am – 11:00 am

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2026

406

Designing for Demand: Creating Programs & Services More Likely To Sell

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom C

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): Bobbi Nance, President,
Recreation Results LLC

No one wants to see their new program ideas fall flat or their once successful programs slowly lose steam. But continually coming up with fresh ideas each season can be challenging, especially when you're trying to balance creativity, capacity, and community needs. This session will help you inject new energy and intentionality into your 2026 program and service lineup. Learn how to tap into emerging trends and use focused brainstorming techniques to develop new offerings, create spin-offs from what's already working, and make your programs and services stand out in a crowded market all with the goal of creating programs and services more likely to sell.

Learning Objectives:

- Apply current consumer trends, interests, and expectations to innovate programs, events, and services.
- Identify techniques to transform current programs to create spin-offs or distinguish your programs from competitors.
- List sources for trends information to serve as future inspiration.

411

It's Not the Size of Your Agency; It's How You Use It!

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall I

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): Alison Rodes, Marketing & Communications Manager, Ridgeville Park District; **Marlon Rodas**, Executive Director, Ridgeville Park District; **Natalie Sallee**, Director of Recreation & Special Events, Ridgeville Park District

Short staff? Tight budget? Sounds like our kind of fun! The Ridgeville Park District team will bare it all (professionally, of course) in a practical—and sometimes provocative—panel covering the creative hacks, bold pivots, and resource-stretching moves that keep our park district running smoothly and looking fit. This refreshingly real session dives straight into the juicy stuff: how small park districts can make a huge impact without a big...anything. Come learn how to own what you've got, work it like a pro, and unleash your B.D.E.—Big District Energy!

Learning Objectives:

- How to stretch your resources to go the distance.
- How to leverage your size for a lasting impression.
- How to keep your team satisfied and your community coming back for more.



503

Brain Hacks: Happiness Chemicals and Hope Molecules

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.1

Location: Michigan 1

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): Jennifer Rosinia, President, Kid Links Unlimited, Inc.

What the brain does is what the brain becomes. We've learned a lot from recent neuroscience research. In particular, the ways in which social emotional development, specifically relationships, have a pervasive influence on the behavior, development and learning. For those of us who work with children, learning and expanding our repertoire of strategies that optimize social and emotional development is important. In this session we will learn some fun ways to foster the production of "happy chemicals" and "hope molecules". Do you want to find out how? Please join me as we learn and play around together hacking into the brain.

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss the foundational and influential role of social and emotional development on behavior, development and learning skills in as seen through a neuroscience lens.
- Reflect on traditional strategies for promoting positive behavior and emotional regulation.
- Learn strategies that foster the release of good chemicals in children as well as adults.





FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:00 am – 11:00 am

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607

Handling Patron Complaints Like a Pro: From Frustration to Loyal Fans!

Topic Track: Facility Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall L

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **Hank Ebeling**, Owner, H4 Training/Superhero Service

Patron complaints are often viewed as setbacks, but in reality, they're valuable opportunities for growth, improvement, and relationship-building. When approached with the right mindset and tools, even the most frustrated guest can be transformed into a loyal supporter. In this session, we'll explore strategic, step-by-step methods for addressing complaints with professionalism, empathy, and efficiency. You'll learn how to de-escalate tense situations, actively listen to concerns, offer meaningful resolutions, and follow up in a way that leaves patrons feeling heard and valued. Walk away with practical techniques that will not only defuse conflict but strengthen your reputation and customer loyalty.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn the #1 most forgotten thing to do when handling complaints and why it is crucial.
- Learn the types of complainers and how to handle each properly.
- Learn how to create your own easy process to handle the complaints.

608

How to Speak Aquatics

Topic Track: Facility Management

Special Interest Category: Students/Early-Career Professionals

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall GH

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **Dave Littwin**, Seasoned Aquatics Professional, Freelance; **Jenn Foreman**, Safety & Training Supervisor, Buffalo Grove Park District; **Viktoria Anderson-Orosz**, Aquatics Program Manager, Fox Valley Park District

Let's be honest, if you don't come from the aquatics world, it can feel like aquatics staff are speaking their own language, which is the case. Ever been confused by a pool schedule that looks like a game of Tetris? Frustrated when a request for "just a little more time" is met with a firm "no"? Wondering why you open swim cannot start earlier because of lifeguard in-service? This session dives into the wet and wild world of pool operations from the perspective of those who live it daily, your aquatic professionals. This is designed for non-aquatic staff who work alongside, rely on, or supervise aquatics teams and those who want to better understand what's happening beneath the surface.

We'll walk you through the unique challenges of aquatics, from safety and staffing to scheduling and certifications, and explain why sometimes we have to make sometimes, very unpopular decisions. You'll learn the "why" behind the "no," and how to translate the language of aquatics into workplace language that builds understanding and teamwork instead of frustration. Through real-world examples, a few "you had to be there" stories, and plenty of laughs, we'll explore how to collaborate across departments without getting in over your head.

Learning Objectives:

- Decode aquatics jargon and understand the legal and safety standards aquatics professionals can't compromise on.
- Learn why lifeguard shortages, weather calls, strict ratios, and rules aren't just excuses.
- Leave with a better appreciation of why "no" in aquatics is a "yes" to safety.



908

Name It To Claim It: Unlocking the Power of Naming Rights Partnerships

Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom B

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): **Grant Cowen**, Market President and Relationship Manager, Naperville Bank and Trust; **Sameera Luthman**, Director of Marketing, Naperville Park District; **Stacey Fontechia**, Sales and Sponsorship Manager, Naperville Park District

In this presentation, you'll gain a comprehensive understanding of the naming rights process—from initial planning through implementation and celebration! We'll explore how to introduce sponsorship opportunities in your Request for Proposals (RFP), navigate the board communication process and approvals, and strategically select high-visibility, high-traffic locations that maximize brand exposure for all parties involved. You'll also learn how to determine the right valuation, structure contract terms, and set the optimal duration to ensure long-term benefits across the board. Whether you're new to the concept of naming rights or looking to refine your current approach, this session will equip you with the insights and tools needed to execute successful, strategic, and community-focused partnerships. This session will be presented by, Naperville Park District Sales and Sponsorship Manager Stacey Fontechia, Director of Marketing Sameera Luthman, and Naperville Bank and Trust Market President Grant Cowen.

Learning Objectives:

- Including sponsorship opportunities and associated dollars as part of your RFP process.
- Deciding on a location and the value of the contract.
- Choosing which elements are included in the contract and determining what sponsor community engagement looks like outside of the naming rights.

FRIDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

1007

Master the Art of Connection: Navigating Difficult Conversations with Confidence and Compassion

Topic Track: Diversity

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Plaza Ballroom

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): Brent Scarpo, President, Open Road Consulting and Life Coaching

Organizations nationwide are launching diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives to strengthen workplace culture, foster mutual respect, and harness the power of diverse perspectives. Yet the true success of these efforts depends on everyday interactions—how peers collaborate, how supervisors lead, how teams communicate, and how colleagues navigate differences. DEI becomes real when individuals are willing to engage in honest dialogue, broaden their awareness, and approach difficult conversations with courage and openness.

This training equips participants with the core interpersonal skills needed to put DEI principles into meaningful practice. Attendees will develop active listening skills to better understand both spoken and unspoken messages and cultivate curiosity to recognize potential biases. They will learn to reframe situations by considering alternative viewpoints, engage with new people to uncover blind spots, and identify systemic preferences or structural inequalities that may influence organizational processes. The session also explores how to advocate for alternative perspectives—often referred to as “allyship”—to ensure that all voices are valued and included.

Learning Objectives:

- Active listening – Taking the time to listen to the other person, both in terms of what is spoken and unspoken, is a core skill in broadening consciousness.
- Engaging new people – Talking with someone new can help reveal blind spots that you and your group may have developed over time, such as unconscious bias.
- Reframing – Push yourself to pause and look differently at a situation. Thinking about how another might view things can help reframe a problem or detect new and unintended consequences.



1109

The Story of Illinois' First (and only - so far) Dark Sky Park

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Suite 3

Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Speaker(s): David Leake, Director, Staerkel Planetarium at Parkland College (retired); Matt Kuntz, Site Superintendent, Middle Fork River Forest Preserve, Champaign County Forest Preserves

In 2018, Middle Fork River Forest Preserve earned the status of the first and, to date, only Dark Sky Park in the state as designated by Dark Sky International. Since then, the Champaign County Forest Preserve District site has skyrocketed in visitation. In 2025, the Forest Preserves completed its Dark Sky Trail and Amenities project to enhance the stargazing experience, with new open-sky campsites, an observatory structure, comfortable sky viewing options, and a loop trail that includes dark-sky-friendly lighting.

Learn from the team that created and continues to enhance Illinois' first Dark Sky Park. In this presentation you'll hear about the importance of dark skies, the Dark Sky International certification process, how Middle Fork River Forest Preserve came to be a Dark Sky Park, Dark Sky compliance, impacts on operations and visitation, and meeting public demand with programming and improvements. Ultimately, this presentation will help you understand the steps your agency can take to be more dark sky-friendly and what it would take to become a Dark Sky Park.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the importance of dark skies and the benefits and mechanisms for reducing light pollution at your sites.
- Understand the process of developing Middle Fork River Forest Preserve into an internationally certified Dark Sky Park, and how your agency can develop its own Dark Sky Park.
- Understand how the designation of Middle Fork River as a Dark Sky Park has changed operations, programming, and visitation.





10 Disagreement Doesn't Have to Be Divisive

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Nan Gesche**, Authentic Encourager

There's a big difference between healthy, productive disagreements and heated arguments. When passionate people come together, different experiences, values, and ideas naturally collide. Sometimes that sparks innovation—sometimes, tension. Without the right skills, small disagreements can grow into big problems, impacting teamwork, morale, and even public trust. In fields like parks and recreation, where collaboration is essential, knowing how to handle conflict with respect and professionalism is critical.

In this lively session, you'll learn simple, practical techniques to turn disagreements into productive conversations. You'll practice how to validate others' perspectives, frame your ideas in a positive way, and listen deeply to find common ground—even when the conversation gets tough. Whether it's a minor misunderstanding or a major difference of opinion, you'll walk away ready to keep dialogue respectful, focused, and moving forward.

Learning Objectives:

- Make others feel heard and respected by validating their perspective.
- Share your ideas in a way that invites conversation, not conflict.
- Team up to find common ground and move forward together.

12 The Burnout Buster Bootcamp for Leaders

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Debbie Woodbury**, Founder/Managing Director, Meritology Institute



Are your staff members feeling burnt out? It's a common problem, with more than half of employees experiencing burnout, according to Workforce Management. I've been there, done that, and gotten the T-shirt. As someone who has also experienced burnout, I'm here to help you steer your team clear of it. We need to ensure that our team is mentally equipped to serve our communities.

One effective tool to combat burnout is empathetic leadership. With empathetic leadership, you can improve team dynamics, boost morale, and enhance overall performance. Let's explore ways to outsmart burnout and become the empathetic leader your team needs. In this session, we will develop techniques to avoid and navigate your team through the stages of burnout. By practicing empathetic leadership, you can create an environment where people feel understood, respected, and motivated to contribute their best. You'll gain the necessary skills and insights to create a workplace where empathy flourishes, burnout fades, and resilience thrives. I'll share my own experiences, help you identify burnout traps, and teach you how to empathetically lead. So, get ready for an engaging session that will leave you with savvy strategies to shield your team from burnout.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will analyze and identify the various triggers and early signs of burnout within their teams.
- Attendees will construct strategies to enhance their empathetic leadership style, fostering a workplace culture where empathy thrives.
- Participants will practice developing insights into fostering resilience and supporting team members through challenging times.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON SPEED SESSIONS

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.

201 Introduction to Early Tree Care

Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Plaza Ballroom

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Scott Seargeant**, International Consulting Arborist, Tree Forensic Analyst, Author/Writer, Public Speaker, Landscape Contractor, Seargeant Landscape & Arboriculture



Long before a tree takes root, human error can determine whether it thrives or fails. In this practical and insightful session, Scott Seargeant will guide you through the critical steps of setting a tree up for long-term survival, starting right from the nursery. You'll learn how to recognize early warning signs that may signal future failure, as well as simple, proven techniques for proper planting. Discover which common practices to avoid and how small changes can have a big impact. Following Scott's recommendations, municipalities can save taxpayer dollars, improve urban climate resilience, and enhance air quality in their neighborhood parks.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify early warning signs of potential tree failure beginning at the nursery stage.
- Apply best practices for proper tree planting and understand which common methods to avoid.
- Recognize the long-term environmental and economic benefits of proper tree establishment and care in urban landscapes.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON SPEED SESSIONS

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.



302

Practical AI Usage for Parks

Topic Track: Finance and Information

Technology

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom D

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): Kelly Tetterton, Partner, Clarity Partners

This session will present a review of real-world, you-can-use-this-stuff-right-now examples of how AI can genuinely help parks and recreation staff with administrative tasks that can otherwise be taxing or burdensome. There will be an overview of AI options and tools, including a review of what to avoid and how to evaluate your options, followed by specific examples of tools and AI usage that the Chicago Park District has leveraged. The goal is to enable session participants to be able to put this knowledge to use in their own organizations immediately.

Learning Objectives:

- Danger zones with AI - what to avoid.
- Options for using AI RIGHT now.
- Future AI options - what may be coming.

402

Understanding the Role of Technology: Bridging the Generational Gap

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom C

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): Jeff Goldberg, Community Partnerships, Kaizen Labs

In today's multigenerational workforce, understanding and addressing the differences between Gen Z, Millennials, and older generations is critical for the success of parks and recreation organizations. "Bridging The Generational Gap" is a dynamic educational session designed to explore how generational values, communication styles, and work expectations shape staffing, retention, and

workplace culture. Through insightful discussions and actionable strategies, this session empowers leaders with the tools they need to foster a more cohesive, engaged, and productive work environment across all age groups.

One of the greatest challenges in managing a multigenerational workforce lies in the varying approaches each generation takes toward work, communication, and technology. While Baby Boomers and Gen X employees may be accustomed to traditional, process-heavy systems, Millennials and Gen Z have grown up in a world of smartphones, apps, and instant access to information — shaping their expectations around speed, flexibility, and digital convenience. By leveraging modern, user-friendly technology, parks and recreation organizations can help bridge this generational divide, streamline operations, enhance communication, and create a work experience that supports recruitment, retention, and satisfaction for employees of all ages.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain insight into the values, motivations, and communication preferences of each generation represented in today's parks and recreation workforce to better understand and engage with their teams.
- Practical approaches for attracting & retaining younger employees, while supporting the needs and contributions of long-standing staff—resulting in a more balanced, satisfied, & committed workforce.
- Participants will discover how modern technology can bridge communication gaps, streamline operations, and create a more inclusive, adaptable, and productive environment for staff of all ages.

501

Evolving Supports: How Can We Better Serve Adults with Disabilities

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.05

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): Heather Hetzel, Recreation Specialist, NISRA; Mackenzie Leech, Recreation Specialist, NISRA; Michelle Friedrichs, LIFE Adult Day Program Leader, NISRA; Peyton Schulte, Recreation Specialist, NSSRA

As societal, educational, and recreational landscapes continue to evolve, so too must the ways in which we support adults with disabilities. Therapeutic recreation professionals play a critical role in fostering inclusion, promoting independence, and enhancing quality of life through meaningful leisure experiences. This 30-minute session will explore how we can reimagine our programs and practices to better align with the unique goals, needs, and voices of adults with disabilities in today's world.

Participants will examine emerging trends and person-centered strategies that encourage active participation and self-determination. Through reflection and discussion, attendees will gain practical tools and ideas to strengthen the impact of their services—ensuring that therapeutic recreation remains a relevant, responsive, and empowering support system. Whether you work in community-based settings, healthcare, or education, this session will inspire thoughtful consideration and offer actionable steps for evolving your approach to meet the changing needs of those you serve.

Learning Objectives:

- Examine current trends and challenges affecting therapeutic recreation services for adults with disabilities.
- Identify person-centered and inclusive strategies that promote engagement, independence, and dignity in recreational settings.
- Develop actionable approaches to enhance the alignment of therapeutic recreation services with the goals and lived experiences of adults with disabilities.



FRIDAY AFTERNOON SPEED SESSIONS

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.

602

Wheels of Change: Urban Mobility and Parks**Topic Track:** Facility Management**CEU:** 0.05**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Michigan 1**Time:** 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM**Speaker(s):** **Mitchell Fransen**, Park Planner, Champaign Park District

"Wheels of Change" explores how micromobility is transforming our parks and trail systems. Discover how e-bikes, e-scooters and other devices are removing obstacles, making green spaces more accessible to underresourced communities and individuals with limited transportation options. We'll examine empirical research showcasing how these devices help overcome physical limitations, promoting fair park use. Learn how integrating micromobility into parks contributes to reduced carbon emissions and improved air quality, supporting the transition to sustainable urban mobility. We'll also explore how micromobility options increase park visitation, stimulating local economies through sustainable development. As park professionals, we're at the forefront of this exciting change. This session will equip you with knowledge to harness micromobility's potential, enhancing the value, accessibility and sustainability of your parks and trail systems. Join us to envision a future where parks become more vibrant, welcoming and accessible for all.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will learn how micromobility enhances park accessibility and equity, exploring strategies to use e-bikes and e-scooters to overcome physical and transportation barriers.
- Attendees will examine the environmental benefits of micromobility in parks, including reduced emissions and improved air quality, and its alignment with urban sustainability goals.
- Attendees will explore how micromobility boosts park use and local economies through increased visitation, job creation, and potential property value growth in park-adjacent areas.

902

How to Be Successful in Sponsorships When It is Not Your Full-Time Job**Topic Track:** Marketing / Communications**Special Interest Category:** Small Agency/Small Staff; Students/Early-Career Professionals**CEU:** 0.05**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Regency Ballroom B**Time:** 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM**Speaker(s):** **Carolyn Potosnak**, Community Engagement Specialist, Batavia Park District

This session will provide you with a roadmap and tools on how to create and manage a sponsorship program. Starting with developing a plan, creating an asset inventory, developing your sponsorship toolbox, building sponsorship support buy in at your district and ways to adapt and change your plan as you understand your community are all areas that should be considered when beginning a sponsorship program. This session is suited for staff at all levels who either work in sponsorship, were recently tasked with sponsorship or are looking for ways to add sponsorship to their district.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand and create the tools needed for your district to build a successful sponsorship program.
- Understand sales and customer relationship strategies when reaching out to potential sponsors both externally and internally at your district.
- How to build and grow your contact list.

1002

Exploring Adaptive Physical Activity Organizations: An Environmental Scan**Topic Track:** Diversity**CEU:** 0.05**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Crystal Ballroom A**Time:** 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Cassandra Herman**, Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Illinois Chicago; **Delphine Labbé**, Assistant Professor, Disability and Human Development Department, UIC, University of Illinois Chicago; **Piyush Mishra**, PhD Candidate, Department of Disability and Human Development, UIC, University of Illinois Chicago; **Yochai Eisenberg**, Associate Professor, University of Illinois Chicago

Despite its numerous benefits, people with mobility disabilities generally show low rates of participation in leisure time physical activity (LTPA). LTPA is further constrained for those with mobility disabilities who identify as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latinx. Although some organizations provide inclusive and/or adaptive LTPA programs, it is not well understood if the organizations are meeting the needs of this unique population. In our study, we conducted an environmental scan to identify and understand organizations providing LTPA opportunities for Illinoisans with mobility disabilities and/or those who are Black/African American or Hispanic/Latinx. A systematic internet search identified over 80 organizations providing LTPA opportunities to one or both target audiences. Eligible organizations were then sent a survey to further understand their LTPA programs, inclusive practices, outreach efforts, and collaborations.

This presentation will summarize characteristics of organizations identified through the environmental scan and explore LTPA offerings available for Illinoisans with mobility disability who are Black/African American or Hispanic/Latinx. We will then discuss if the existing offerings meet the needs of people with disabilities based on the results of interviews with the target audience and provide suggestions for LTPA organizations on how to optimally tailor their offerings and, thus, better serve people from this population.

Learning Objectives:

- Examine LTPA programs for Illinoisans with disabilities from minority backgrounds.
- Explore characteristics of organizations providing adaptive LTPA opportunities.
- Discuss alignment of adaptive LTPA offerings with population needs.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON SPEED SESSIONS

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All speed sessions award 0.05 CEUs.

1102

Talking Trash with your Community:

Adventures in Sustainability

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

CEU: 0.05

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall L

Time: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Renee Patten**, Sustainability Coordinator, Forest Preserves of Cook County

Now more than ever, consumers must be mindful of how their purchases and garbage affect our planet. But how do you inform and educate the public on sustainability and conservation in a positive and meaningful way? The Forest Preserves of Cook County has taken a number of internal measures to reduce pollution in our public and workspaces, and we've also developed a variety of programming to engage consumers. With partnerships and creativity, the FPCC is committed to helping residents learn and do more to refuse, reuse, reduce, repurpose and recycle.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn about what the FPCC is doing internally to reduce waste and be more mindful consumers.
- Participants will learn how to get community members involved through creative programming.
- Participants will learn about partnerships and funding sources that can help with sustainability efforts.



FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

20

Q+A: The Best Way to National Exam Certification Success

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Katie Trolene**, Owner/Rereation & Parks Professional, Gold Medal Force, LLC

This session will take you through professional certifications as you anticipate becoming certified for the first time or acquiring a higher level certification. Learn about CPRP, CPRE, CPSI and AFO certifications and what you need to do to prepare for the exams. This session will include questions from each of the 4 national certifications. Come and see how much you know. You may surprise yourself. You may be qualified to sit for an exam today or you may need to more professional experience before you are able. This is information you will be able to share with your supervisors and directors in order to better prepare for your certification success.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about what each certification is and why you should become certified.
- Learn what qualifications are needed in order to sit for the exams.
- Learn more about the particular exams through various questions posed during the session.

205

Integrating Equity Into Park Planning - A Case Study

Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall I

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Abbey Eckberg**, Project Partner, Confluence; **Jane Reasoner**, Associate, Confluence, Inc.; **Katie Gamroth**, Executive Director, Round Lake Area Park District

The Round Lake Area Park District serves the communities of Round Lake, Round Lake Beach, Round Lake Park, Round Lake Heights, and Hainesville. In 2024, the Park District hired a team to develop an updated Comprehensive Master and Strategic Plan. The goal is to guide future investments by balancing long-term financial sustainability and the upkeep of aging infrastructure with the need to equitably serve the District's diverse communities.

The District includes 83 park sites and over 750 acres of park land. A review was conducted to assess the physical needs of many parks, but the team didn't stop there. To help the District make more informed decisions, they also looked beyond the physical need to consider who is likely using each park – including factors like race, income, and crime levels. This presentation will walk through how that analysis was done and what the results revealed – including needs that wouldn't have been identified through a physical analysis alone.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the process and methods used in a multi-layered park analysis.
- Learn how weighting metrics were applied to prioritize parks based on community need.
- Explore a new approach to equitable park planning.



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313

Smart, Simple, and Streamlined: Using Microsoft Forms



Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

Special Interest Category: Students/Early-Career Professionals

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall K

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Marie Herman, Owner, MRH Enterprises LLC

Microsoft Forms is a game-changer for parks and recreation agencies looking to streamline data collection, conduct internal surveys, and gather community feedback. Yet many office professionals don't realize how powerful—and easy to use—this free tool can be.

This session will guide participants through the full potential of Microsoft Forms. We will look at how to create, edit, publish and share forms and quizzes, investigate the various question formats available, and explore advanced features like branching logic, automated email notifications, distribution and analysis options, and integration with other Microsoft Office products such as PowerPoint, Excel and Teams. Whether you are brand new to Forms or looking to enhance what you're already doing, this session will leave you confident and inspired to make Microsoft Forms your go-to digital tool for smarter administration.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn what Microsoft Forms software is and what kinds of forms and quizzes it can create.
- Identify the various types of questions you can create in your documents, including advanced customization options.
- Connect Microsoft Forms to other Office programs for automation and analysis.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

317

Working Smarter with HR: Strategies for Mid-Level Managers

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall J

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Alli Siamis, HR & Risk Manager, Oak Brook Park District; Lindsey Robertson, Superintendent of Recreation Facilities, Arlington Heights Park District

In the world of parks and recreation, strong collaboration between mid-level managers and human resources is essential to building high-performing teams, navigating personnel challenges, and delivering exceptional community services. This interactive session explores practical strategies for working more effectively with HR to support staff development, streamline communication, and align departmental goals with broader organizational priorities. Through real-world examples and shared experiences, this session will help professionals bridge gaps, resolve friction points, and apply HR-informed practices to strengthen their teams and workplace culture. Whether you're a facility manager, program supervisor, or HR generalist supporting frontline staff, you'll leave with practical tools and a refreshed perspective on how to work smarter—not harder—with HR.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand HR's role in organizational success.
- Improve collaboration and communication between Rec and HR departments.
- Apply HR-informed practices to strengthen your team.

415

The Art of Dealing With Difficult People in Youth Sports

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom B

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): Chris Stevenson, Founder, The Empower Group

To soar to new heights in youth sports, we must first learn to navigate the turbulence. Parents, coaches, and athletes—the athletic triangle—each bring passion and pressure that can sometimes lead to conflict. Creating a positive experience for everyone hinges on mastering the skill of handling difficult people. This engaging and interactive session will equip attendees with tools to rise above the drama by clearly communicating expectations, navigating crucial conversations, and confidently addressing challenging behaviors. When these skills take flight, everyone benefits—from the sidelines to the scoreboard.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze common challenges within the athletic triangle (coach, athlete, parent) to better understand the dynamics that contribute to difficult interactions in youth sports.
- Demonstrate effective communication strategies for setting and managing expectations with athletes, parents, and coaches, ensuring a positive and constructive environment.
- Apply techniques for conducting crucial conversations with difficult individuals, utilizing conflict resolution skills to de-escalate situations and foster cooperative relationships.



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FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.



FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2026

506

Inclusion 101

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.1

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Janae Winston**, Inclusion Coordinator, Fox Valley Special Recreation Association; **Samantha Tabert**, Inclusion Coordinator, Northwest Special Recreation Association



In this session, we'll explore the core principles of creating welcoming, supportive, and inclusive environments for all participants. You'll gain a deeper understanding of what inclusion looks like in practice and leave with practical strategies for adapting activities, communicating effectively, and meeting diverse needs. Throughout the presentation, we'll highlight the importance of fostering a sense of belonging for every individual, regardless of their ability level, background, or experience. Whether you're new to inclusion or looking to enhance your current practices, this session will help you feel more prepared and confident. Together, we'll discuss real-life examples and actionable tools you can take back to your programs to make sure everyone has a chance to participate, succeed, and truly enjoy their experience.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the core principles of inclusion and explain their importance in creating welcoming programs for all participants.
- Demonstrate practical strategies for adapting activities and interactions to support diverse abilities and learning styles.
- Develop the skills to recognize individual needs and proactively foster an environment where every participant can succeed and feel a sense of belonging.

610

The Wonderful World of Facilities (An Intro to Facilities Management)

Topic Track: Facility Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall GH

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Dan Reamer**, Facilities Manager, Chicago Park District; **Erin Chapa**, Superintendent of Facilities Operations, Schaumburg Park District; **Marek Stankowski**, Facility Manager, Chicago Park District



Designed for college students and new recreation professionals, this session will expose the audience to municipal facilities management from small parks departments to large-scale park districts. Industry professionals with diverse backgrounds will share their experiences and knowledge on how to enter the workforce in a facilities management role. Educational backgrounds, entry-level and administrative positions, career paths, and daily operations of a facilities management department will be showcased in addition to the often-unknown administrative roles in this field. In such a diverse and evolving field, see how a professional from any background, education, and skillset can be applied to and succeed in the wonderful world of facilities at park agencies of any size.

Learning Objectives:

- Discover the day-to-day happenings and administration of a Facilities Management operation.
- Identify and describe the wide variety of roles a Facilities Management department and how they contribute to daily operations in a municipal setting.
- Assess where and how to apply education and training to roles in Facilities Management.

907

Marketing with AI: Practical Tools for Promotion, Engagement, and Growth

Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Sean Chang**, Founder & CEO, DoubleSpot AI

Park and recreation agencies play a vital role in bringing communities together—and marketing helps make that happen. Whether it's promoting seasonal programs, increasing attendance, or keeping residents engaged online, AI tools are making it easier than ever for marketing teams to stay creative and consistent, even with limited time and resources. This session explores how AI can support both day-to-day marketing tasks and long-term strategy.

Attendees will discover practical tools that assist with social media content, email campaigns, design work, analytics, and more. Through real-life examples and tips from the field, this session will highlight how park and rec professionals are using AI to boost visibility, deepen engagement, and streamline their workflows. Whether you're a team of one or part of a growing department, you'll leave with ideas you can apply right away.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify AI tools that support daily marketing tasks in parks and recreation.
- Explore how AI can enhance outreach, content creation, and audience engagement.
- Learn strategies for integrating AI into long-term marketing planning and campaigns.



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FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

1009

The Side by Side: Cross Cultural Exploration**Topic Track:** Diversity**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Crystal Ballroom A**Day/Date:** Friday / 30 January 2026**Time:** 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Craig Stevenson**, Managing Director and Co-Chair of Open Architecture Collaborative Chicago, Open Architecture Collaborative Chicago; **Gina Jameson**, Garfield Park Park Advisory Council President, Garfield Park Advisory Council; **Sheila McNary**, President / CEO, Advance Care Services Inc.; **Sonica Ruiz**, Program Specialist, Chicago Park District

Join us to learn how the Side-by-Side program provides neighboring parks the opportunity to intentionally connect for cross cultural exploration. Park Staff and Park Advisory Council Members from Humboldt, Douglass and Garfield Park.

Explore how you can build bridges through cross cultural exchange and collaboration. Learn how meet-ups can facilitate connections and set the stage for cross community cohesion and well-being.

Reach across your communities' boundaries and neighborhoods to build a strong coalition that will bridge the barriers of ethnicity, religion, and race which will allow us to provide diverse programming for everyone.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about the Chicago Park District past and current history of Jen's Jensen's Prairie designed parks on the West Side of Chicago.
- How Side by Side Cross Cultural Exchange promotes cross cultural exploration.
- Create a cultural asset map for your parks that can help with cross cultural exchange and help you to unify and connect parks in your town and cities.

1103

Adaptive Reuse and Preservation of Extant Buildings for Sustainability**Topic Track:** Forest Preserve and Conservation**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Grand Hall L**Time:** 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Ellen Stoner**, Architect, AltusWorks, Inc

As existing and historic buildings age and our lifestyles, activities and recreation expectations change, the buildings' use may not always remain relevant. Many of these buildings become abandoned or under-utilized and the investment made in their construction is lost. Adapting these buildings to new uses captures the previous investments while responding to the changing needs of the community in which they exist.

Known as Adaptive Reuse, this creative reinvigoration of existing and historic buildings is inherently sustainable. By rehabilitating the structure and envelope of these buildings, the embodied carbon expended in their construction is retained. Adding new building systems, applying state of the art building science, and incorporating universal design solutions reactivates these buildings while maintaining their unique architectural character and servicing their community for many years to come.

Learning Objectives:

- What is adaptive reuse and what to consider when evaluating adapting an existing and/or historic building for a new use.
- Considerations when integrating new and sustainable building systems.
- Universal design principles and their application to existing buildings when adapting to a new use.



FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

3

Executive Director Panel Discussion**Topic Track:** Leadership / Management**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Regency Ballroom A**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Katie Troline**, Owner/Rereation & Parks Professional, Gold Medal Force, LLC

Whether you're a newly appointed executive director eager to navigate your role or a seasoned veteran looking to refine your leadership approach, this session offers a valuable, confidential space for authentic peer-to-peer engagement. Join colleagues from across the state to exchange ideas, tackle complex challenges, and crowdsource solutions for the toughest issues facing your agency. Hosted by IAPD and IPRA, and skillfully facilitated by Katie Troline of Gold Medal Force, LLC, this highly interactive session encourages participants to ask questions, seek guidance, share impactful stories, and celebrate successes. Discover new perspectives, practical strategies, and innovative approaches drawn from the real-world experiences of fellow directors. Don't miss this chance to build connections, gain insights, and return to your organization with actionable ideas to strengthen your agency's operations, culture, and overall impact on the communities you serve.

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss timely, sensitive issues as they related to parks, recreation, and conservation.
- Gain new perspectives and strategies from others' shared experiences.
- Connect with peers from different parts of Illinois.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

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Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.



16

Department Head Training 101

Topic Track: Leadership / Management**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Regency Ballroom B**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Joan Scovic**, Director of Marketing & Communications, Northbrook Park District; **Joe Zimmermann**, Director of Recreation & Operations, Buffalo Grove Park District; **Kraig Owens**, Director of Parks & Planning, Gurnee Park District; **Liz Vistein**, Superintendent of Recreation, Park District of Franklin Park; **Tiffany Greene**, Director of Leisure Services, Elk Grove Park District

Are you ready to be department head? Are you sure? Well, prepare yourself for a wild ride. Learn from your peers how to navigate the transition from supervisor to department head from those who have done it. What key qualities do you need to be a good leader? How do you balance your workload while supporting your team? Speakers will share their experiences of managing teams, the skills and leadership qualities needed to succeed, on-the-job curveballs, and how the department head role fits into the overall agency. Panelists will include representatives from various departments.

Learning Objectives:

- How to navigate transition to a middle management or department head position.
- Skills needed to succeed in new role as a department head.
- How middle management fits into the flow of the overall agency.

104

IDNR Grant Outlook 2026

Topic Track: Boardmanship**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Grand Hall GH**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Michelle Kelly**, Principal Landscape Architect, Upland Design Ltd; **Patrick Davis**, Chief Accountability Officer, Office of Grants Management and Accountability, Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Meet with the IDNR grant expert, Patrick Davis, Chief Accountability Officer, and Upland Design's Principal Landscape Architect, Michelle Kelly, to hear the latest on the Illinois Department of Natural Resources State of Illinois grants. The two will review recent grant changes, budgets, and key elements of state grants. Included will be review of OSLAD, trail grants, land purchase, and many others. You will learn about the most common issues with grant submissions, and tips for writing a great grant application. Finally, a question-and-answer session will allow attendees to get their most pressing questions answered.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand 2026 grant options for park, forest preserve, and recreation agencies.
- Understand the key reasons grant applications are rejected.
- Learn key elements for successful grant applications.



106

Agency State Accreditation - A Blue Print to Excellence

Topic Track: Leadership / Management**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Michigan 3**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Jason Herbster**, Executive Director, Crystal Lake Park District; **Ron Salski**, Executive Director, Mundelein Park and Recreation District

This session will provide attendees with an overview of what is IAPD/ IPRA State Accreditation and the processes, time and requirements necessary to achieve the prestigious status of being a distinguished accredited agency in the State of Illinois. Topics covered will be the application and self-assessment process, the mentor program, as well as helpful hints on how to be successful in becoming accredited. Presenters will also review sample standards to provide insight and details to what documentation is required. Scoring, benefits and history of this statewide program will also be covered.

Learning Objectives:

- The steps of the IAPD/ IPRA State Accreditation process.
- Understanding of the six sections of the accreditation process.
- Understanding of the staff and time commitment to complete the process.





FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

114

**Leading Together:
Strengthening
Board, Executive,
and Staff Relations****Topic Track:** Boardmanship**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Grand Hall I**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** **Bill McAdam**, Executive Director, Downers Grove Park DistrictNEWLY
ELECTED

This presentation explores collaborative governance in a park district; forest preserve or conservation district. It outlines the mission, vision, and values guiding decision-making while clarifying roles—board sets policies, the executive director implements them, and staff executes daily operations. A structured chain of command ensures accountability, communication, and efficiency. Master planning supports future growth, while the board approves salaries for leadership, and the executive director manages staff compensation. Collaborative planning and budgeting ensure financial stability and effective service delivery.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand board, executive, and staff responsibilities in park district, conservation district or forest preserve leadership.
- Learn effective teamwork and accountability structures.
- Gain insights into budgeting, salary structures, and long-term sustainability.

119

**Regulating
Controversial
Park Activities****Topic Track:** Governance / Legal**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 1.0 (Pending Approval)**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Randolph 1AB**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** **Katherine Nagy**, Associate, Ancel Glink, P.C.; **Eugene Bolotnikov**, Attorney, Ancel Glink, P.C.; **Tyler Smith**, Associate, Ancel Glink, P.C.NEWLY
ELECTED

Park Districts are responsible for managing many acres of public space, where members of the public sometimes pursue controversial uses. What authority do park districts have to regulate contentious activities and uses while still respecting the individual rights of park patrons? Regulating Controversial Park Activities is presented by Ancel Glink's Quorum Forum Podcast, participants will explore scenarios based on real cases and land use disputes, including permissible approaches and best practices to regulating the public's use of park district property.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand Park District statutory authority to regulate a wide range of emerging uses of Park District property.
- Analyze the constitutional and other rights of individuals using public spaces.
- Learn best practices to address and regulate controversial uses of Park District property.

121

**Government
Finance for Non-
Finance Board
Members & Professionals****Topic Track:** Boardmanship**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Grand Hall J**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** **Jason Myers**, Director of Finance and Personnel, Arlington Heights Park District; **Jessica Ramirez**, Director of Finance & Personnel, Lombard Park District; **John Cutrera**, Director of Finance/Human Resources, Glencoe Park DistrictNEWLY
ELECTED

This session is designed to equip board members and non-finance professionals with a practical and proven approach to explaining government finance. The topics covered will include tax levy, budget and appropriation, revenue and expenditure reporting, debt service and bonds, tax increment financing (TIF), and audit. Attendees will gain the basic understanding required to succeed in their role. In order to answer your finance questions, the panel is asking that you submit any finance questions prior to conference in order to be incorporated into the conversation. Please send them to conference@ahpd.org.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the commonly used government finance terms.
- Acquire a solid base of knowledge about the budget and tax levy process.
- Gain an understanding of bonds and the role they play in government finances.



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FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm

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All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.



127 2026 Employment Law Update

Topic Track: Governance / Legal**Special Interest Category:** Newly Elected Official**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 1.0 (Pending Approval)**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Michigan 1**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** Darcy Proctor, Partner, Tressler LLP; Drew O'Donnell, Senior Counsel, Tressler LLP

This session will cover recent developments in state and federal employment laws and court decisions impacting Illinois park districts. The session will also cover best practices for avoiding employer liability and putting the employer in the best position to defend potential employment related claims and lawsuits.

This session will cover recent developments in state and federal employment laws and court decisions impacting Illinois park districts. The session will also cover best practices for avoiding employer liability and putting the employer in the best position to defend potential employment related claims and lawsuits.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify common workplace issues that lead to employment litigation and potential employer liability.
- Minimize liability exposure and mitigate risk associated with employment decisions and practices.
- Review key court cases and legislative updates.

206 Introduction to Forensic Tree Analysis

Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Grand Suite 5**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** Scott Seargeant, International Consulting Arborist, Tree Forensic Analyst, Author/Writer, Public Speaker, Landscape Contractor, Seargeant Landscape & Arboriculture

Over 50% of urban trees die before maturity. Why? Why did that limb split? Why did this tree collapse? Wind, disease, and insects are the usual suspects. However, they are rarely the culprit or causal agent responsible for an urban tree's death.

Forensic analysis is the art and science of finding evidence that links urban tree damage or death to the responsible causal agent. With this technique, green industry professionals and municipalities learn from past mistakes and amend procedures to improve urban tree longevity, sustainability, and aesthetic value.

In this presentation, I will present case studies and demonstrate how to implement this methodology into existing practices, raising the bar for our industry.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the fundamentals of tree forensics and its role in identifying tree mortality causes.
- Apply tree forensics techniques to everyday discussions about tree health and management.
- Recognize the effects of acute and chronic injuries on tree vitality.

311 Municipal Market Impact from Washington's Polices

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Water Tower**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** Craig Elder, Director / Sr. Fixed Income Research Analyst, Robert W. Baird & Co.; Kent Floros, Partner, Chapman and Cutler LLP; Stephan Roberts, Managing Director, Raymond James Public Finance

The municipal market is impacted by Washington's policy and trade positions, tax proposals, and the wider geopolitical and macro-economic environments. Washington's tax policies could impact the very nature of the Federal government's relationship with municipal issuers including the possible elimination of tax-exemption. This nonpartisan presentation will delve into municipal market trends, expectations and policy pronouncements from DC to give the audience the most up-to-date information on expected borrowing costs, inflation and economic growth.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how the current political environment impacts the economy and interest rates.
- Understand how the administration could impact future growth, inflation and interest rate trends.
- Become familiar with the latest proposals that could impact their communities bottom-line.



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FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm

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316

The Switchback Career Path: Navigating Nonlinear Journeys in Parks and Rec

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Anthony Iracki**, Professional Development Manager, PlayCore; **Jonelle Bailey**, Executive Director, Sycamore Park District; **Mitchell Fransen**, Park Planner, Champaign Park District

In parks and recreation, career paths rarely follow a straight line. This session uses the concept of the “switchback career path” to explore how diverse, non-linear career journeys are becoming the norm across the field. Participants will reflect on how professionals navigate cross-sector experiences, role changes, and career pivots, building resilience and broad skill sets along the way. Using the NRPA Workforce Development Framework as a guide, the session will connect these real-world career patterns to larger organizational strategies around mentorship, skills-based learning, recruitment, retention, and partnership building. Attendees will gain insight into how agencies can better recognize, support, and grow professionals whose career paths take unexpected but valuable turns—strengthening both individuals and the broader workforce in the process.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the concept of the “switchback career path” and its relevance to career growth in the parks and recreation profession.
- Analyze how non-linear career journeys align with the key pillars of the NRPA Workforce Development Framework.
- Identify actionable strategies agencies can use to support, mentor, and retain professionals with diverse and nontraditional career paths.

412

Leaders Linking Up - School Age and Day Camp Round Table

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Plaza Ballroom

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Erin Weingart**, Recreation Manager, Dundee Township Park District; **Kandice Newton**, Recreation Supervisor, Village of Lincolnwood; **Sarah Carr**, Recreation Supervisor, Pleasant Dale Park District

Join fellow recreation professionals for an interactive round table discussion focused on key operational challenges in recreation programming. This session will explore effective strategies for managing behavior across parents, participants, and staff, ensuring consistent expectations and responses. We'll also cover how to handle FOIA requests and share best practices for staff training—covering frequency, phone use, communication, facility usage, and working with independent contractors. Participants are encouraged to bring their brochures, FOIA documents, parent manuals, staff manuals, and camp timelines to the session. You'll also have the option to scan a QR code to upload these materials electronically. This session is ideal for supervisors, coordinators, and managers seeking to strengthen internal practices, improve communication, and promote a safe, well-trained, and responsive environment across all levels of service. Come prepared with questions and insights to contribute to an open, collaborative discussion.

Learning Objectives:

- Effective strategies for managing behavior in school age programs.
- Best practices for staff training and FOIA requests.
- Collaborate and network with other professionals.

414

Targeting Success: Launching an Archery Program at Your Agency



Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall K

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Keith Jones**, Park Supervisor of Recreation, Chicago Park District

Archery has stood proudly on the Olympic stage since 1900 and is a well-established sport. Anyone, regardless of their age or background, can pick up a bow and discover the benefits of archery. This session is designed to give you all the details needed, including range assessment, budget, essential supplies, coaches' trainings and much more.

Whether offering a class, indoor range, after-school program, or partnering with a local established club, this session will help you learn more about this popular worldwide sport. Join us to see how even a small Chicago Park District gym has been transformed into a top notch and safe indoor archery range.

Discover how archery can enhance your agency's recreational portfolio, promoting focus, discipline and healthy activity for residents. This Olympic sport can enrich your agencies programming for years to come.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the essential steps for implementing a successful archery program within a community setting.
- Understand key planning considerations—selecting essential supplies, range assessment, budgeting, program structure, partnerships and safety guidelines.
- Learn the fundamentals of becoming an archery coach, setting up a range, overall benefits, developing class curriculum and organizing tournament formats that everyone can enjoy.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

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505

Designing with Sensory Needs in Mind**Topic Track:** Therapeutic Recreation**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0.1**Location:** Toronto**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** **Ariel Mansholt**, Inclusive Play Specialist & Occupational Therapist, Landscape Structures Inc. (LSI)

Sensory related diagnoses are the fastest growing disability category among children today. This is impacting the way children engage in academics and show up to engage in our play spaces. In this presentation we will define this spectrum of childhood disabilities that is much broader than autism. We will evaluate diagnoses such as sensory processing disorder, ADHD, and dyslexia. Design strategies will be presented on how to create play spaces so that these children and their families can successfully GET there, PLAY there, and STAY there and have tons of fun. Concepts will be wrapped together in a real-life case study.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the current concept of a multidimensional spectrum for typical children and those with a variety of childhood medical conditions that impact learning.
- Incorporate design strategies that help these visitors be able to GET to the play space.
- Incorporate design strategies that help these visitors be able to PLAY and STAY at the play space.

603

Aquatic Roundtable**Topic Track:** Facility Management**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Acapulco**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** **Jenna Jezek**, Aquatics Supervisor, Park Ridge Park District; **Jennah Carlson**, Recreation Supervisor, Homewood-Flossmoor Park District; **Viktoria Anderson-Orosz**, Aquatics Program Manager, Fox Valley Park District

Located within IPRA's Facility Management (FM) Section, the Aquatic Committee consists of a group of park district professionals that either specialize or work in and around Aquatic Facilities. Please bring your Staff Training Agendas to this meeting to workshop with others after the presentation. If you are interested in joining the committee or simply wish to attend for educational and networking purposes, we encourage you to register. If you are interested in joining the committee or simply wish to attend for educational and networking purposes, we encourage you to participate.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify best practices for aquatic staff trainings and programs.
- Collaborate with industry peers to improve operational procedures.
- Expand professional knowledge through networking and committee involvement.

906

Marketing and Communications Roundtable**Topic Track:** Marketing / Communications**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Comiskey**Time:** 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM**Speaker(s):** **Amy Lewandowski**, Director of Marketing and Community Engagement, Arlington Heights Park District

Join fellow marketing and communications professionals for an engaging and collaborative session of roundtable discussions focused on the most pressing and trending topics in the industry. Explore a wide range of subjects including sponsorship opportunities, photography and videography techniques, recruitment and hiring strategies, the impact of emerging technologies, innovations in digital and print communications, branding evolution, and more. This is a valuable opportunity to share experiences, gain fresh insights, and expand your professional network by connecting with both new and familiar faces in the field. Whether you're looking to brainstorm solutions, stay ahead of industry trends, or simply connect with peers who understand your challenges and goals, this session is designed to inspire and inform.

Learning Objectives:

- Meet and network with like-minded marketing professionals.
- Discuss best practices in marketing and communications for park and recreation.
- Brainstorm new marketing initiatives and tailor them to your District.





FRIDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Friday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

1004

Girls Just Wanna Have Fun: Designing Parks with Teen Girls in Mind

Topic Track: Diversity

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Gold Coast

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Cassandra Rice**, Senior Urban Designer, Perkins&Will

Teenagers are among the more frequent users of parks and public spaces, yet these spaces are not designed with, for, or by teenagers, specifically teen girls. This session presents the results of a professional research project that explores how the unique experiences of teen girls impact their interactions with and feelings about the built environment. This research investigates the influence of adolescent development, play experiences, and external factors (i.e., society and adults) on teens' behavior and interactions with the built environment. This research will be paired with on-the-ground experts who will share actionable steps to better engage youth in design, taking into account their nuanced experiences.

We define adolescents and teenagers as individuals between the ages of 13 and 19. We define girls as people assigned female at birth, as well as those who express themselves in a way that others perceive as

feminine, which also includes transgender and gender-expressive individuals. We approach the topic through the lens of intersectionality, recognizing that there are additional layers, including race, class, and physical ability, that we will also touch on during our discussion and explore how these layers influence how girls experience the built environment.

This presentation aims to broaden the lens through which park and recreation professionals, designers, planners, elected officials, and community builders approach the design of our parks and public realm, providing the audience with case studies, tools, and techniques to support their efforts in collaborating and partnering with teen organizations in their communities across all phases of the design process.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe how adolescent development, play experiences, and societal influences shape teen girls' interactions with the built environment.
- Explore the barriers and challenges that prevent parks and public spaces from being inclusive and welcoming to teen girls.
- Summarize tools and techniques that can be used to apply these research findings and create parks that prioritize the needs, desires, and agency of teen girls.

1107

Forest Preserve & Conservation Roundtable

Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Suite 3

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Jessica Ortega**, Manager of Strategic Plans & Initiatives, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County; **Katie Schweiger**, Assistant Director of Community Engagement, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County - Wheaton, IL

Join us for an interactive facilitated roundtable designed to spark fresh ideas and meaningful connections within the Forest Preserve and Conservation field. Through rapid-fire small group discussions on relevant topics, participants will share experiences, tackle shared challenges, and gather diverse perspectives—all while maximizing professional development and networking in a dynamic, collaborative setting.

A range of topics will cover such things as current challenges facing participants' organizations, engaging underrepresented or new audiences in nature-based programming, innovative staffing or volunteer strategies that have been successful, integrating climate resiliency into operations, strategies that have helped staff stay motivated through challenges, technological tools that have helped make their teams more effective, using public feedback to shape projects, programming and policy, successful programs, events or initiatives, and potential future trends.

Learning Objectives:

- Collaboratively explore common challenges and opportunities in the forest preserve and conservation sector.
- Facilitate meaningful professional connections and encourage peer-to-peer learning.
- Discover innovative solutions by gathering insights from professionals with varied roles and backgrounds.



Closing Keynote with Jan McInnis

Saturday, January 31, 2026

9:00 am – 10:15 am

Grand Ballroom, East Tower, Gold/Ballroom Level

CEUs: 0.1, NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.1



Finding the Funny in Change

Get ready to transform the way you and your team deal with change! The pace of change is faster than ever, leaving many leaders and organizations feeling overwhelmed and uncertain. In Jan's electrifying keynote, "Finding the Funny in Change," she shows your attendees how to turn tension into laughter and get your point across with ease. She'll equip your team with the humor tools to diffuse tension instantly, initiate those tough conversations, and facilitate communication through using well-placed, appropriate humor. By using Jan's tips, your attendees will not only keep their teams more engaged, but also more likely to remember their message.

Your group will walk away with a fresh perspective on change, and best of all, they'll be laughing all the way to the next level of success. Don't miss out on the opportunity to bring a unique and unforgettable experience to your team. Book Jan as your keynote speaker now and get set to find the funny in change together!

About the Speaker

Jan McInnis, has written for Jay Leno's Tonight Show monologue as well as many other people, places and groups – radio, TV, syndicated cartoon strips, guests on the Jerry Springer show (her parents are proud!). For the past 25+ years she's traveled the country as a keynote speaker, and comedian sharing her unique and practical tips on how to use humor in business (yes it's a business skill!). Jan has spoken to thousands of organizations from the Federal Reserve Banks to the Mayo Clinic. She is author of two books: "Finding The Funny Fast," and "Convention Comedian," and has been heard on hundreds of radio stations. Jan was also featured in the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and the Huffington Post for her clean comedy.

Learning Objectives:

1. Participants will have immediately useable skills for handling change using humor, including how to diffuse tension instantly, kick off tough conversations, and open lines of communications.
2. Participants will be able to understand what they should AVOID doing when faced with change.
3. Participants will understand the importance of adapting to change.

Sponsored By:



SATURDAY AT-A-GLANCE

7:00 am – 7:45 am

Coree & More Fitness Class

7:45 am – 11:00 am

Conference Registration Open

8:00 am – 3:00 pm

Quiet Room

9:00 am – 10:15 am

Closing Keynote (0.1 CEUs)

10:45 am – 11:45 am

General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm

General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

IAPD Annual Business Meeting

7:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Closing Social at House of Blues featuring
No Turn on Red*

*Ticketed Event



SATURDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:45 am – 11:45 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit
(pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

19

Ladies, What's Holding You Back?

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom D

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): **Debbie Woodbury**, Founder/ Managing Director, Meritology Institute



What's holding you back, and more importantly, are you standing in your way? Too often, women silence their voices, second-guess their value, or tell themselves "no" before anyone else has a chance to. This workshop invites you to pause, reflect, and challenge the internal and external narratives that may be limiting your growth.

Ladies, What's Holding You Back? is a transformative session designed to help participants identify and dismantle the societal, organizational, and self-imposed barriers that often hinder women from leading boldly and unapologetically. We'll dive into the roots of self-sabotaging behaviors, unpack the weight of invisible expectations, and provide practical strategies to rise above them.

Through open discussion, reflection exercises, and interactive activities, participants will explore how to enhance their leadership presence, cultivate positive workplace cultures, and build a network of strategic, supportive relationships.

Leadership starts from within. When women reclaim their voice, redefine success on their own terms, and surround themselves with the right support, they unlock powerful potential, not just for themselves, but for the spaces they lead.

Join us and take the first step toward leading with purpose, power, and confidence.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will identify specific societal, organizational, or self imposed limits and outline actionable steps to overcome them.
- Participants will create strategies to enhance their leadership skills and foster a positive workplace culture.
- Participants will establish professional connections and outline how they plan to engage with these connections to support their leadership goals.



SATURDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS 10:45 am – 11:45 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.
All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

103 Board Member to Board Leader, Part 2



Topic Track: Boardmanship

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Suite 5

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): Dannie Wilson, Manager, BerryDunn

Great volunteers just keep on giving...and then come back for more! (Sound familiar, board members?!?) If you're itchin' for more, this session covers topics that previous years' attendees at Part 1 of the Board Member to Board Member series have requested. We'll dive into NEW topics like working with difficult residents, promoting long-term thinking, advancing agenda items, leading efficient meetings, and assessing your director. Led by a current park board commissioner and former park board secretary, you'll learn from someone with practical experience on both sides of the table in an engaging and lighthearted atmosphere. Whether you've participated in Part 1 before or are new to the series, join us for this not-to-miss session!

Learning Objectives:

- Participant will be able to identify leadership strategies they would like to employ in their boardmanship.
- Participant will be able to demonstrate new approaches to working through difficult situations.
- Participant will be able to bring practical suggestions and tools back to their fellow board members.

115 Be Prepared for Your First Amendment Audits



Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom A

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): Erin Monforti, Attorney, Ancel Glink, P.C.

In a time rife with political activism and protests, agencies must be well-equipped to respond to a wide range of expressive activity conducted in their facilities. First Amendment audits challenge administrators and staff to understand and uphold the principles of free speech and expression—while on camera. In this session, attendees will learn best practices for responding to First Amendment audits in the context of constitutional protections for park patrons and visitors. Key topics include: (1) the application of the First Amendment to local governments, (2) the rise of internet activism and First Amendment audits, and (3) tips for responding to persistent auditors and difficult patrons under stressful circumstances.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will learn how the First Amendment applies to units of local government in a variety of contexts.
- Attendees will learn best practices for identifying and responding to First Amendment audits, including practical and legal considerations.
- Attendees will obtain critical skills in conflict resolution and de escalation relevant to First Amendment audits.

118 Park District Finance - It's Not Intuitive



Topic Track: Boardmanship

Special Interest Category: Newly Elected Official

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall GH

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): Adam Simon, Partner, Ancel Glink P.C.; Mari-Lynn Peters, Director of Finance, Park District of Highland Park

This course will provide a survey of all the essentials you need to know about the annual financial ordinances and reports required for local park and recreation agencies. If you have questions you've been afraid to ask, or if you don't know what you don't know, this seminar is for you! Do you know how much your agency can ask for in taxes? Do you know how to ask for a tax increase? Who should be included in preparing your budget? Where do all these reports go? Attendees will take away the knowledge necessary to ask important questions so you understand your own agency's financial documents.

Learning Objectives:

- Calculating and adopting the annual tax levy ordinance.
- Planning for and adopting the annual budget and appropriation ordinance.
- Identifying the annual financial reports and where each must be filed.



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SATURDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:45 am – 11:45 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.



125

The Process of Amending a Motion



Topic Track: Boardmanship

Special Interest Category: Newly Elected Official

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall I

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): **Christina Emmert**, Professional Registered Parliamentarian, National Association of Parliamentarians

Attendees will learn options for amending motions during a meeting, the process for debating the amendment and the process of making a motion for a secondary amendment. Adding words, striking words and inserting words, along with combinations of these options will be covered. The process of creating a blank and how to vote on filling a blank as well as what order to put options in will be covered. Attendees will also discuss how to determine if an amendment is germane to the motion that is pending as well as how to determine if a motion is germane if there is doubt.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn the options for amending a motion.
- Learn how to fill a blank.
- Learn about germane motions and settling doubt about whether or not a motion is germane.



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134

Commissioners in Conversation: Addressing Today's Top Issues



Topic Track: Boardmanship

Special Interest Category: Newly Elected Official

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall J

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): **Carol Sente**, Board President, Vernon Hills Park District; **Carolyn Ubriaco**, Commissioner, Elmhurst Park District; **Christina Codo**, Commissioner, Winnetka Park District; **David Dillon**, Commissioner, Glenview Park District; **Robert Johnson, Sr.**, President, Peoria Park District

In this session, we will explore common Board challenges through an engaging dialogue led by a seasoned panel of Commissioners who will share diverse perspectives and practical approaches to real-world issues. The panel will address two to three key topics, including how to navigate tricky Board dynamics that can negatively impact your agency and how to evaluate the pros and cons of rotating the Board President role to determine whether this structure is the right fit for your organization. Ample time will be provided for participant questions and interactive audience input, ensuring a collaborative and informative experience for all.

Learning Objectives:

- How a Board can work together as an effective team, blending the strengths and skills of new and seasoned Commissioners.
- Techniques for addressing tricky board dynamics that can negatively affect your Agency.
- Thoughts on the pros and cons of rotating the President role versus keeping one board member in the position for a longer period of time.

135

Municipal Roundtable



Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Suite 3

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): **Dianna Kroll**, Director Parks & Recreation, Village of Monee; **Kim Wascher**, Director Parks & Recreation Department, Village of South Elgin Parks & Recreation Department; **Dustin Kleefisch**, Director Parks & Recreation, Village of Willowbrook

Parks and Recreation provides essential services, facilities and programs necessary for the positive development and well-being of the community. What if you are a parks and recreation department within a municipality and have to share resources with other high-value services such as fire, police, streets, water, and sanitary? How do you compete to get the word out? Thinking of switching career paths and coming to the municipal side? The panel of speakers has over 75 years of experience to share the need to know for moving to the municipal side. We will discuss common obstacles of being on the municipal side of parks and recreation. The panel will lead conversations that will share tips, strategies and success stories relevant to the parks and recreation profession in a municipal setting.

Learning Objectives:

- Connect with others in the Municipal side of Parks & Recreation to share information and build a valuable support network.
- Thinking of changing careers and moving to the Municipal side what are some key things I need to know.
- Learn success stories of other municipalities and how you could implement them at your municipality.



SATURDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:45 am – 11:45 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

204

Leveraging OSLAD for Inclusive, Future-Ready Parks

Topic Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall L

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): Doug Anderson, Partner, LCM Architects; Rob Reuland, Principal, Site Design Group, Ltd.

Recent changes to Illinois law (House Bill 1788) and updates to OSLAD grant scoring are challenging communities to go beyond basic ADA compliance and design parks that are truly inclusive. This session will help park planners, grant writers, and local leaders navigate these changes and respond effectively. Attendees will learn how HB1788 impacts future park design, how OSLAD is evolving to emphasize universal design, and practical strategies to meet—and exceed—these new expectations.

Through real-world examples from Illinois and beyond, presenters will explore inclusive design solutions ranging from cost-effective sensory elements to larger intergenerational playgrounds. The session will also provide guidance on strengthening grant applications by aligning with legislative priorities and centering the needs of people with disabilities, neurodivergent users, and older adults.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify Evidence-Based, Inclusive Design Strategies: Learn practical, scalable solutions for designing parks that meet universal design and inclusive play goals.
- Apply Design Strategies to Varying Budgets: Discover how to implement these strategies, from low-cost interventions to high-impact playgrounds.
- Position Your Grant Applications for Success: Align your project goals with the state's evolving funding priorities to improve competitiveness in OSLAD applications.

307

DIY GPT: Building a Custom AI Assistant for Parks and Recs Professionals

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): Adina McCollough, Recreation Manager, Village of Park Forest

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer just for tech experts—it's a practical tool that parks and recreation professionals can use to streamline operations and improve service delivery. In this session, you'll learn how to create a custom AI assistant using OpenAI's GPT technology to handle tasks like

automating FAQs, assisting with event scheduling, and enhancing customer engagement. Designed specifically for planners, supervisors, and event organizers, this hands-on session will walk you through step-by-step instructions to build and deploy your own AI assistant, even with minimal technical experience. You'll leave equipped with practical tools, actionable ideas, and a clear understanding of how AI can save time and resources while elevating your department's productivity.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the benefits of AI and GPT technology in parks and recreation operations.
- Learn how to create and customize a GPT assistant using OpenAI's user friendly tools.
- Discover actionable strategies to integrate AI into your everyday workflows.



SATURDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:45 am – 11:45 am

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309

How to Create a Workplace Where Everyday is a Walk in the Park!

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Grand Hall K**Time:** 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM**Speaker(s):** Jackie Iovinelli, Executive Director, Park District of Forest Park; Jeffrey Murphy, Superintendent of Business, Park District of Forest Park

Is attracting and keeping high-quality personnel a challenge for your agency? Does high turnover negatively impact your agency? Are you struggling to determine how to transition employees from "new hire" to "highly productive" before they find another, more attractive opportunity?

Finding, hiring, and keeping employees can be a challenge for any organization. Going back to the basics may be the best place to start to make necessary changes. A great place to begin is with job satisfaction. Does your organization allow for employees to find satisfaction in their work? In this session, we will explore the key elements of creating a work environment that fosters high levels of job satisfaction. Government agencies cannot compete with for-profit businesses when it comes to salaries, but we can compete with job benefits. We will discuss creative and interesting job perks that your agency can offer to boost employee job satisfaction levels. Lastly, we will discuss the critical role organizational leadership has in creating and building a culture that your employees will find refreshing.

Learning Objectives:

- Maximize job satisfaction, minimize job dissatisfaction.
- Offering benefits that attract and retain high quality personnel.
- Create the highly sought after work environment that other agencies envy.

403

Beyond the Playground: What Millennial Parents Really Want

Topic Track: Recreation**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Regency Ballroom C**Time:** 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM**Speaker(s):** Chris Nunes, Chief Operating Officer, The Woodlands Township

As millennial parents become the dominant demographic raising young children, their expectations and behaviors are reshaping how communities engage families through recreation. Discover what matters most to today's families in this data-driven session exploring the habits, preferences, and priorities of millennial parents. Based on data, we will uncover how parks and recreation districts can better engage modern families by prioritizing convenience, safety, variety, and wellness. Walk away with actionable strategies to attract and retain this dynamic and growing audience.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the key preferences and motivations of millennial parents when selecting community recreation programs for their families.
- Identify the most valued features such as ease of registration, safety, and diverse offerings—that influence participation and satisfaction.
- Apply data-driven strategies to design and promote programs that increase engagement and meet the evolving needs of millennial families.

409

From Chaos to Control: Transform Your Programs and Facilities

Topic Track: Recreation**CEU:** 0.1**CLE:** 0**NCTRC Pre-Approved:** 0**Location:** Regency Ballroom B**Time:** 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM**Speaker(s):** Adam Wohl, Assistant Director of Recreation and Facilities, Glencoe Park District; Shannon Stevens, Facility Manager - Glencoe Beach and Ice Rink, Glencoe Park District

Are you overwhelmed by the daily demands of managing multiple recreation programs and facilities? This session will equip you with practical strategies to move from disorganization and reactive management to streamlined, proactive control. Discover how to implement effective planning, leverage technology, and create systems that improve communication, boost efficiency, and enhance participant experiences. Whether you oversee a small community center or a large recreation complex, learn actionable tools and best practices to take charge of your operations, reduce stress, and elevate the impact of your programs and facilities.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify key organizational strategies and tools to streamline program and facility management.
- Explore technology solutions that automate routine tasks and improve communication across teams.
- Develop actionable steps to create a proactive, efficient operational plan that enhances participant satisfaction and staff effectiveness.



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SATURDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:45 am – 11:45 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

508

Recreation Reimagined: Integrating Sensory Tools for Inclusive Fun

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.1

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): **Brittany Johns**,
Occupational Therapist, Shirley Ryan
Ability Lab



Recreation is meant to be enriching, energizing, and—above all—enjoyable. Yet for individuals with sensory sensitivities or processing differences, many recreational spaces can feel overwhelming or inaccessible. Recreation Reimagined explores how sensory tools, environmental design, and intentional programming can transform traditional recreational activities into inclusive experiences that serve a broader range of abilities and needs. This session will provide practical strategies for integrating sensory-friendly elements into recreational settings—whether in parks, community centers, after-school programs, or special events. Attendees will learn how to create multi-sensory zones, introduce calming kits, adapt programming through universal design principles, and train staff to recognize and support diverse sensory needs.

We'll also highlight case studies and real-world examples of how inclusive recreation initiatives have increased participation, improved behavioral outcomes, and fostered a greater sense of community. Attendees will have the opportunity to interact with a variety of sensory tools and leave with a starter toolkit they can adapt for their own environments. Whether you're a parks and recreation professional, educator, program coordinator, or advocate, this session will equip you to reimagine recreation as a space where everyone can play, relax, and thrive—regardless of sensory profile.

Learning Objectives:

- By the end of the session, participants will be able to define the role of sensory tools in inclusive recreation.
- By the end of the session, participants will be able to identify at least three low cost strategies to improve sensory accessibility.
- By the end of the session, participants will be able to apply universal design principles to program planning and space layout.

909

The Marketing Playbook: Winning Strategies

Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): **Joan Scovic**, Director of Marketing & Communications, Northbrook Park District; **Josh Hendricks**, Director of Marketing, Plainfield Park District; **Laura Finch**, Director of Marketing & Customer Service, Oswegoland Park District; **Matt Szytz**, Director of Marketing & Communications, Huntley Park District

Marketing success doesn't happen by chance—it's the result of smart planning, skilled coaching, strong teamwork, and informed decision-making. In this fast-paced, football-themed session, we'll break down the strategy behind effective marketing into four key quarters: Game Planning, Coaching, Teamwork, and Data-Driven Decision Making.

Each quarter highlights a critical element of the marketing process: how campaigns are thoughtfully designed, how internal coaching helps shape messaging and expectations, how cross-department collaboration drives results, and how data guides future success. With humor, real-world examples, and plenty of team spirit, this session will give non-marketers a clearer understanding of the “why” behind marketing decisions—and empower marketers to coach and collaborate with stronger, more strategic teammates.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how thoughtful marketing game planning drives success by aligning strategy with audience insights, resources, and timing.
- Recognize and apply teamwork strategies that strengthen collaboration between marketing and all departments, with a shared playbook, clear communication, and unified approach to promoting your agency.
- Identify key marketing metrics and measurable data points to evaluate campaign performance and support data informed decision-making across teams.

1008

The Language Has Changed, But the Work Remains the Same

Topic Track: Diversity

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Michigan 1

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): **Oralethea Davenport**, Irwin Center Manager, Homewood-Flossmoor Park District; **Tracey Crawford**, Senior Learning Strategist, Access to Growth (ATG)

As the landscape of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) continues to evolve and change, so does the language we use to engage in this vital work. Terms shift, words become prohibited, definitions expand, and frameworks adapt but the foundational goals remain unchanged: to create spaces where all individuals feel seen, heard, and valued. In today's climate, practitioners and leaders are faced with a critical challenge: How do we continue to do meaningful, equity-centered work when the vocabulary itself becomes contested? Through thoughtful dialogue and interactive activities, participants will explore the concept of “universal language” as a tool to continue driving inclusive impact while navigating cultural and social pushback. Whether you're a practitioner, leader, or advocate, this session will reaffirm your commitment, even as the words we use evolve. The mission hasn't changed—just the words we use to get there.

Learning Objectives:

- Explore the shift in DEIB related language and reflect on why language matters but it doesn't omit the work.
- Equip participants with tools to navigate and lead through this shift in language.
- Learn how to respond and react to language shifts while remaining rooted in values and impact of belonging and inclusion.

SATURDAY MORNING CONFERENCE SESSIONS

10:45 am – 11:45 am

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

1108

Making a Case for Bison: Early Wins for Wildlife and Ecosystem Health



Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Roosevelt 3AB

Time: 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Speaker(s): Brenna Ness, Working Lands Ecologist, McHenry County Conservation District

In December 2021, the McHenry County Conservation District welcomed a herd of bison to Pleasant Valley Conservation Area, located outside of Woodstock, IL. The herd is owned and managed by Ruhter Bison - a private, family-owned and operated bison producer. The long-term, public-private partnership created a unique opportunity for the District to utilize a native grazer as a grassland management tool to benefit grassland birds, soil health, and ecosystem function. The project seeks to assess the impact of grazing activities on wildlife, habitat quality, and soil health, while supporting the production goals of Ruhter Bison. After only 4 growing seasons, the changes to the landscape and response of the wildlife, vegetation, and general public have laid the groundwork and created a compelling case for growing this type of partnership on public land.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain an understanding of the biology and background of American Bison in Illinois and the US.
- Gain an understanding of the pros and cons of a public-private partnership for grazing.
- Learn about the ecological impacts of utilizing bison as a grassland management tool.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

14

Career Development Bootcamp - How To Improve and Standout

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom D

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): Juan Carlos Acevedo, Superintendent of Marketing & Communications, Wheeling Park District; Michael Biedenstien, Senior Manager of Membership, National Recreation and Park Association

Are you looking for ways to take your career to the next level and develop soft skills? Do you feel like you're being held back at work or could be contributing at a higher level? This session will discuss four different lops/phases of a career and what to do at each level to get yourself ready for the next step. You'll leave this session with concrete ideas to improve yourself, expand your influence and position yourself for a promotion. These ideas come directly from park and recreation professionals including how they have provided value and furthered their career. With so many options for professional and career development, this session will help you identify and pursue the ones that are right for you at this point in your career!

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to understand where they are at in their career and what many professionals have done already up that point in a career.
- Participants will be able to develop a roadmap (identify opportunities to pursue) to the next career step to help achieve their goals.
- Participants will be able to identify professionals to model their career after or in a similar career phase as themselves -- both providing accountability and support to the learner going forward.

109

Planning for the Future: A Board Member's Role in Strategic and Master Planning

Topic Track: Boardmanship

Special Interest Category: Newly Elected Official

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall GH

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): Dannie Wilson, Manager, BerryDunn; Elsa Fischer, Manager, BerryDunn; Nikki Ginger, Manager, BerryDunn

Board members play a vital role in shaping the long-term vision and success of park and recreation agencies. This interactive session will explore how board members can effectively contribute to both strategic and master planning efforts. Participants will gain a clear understanding of the differences between these two essential planning tools—strategic plans that guide organizational priorities and master plans that shape physical spaces and infrastructure.

This workshop will highlight how board members can serve as ambassadors for community engagement, champions of fiscal responsibility, and stewards of long-term sustainability. We'll discuss the board's role in both processes, and how you can support staff in implementation and accountability.

Whether you're new to planning or looking to strengthen your role, this session will equip you with the knowledge and confidence to help guide your agency into the future.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain a clear understanding of the differences between these two essential planning tools.
- Learn how board members can serve as ambassadors for community engagement, champions of fiscal responsibility, and stewards of long-term sustainability.
- Learn the board's role in both processes, and how you can support staff in implementation and accountability.



SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

116

Understanding Social Media: Facebook? Instagram? X?

Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom B

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Scott Puma**, Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; **Erin Monforti**, Attorney, Ancel Glink, P.C.

The use of social media by local governments, and government officials and employees, has created a rich and complex landscape of developments in the law, ranging from First Amendment issues to implications of using Artificial Intelligence and copyright. Attendees, including professional staff and elected officials, will learn how to identify and avoid common pitfalls when administering and using social media pages, best practices for drafting social media policies, and more. Join attorneys from Ancel Glink to gain critical skills in navigating "the new public square."

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will learn about key legal concepts applicable to social media, including First Amendment free speech and copyright.
- Attendees will understand how Artificial Intelligence impacts social media and the burgeoning legal issues associated with its use.
- Attendees will learn best practices for drafting effective social media policies.



124

Robert's Rules of Order

Topic Track: Boardmanship

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall I

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Christina Emmert**, Professional Registered Parliamentarian, National Association of Parliamentarians

Learn how becoming familiar with and using Robert's Rules can compliment the rules contained in the open meetings act. There are items covering in meetings that the open meetings act does not give rules for, any productive board member and especially the chair should be familiar with correct meeting management and allow for orderly, efficient meetings.

In this session we will review the 13 ranking motions of Robert's, and how they can compliment various items on the agenda. Attendees will learn which motions are in order at various times during the meeting.

Learning Objectives:

- Become familiar with the 13 ranking motions.
- Learn how to be efficient and effective in meeting management.
- Learn where Robert's fits in with regards to state laws.



129

Boardmanship Essentials Part I

Topic Track: Boardmanship

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall J

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Steven Adams**, Partner, Robbins Schwartz; **Patrick Miner**, Attorney, Robbins Schwartz

This session provides essential, practical information every commissioner needs to know about public meetings, including how to conduct regular, special, closed, and emergency meetings that meet the requirements of the Open Meetings Act and the PAC opinions and cases interpreting it. We will explain the requirements of agenda details, public recital and minutes detail, the public's right to participate in meetings (including what is not required), commissioner remote attendance (audio or video conference), Robert's Rules fundamentals, rules governing all aspects of closed meetings, commissioner communications outside of meetings, special voting rules, final action do's and don'ts, training requirements for commissioners, website posting requirements, posting compensation information, and more.

Learning Objectives:

- Command over the critical rules for open and closed board meetings; strategies to avoid costly Open Meetings Act mistakes.
- Knowledge and application of the rules for electronic attendance at meetings and commissioner electronic communication.
- Tips and strategies for more efficient and professional meetings.



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SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm

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Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.



131

Solar and Green Energy Options

Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall L

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): Adam Simon, Partner, Ancel Glink P.C.; Erik Brown, Deputy Director, Downers Grove Park District; Shawn Ajazi, Vice President, Progressive Business Solutions

More and more agencies are exploring how to obtain "green energy" to power their facilities, but not everyone has the same comfort level with a long-term capital investment. This session will provide options for the skittish and the brave, including simple contracts, community solar and behind-the-meter photovoltaic solar installations. You heard the Federal government is "sun"-setting incentive? Learn about the State programs which continue to promote the expansion of solar power in Illinois. Participants will get to share their experiences and ask questions.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn how to compare energy supply options.
- Learn about community solar options for large and small agencies.
- Learn why some agencies are building their own solar farms.



133

Managing Teen Takeover Events: Strategies, Challenges, and Collaborative Solutions

Topic Track: HR / Risk Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom A

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): Derke Price, Equity Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; Steven Schindlbeck, Chief of Police, Naperville Park District

Teen takeover events have surged over the last couple of years with parks and beaches becoming some of the most preferred locations for these teens to gather. This block of instruction will focus on lessons learned/ best practices concerning gathering information about the event and how to respond to such events with overwhelming numbers of teens that show up on short notice, the limited enforcement options available when working with juveniles, and the sometimes limited law enforcement resources available on short notice. The presentation will also discuss preparation and response strategies that include coordination with local law enforcement and surrounding park districts, as well as training for frontline staff.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the most practical strategies to utilize when faced with an event that is being advertised as taking place on your property while respecting the limits imposed by the First Amendment.
- Identify practical logistical options to manage the event while working closely with law enforcement to identify the most practical enforcement options to disperse the event once it's underway.
- Learn How to Train Frontline Staff to be on the Alert and execute the correct safety protocols.



304

Beyond the Buzzwords: Cutting-Edge AI Technologies Explained

Topic Track: Finance and Information Technology

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom A

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): Joshua Chang, Software Engineer, DoubleSpot AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly evolved from simple automation to complex, context-aware models capable of reasoning, generating, and adapting in real-time. However, what exactly powers today's most advanced AI tools? This session breaks down the foundational technologies behind modern AI, including Transformers, GPT models, diffusion models, chain-of-thought reasoning, and retrieval-augmented generation (RAG). Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how these systems work, their capabilities, and the unique strengths and weaknesses of each.

The session is for those in charge of information technology and/or evaluating AI tools for park & recreation operations. Understanding the architecture behind AI through this session would be beneficial for effective and responsible implementation of AI systems. This session will also explore use cases in community engagement, and recreation, giving professionals the vocabulary and insight to make informed decisions about adopting and integrating AI technologies.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand key AI model types including Transformers, GPT, diffusion models, and more.
- Identify the strengths, weaknesses, and use cases of each type of AI technology.
- Learn practical applications of cutting edge AI within recreation settings.



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SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

413

Scrap the Crap: Make Your Programs Greener, More Sustainable, & Purposeful

Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom C

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): Diane Michalski, Recreation Program Supervisor, Glenview Park District



Tired of wasteful, one-and-done activities? Join us for Scrap the Crap: 20 Ways to Make Your Programs and Crafts More Green, Sustainable, and Purposeful. This fast-paced, idea-packed session will inspire you to rethink how you plan and deliver programs—especially those involving crafts and take-home items. Discover practical strategies for reducing waste, reusing materials, and choosing earth-friendly supplies that align with your organization's mission. We'll explore creative alternatives to common "junk crafts," share examples of meaningful activities that connect participants to nature, and provide tools to evaluate the environmental impact of your programming.

Walk away with 20 actionable ideas you can implement immediately to engage your audience while treading lightly on the planet. It's time to scrap the crap and craft with purpose!

Learning Objectives:

- Identify environmentally harmful practices commonly used in programming and crafts.
- Apply sustainable alternatives by integrating reusable, recyclable, or natural materials into program activities.
- Evaluate program and craft activities using a sustainability lens to ensure alignment with environmental and educational goals.

507

Priorities and Presence: Navigating Career and Family in Special Recreation

Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.1

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): Alex Engelhardt, Executive Director, Fox Valley Special Recreation Association

Navigating a career in Special Recreation with the responsibilities of parenting can feel like a constant juggling act. This session explores how the same behavior supports and systems we use with participants—like structure, consistency, and positive reframing—can be powerful tools in our own lives. Through personal stories, practical parenting hacks, and insights from professional literature, we'll discuss how to set and maintain boundaries, identify what truly matters, and reframe challenges with a positive lens. Whether it's managing missed work for a sick child or unplugging from emails during family time, this session offers real-world strategies to help you feel more present, more effective, and hopefully free up some more time for you to focus on what matters most.

Learning Objectives:

- Apply Therapeutic Recreation (TR) behavior supports and systems—such as structure, consistency, and positive reframing—to enhance both professional practice and personal life as a working parent.
- Identify practical strategies and mindset shifts for managing the dual demands, including time-saving hacks, boundary setting techniques, and reframing challenges with a positive lens.
- Develop a personalized framework for presence and prioritization, empowering participants to feel more confident, focused, and fulfilled in their roles at work and at home.

606

Everything's for Rent

Topic Track: Facility Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Grand Hall K

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): Katie Trolene, Owner/Rereation & Parks Professional, Gold Medal Force, LLC

There are surprising opportunities for rental spaces everywhere in your parks and facilities: parks, playgrounds, grassy areas, trees, trails, fields, multipurpose rooms, art rooms, fitness centers, gymnasiums, event facilities, spraygrounds, aquatic facilities, concession areas, pavilions, sections of parks, stages, parking lots, docks, waterfront areas, and more. If you are open to putting a dollar figure on a "space", no matter the space, the sky's the limit. Thinking outside the box will allow you to expand your rental revenue which in turn can help to support programming, facility maintenance and repairs or any other areas within your organization in need. Developing rental protocols to support your newfound outlook is easy.

Learning Objectives:

- A think outside-the-box review of rental spaces within your organizations.
- Learn how you can develop a rental contract for any space or request.
- Learn to develop rental protocols to support expanded rental options including blocked off areas within open parks.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

1106

Conservation@Home: Supporting Biodiversity Beyond The Preserve



Topic Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation
CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Speaker(s): **Beth Peluse**, Conservation@Home Program Manager, The Conservation Foundation

For over two decades, The Conservation Foundation's (TCF) Conservation@Home program has empowered individuals to create more sustainable, ecologically supportive landscapes in their own yards. By promoting native plants, water conservation, and wildlife-friendly practices, the program has been instrumental in fostering environmental stewardship at the residential level. Recognizing the critical role public lands play in local ecosystems, TCF has partnered with Forest Preserves and Park Districts to extend the impact of the program beyond private property lines. These collaborations not only enhance sustainability efforts on public lands but also help educate the broader community about their role in supporting biodiversity. Together, Conservation@Home and public agencies create continuous wildlife corridors that connect preserved lands with surrounding neighborhoods, strengthening our region's ecological resilience. This session will explore how park and preserve staff can leverage these partnerships to amplify community engagement, expand native habitat, and integrate conservation practices across boundaries.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn the history and regional impact of the Conservation@Home program as a model for community based ecological stewardship.
- Identify opportunities for Forest Preserve and Park Districts to partner with community-based conservation programs to enhance native habitat and environmental education efforts.
- Develop ideas for engaging residents and visitors in conservation actions that extend beyond the boundaries of publicly owned land.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

22

Time Management--How Billionaires Do It!

Topic Track: Leadership / Management

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom D

Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Speaker(s): **James Moore**, CEO and Co-Founder, Athletify; **Jared Moore**, President, Athletify

Want to know how Warren Buffet, Charles Schwab, Richard Branson, and other similar high achievers manage their time? Come find out. Everyone's given the same 24/7 but results differ. Much of the disparity boils down to how time is spent. This session will provide you with time management frameworks and approaches from some of the most successful people on the planet specifically selected for parks and recreation professionals. Rest assured—getting more out of your day and your team can easily happen by mirroring successful systems. Come and find out how!

Learning Objectives:

- Learn ten different approaches to time management used by the world's most successful people.
- Perform an evaluation of one's own time management and identify 1-3 areas of improvement.
- Create a customized weekly time management system based on priorities and vision.

122

You Really Should Read Your Board Policy Manual (And Keep it Updated)



Topic Track: Governance / Legal

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom A

Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Scott Puma**, Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; **Erin Monforti**, Attorney, Ancel Glink, P.C.

An effective Board policy manual is critical for educating elected officials, developing effective relationships with professional staff, and ensuring compliance with key laws impacting park agencies. From the Open Meetings Act to various ethics requirements, elected officials should be aware of the many issues facing the agencies they serve, as well as the optics associated with Board relations. In this session, attendees will learn how to craft and revise effective Board policy manuals that reflect the priorities of their agency and important legal and practical issues for governance.

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will identify critical legal issues that impact Board governance, including Open Meetings Act requirements, ethics considerations, and Board authority.
- Attendees will learn best practices for establishing effective relationships between elected officials and staff.
- Attendees will gain critical skills in regular review and revision of Board policy manuals given changes in the law impacting park agencies.



SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2026

128 Parks Role in Successful Planning and Economic Development



Topic Track: Boardmanship
CEU: 0.1
CLE: 1.0 (Pending Approval)
NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0
Location: Grand Hall I
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Speaker(s): **David Silverman**, Equity Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; **Daniel Bolin**, Partner, Ancel Glink, P.C.; **Jodi Mariano**, Vice President, Teska Associates

This program examines the essential role parks play in shaping vibrant, sustainable, and economically resilient communities. Participants will explore how parks influence urban planning by enhancing livability, encouraging walkability, and supporting smart growth. The session will highlight the economic benefits of parks, including increased property values, business attraction, job creation, and tourism revenue. It will also address how parks contribute to public health, environmental sustainability, and social equity by offering spaces for physical activity, community gathering, and ecosystem preservation. Attendees will gain insights into how thoughtfully designed and maintained parks can drive both community well-being and economic development. Ideal for staff and elected officials, this program offers practical strategies for integrating parks into planning processes to support thriving communities.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how parks influence land use, urban design, and quality of life in community planning.
- Identify the economic benefits parks bring through tourism, property value, and job creation.
- Explore how parks support public health, social interaction, and environmental sustainability.

130 Boardmanship Essentials Part II



Topic Track: Boardmanship
CEU: 0.1
CLE: 0
NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0
Location: Grand Hall J
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM
Speaker(s): **Steven Adams**, Partner, Robbins Schwartz

Park and Forest Preserve District boards increasingly find themselves facing hostile and negative commissioners, bitter division between board factions, and angry resident groups. Often these situations become obstacles to achieving agency priorities, retaining staff, and maintaining board morale and public credibility. This session explores the legal, policy and personal tools and strategies available to deter and respond to negative actions by commissioners, board factions and the public. Examples of board policies and procedures, censure actions, statutory provisions, caselaw and litigation will be discussed.

Learning Objectives:

- Obtain legal and practical strategies for managing hostile commissioners, board factions, and a hostile public.
- Learn about essential laws and policies available to regulate commissioner and board conduct and how to apply them.
- Learn strategies for building a more professional board, delivering on important objectives despite conflict, and rebuilding and retaining public credibility.

315 The Leadership Trailhead: Equipping New Supervisors for the Journey Ahead



Topic Track: HR / Risk Management
CEU: 0.1
CLE: 0
NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0
Location: Regency Ballroom A
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Elizabeth Borman**, Founder and Principal Consultant, Connected Communication Solutions, LLC

Supervisors are the heart of every parks and recreation agency—but too often, employees are promoted without the training they need to thrive. This session introduces an innovative, needs-based framework for developing new supervisors using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. By building from compliance essentials to relationship-centered leadership, participants will explore a phased approach. Grounded in real-world challenges like limited training capacity, workforce turnover, and the need for inclusive leadership, this session offers scalable, practical solutions that support supervisor success from day one. Best of all, attendees will leave with a ready-to-use Supervisor Toolkit that includes sample training modules, templates, and implementation tips that they can bring the program back to their agency and roll it out with minimal prep.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize and apply essential compliance responsibilities—including FMLA, ADA, and other key HR laws—to ensure day-to-day operations are legally sound and aligned with agency policies.
- Use practical tools to support team performance and development, including techniques for giving feedback, coaching staff, and fostering an inclusive and respectful team environment.
- Demonstrate foundational leadership skills that build confidence, strengthen communication, and positively represent the agency in daily interactions with staff and the public.



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SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

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All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.



410

From Small to Spectacular: The Power of Partnerships in Event Planning



Topic Track: Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom C

Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Jamie Healy**, Administrative Assistant and Village of Crete Trustee, Crete Park District; **Janel Geary**, Superintendent of Recreation, Crete Park District

Special events on a grand scale are hard for smaller districts who fall short of having all of the resources necessary to pull it off. Joins us for an insightful workshop designed for the smaller districts seeking to enhance their Special Events through collaboration with other taxing bodies and community organizations. Learn how to effectively utilize intergovernmental agreements and establish effective committee structures. This workshop aims to empower park district leaders and staff with the knowledge and tools needed to foster strong partnerships, streamline operations, enhance safety and maximize community benefits.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain actionable insights to improve intergovernmental relations and manage effective IGA's.
- Learn to create a committee structure that enhances organizational efficiency.
- Learn how to create safety protocols in conjunction with local Police, Fire and EMA.

504

Climbing the Ladder: Navigating Growth & Balance in SRA Careers



Topic Track: Therapeutic Recreation

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0.1

Location: Crystal Ballroom C

Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Dawn Krawiec**, Superintendent of Recreation, SEASPAR; **Nicole Derrig**, Manager of Support Staff, M-NASR; **Tammy Kerrins**, Superintendent of Inclusion and Risk Services, WDSRA; **Victoria Gonzalez**, Superintendent of Recreation, NWSRA

Join a panel of experienced professionals from Special Recreation Associations as they share real-world insights and practical advice for advancing your career in the field. Whether you're exploring your next move or supporting others on their path, this session will cover key topics including how to recognize when it's time to pursue a promotion, essential skills and knowledge for career growth, strategies for work-life balance, and how to take ownership of your professional journey. Panelists will also offer tips for thriving at every stage—from entry-level to leadership. Come ready to learn, reflect, and be inspired to take your next step with confidence and clarity.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify key indicators that signal readiness for a promotion and outline actionable steps to pursue new professional opportunities within special recreation.
- Describe essential skills and knowledge needed at different stages of a career in therapeutic and special recreation, from entry-level roles to leadership positions.
- Apply strategies to maintain a healthy work-life balance and take ownership of their career path through intentional planning and professional development.

910

The Struggle Is Real: Building a Social Plan That Actually Works

Topic Track: Marketing / Communications

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Regency Ballroom B

Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Brittany Moldenhauer**, Marketing Manager, Peoria Park District; **Jennifer Swanson**, Supervisor of Advancement and Communications v, Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria

Let's be real—social media can feel like a never-ending hustle. You post, you hope, and sometimes... crickets. But don't worry, you're not alone! This session is here to save your sanity with a social media plan that's actually doable and scalable—whether you're a one-person team or a whole crew.

We'll break down how to craft a content plan that fits your brand's vibe and mission (because one size definitely doesn't fit all). Plus, we'll show you how to make AI your trusty assistant—helping you brainstorm and create content faster without stealing your style. And finally, we'll help you decode those confusing analytics so you can stop guessing and start winning. Say goodbye to the social media struggle and hello to a plan that works for you—with less stress and more success.

Learning Objectives:

- Build a scalable content planning framework that adapts to your agency's unique voice, mission, and resources—because one size doesn't fit all.
- Leverage AI tools to streamline content creation, brainstorm posts, and boost productivity without losing the human touch.
- Analyze and interpret performance data to understand what's working, what's not, and how to confidently refine your social strategy.



SATURDAY AFTERNOON CONFERENCE SESSIONS

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Pre-Registration is not required to attend Saturday sessions.

All conference sessions award 0.1 CEUs.

Attorneys: Sessions that award 1.0 CLE credit (pending approval) are noted in the session listing.

1003

Driving Innovation, Inclusion and Well-Being



Topic Track: Diversity

CEU: 0.1

CLE: 0

NCTRC Pre-Approved: 0

Location: Crystal Ballroom B

Time: 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Speaker(s): **Jonelle Bailey**, Executive Director, Sycamore Park District; **Keith Wallace**, Executive Director, Lincolnway Special Recreation Association

Parks and Recreation leaders are at the forefront of building strong, resilient, and inclusive communities. This dynamic 60-minute training equips senior leadership with practical tools to drive creativity, foster collaboration and trust, and prioritize staff well-being. Through fast-paced activities and real-world strategies, participants will learn how to spark innovation, adapt programs to serve diverse communities better, and create supportive workplace cultures where ideas—and people—thrive. Join us and take actionable steps to lead with vision, inclusivity, and care.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify strategies to drive creativity and innovation within Parks and Recreation agencies, with a focus on inclusive and community-centered program design.
- Demonstrate techniques for building trust, collaboration, and psychological safety among teams to foster a culture where diverse ideas are heard and valued.
- Recognize the importance of employee well-being and mental health support and apply practical tools, including Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), to create healthier, more resilient workplaces.

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IGNITING THE GROOVE WITH FUNK AND BRASS FUSION!

No Turn On Red is a powerhouse funk band that delivers thick, killer grooves infused with a distinctive New Orleans brass band flair. The group is made up of seasoned professional musicians who have honed their craft and risen through the ranks of the Chicago music scene. Their performances are a testament to their dedication and expertise, offering audiences a rich blend of old school funk, danceable grooves, and meticulously chosen covers.

The band's music lineup is deeply rooted in funk traditions, drawing inspiration from influential acts like The Meters, Rebirth Brass Band, and James Brown. Their repertoire also reflects the innovative spirit of artists such as Jimi Hendrix, The Dirty Dozen, Lettuce, Tower of Power, Galactic, and Stevie Wonder. This eclectic mix of influences ensures that No Turn On Red delivers a sound that is both familiar and refreshingly original.

Since its inception, No Turn On Red has been committed to producing high-energy shows that captivate audiences with their provocative and engaging style. Their performances are characterized by a seamless fusion of classic funk elements with contemporary twists, creating a unique and dynamic musical experience. The band's ability to blend old school charm with modern sensibilities is a key aspect of their appeal.

No Turn On Red's live shows are designed to keep audiences on their feet, dancing and enjoying the infectious rhythms and vibrant energy. Their ability to merge various styles while maintaining a cohesive and exhilarating sound makes them a standout act in the funk genre. The band's engaging performances and tight-knit musicianship ensure that each show is a memorable event.

With their rich musical heritage and commitment to delivering top-notch entertainment, No Turn On Red invites fans to experience their exhilarating funk-infused performances. Whether you're a longtime funk enthusiast or new to the genre, their shows promise a high-energy, immersive experience that will leave you wanting more.



Saturday, January 31
7:00 pm – 10:00 pm
House of Blues
329 North Dearborn

THIS IS A TICKETED EVENT!

Ticket includes:

- Round trip shuttle service from the Hyatt Regency Chicago
- Admission to House of Blues
- Dinner buffet with unlimited beer, wine, and soft drinks
- A great night of music featuring No Turn on Red

TICKET INFORMATION:

- Delegates who register for the Full Package or the Saturday Only Package will receive one ticket for admission.
- Additional tickets may be purchased for \$145 per ticket through the pre-registration process or on-site from Conference Registration.
- Tickets **will not be sold** on-site at the Closing Social.
- This is an adult only event.

**BUSSES LOAD AT 6:45 PM AT THE
GOLD/BALLROOM LEVEL ADJACENT TO
CONFERENCE REGISTRATION**



EXHIBIT HALL INFORMATION

The IAPD/IPRA *Soaring to New Heights* Exhibit Hall is the largest exhibit show for the parks, recreation, special recreation, forest preserves and conservation community in Illinois.



Open Thursday and Friday (see times noted below), the Exhibit Hall is located in the Riverside Center, East Tower/Purple Level (Lower Level) of the Hyatt Regency Chicago. Come visit over 275 commercial vendors as they showcase their latest products and services.

While perusing the hall, don't forget to look for the roaming raffle drum and complete an entry form for the drawings to win great prizes. Drawings will take place Thursday afternoon and throughout the day on Friday. Entry forms will be in the registration materials that you pick up at Conference Registration. You must be present to win. Additional rules and regulations apply.

The locations of the raffle drum are random. Volunteers working Conference Registration, Conference Headquarters, and Exhibitor Registration do not know the locations of the drum.



EXHIBIT HALL EVENTS & HOURS

Thursday, January 29

11:00 am – 5:00 pm, Grand Opening

Prize drawings will take place at 12:30 pm, 1:30 pm, 2:30 pm, 3:30 pm, 4:00 pm, and 4:30 pm

Friday, January 30

9:00 am – 12:00 pm

11:00 am – 12:00 pm Dedicated Hour

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm Dessert in the Exhibit Hall*

Prize drawings will take place at 10:00 am, 11:00 am, 11:30 am, 2:30 pm and 2:45 pm.

*Ticketed Event

CONTEST RULES

Prizes must be claimed the same day as the drawing. At the end of the day, any unclaimed prizes will go back into the drum for the next day's raffle. Prizes may only be claimed during exhibit hall hours.

- Only official entry forms will be accepted.
- You may win only once during the conference.
- Only one entry per delegate is allowed.
- The delegate must claim his/her prize in person from Exhibitor Registration.
- A picture ID may be requested for winner verification.



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2026 IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference Exhibitors



COMPANY	BOOTH#	COMPANY	BOOTH#
390 Golf Experience	631	Commercial Recreation Specialists	825
A&A Paving-Concrete	726	CommunityPass	725
Action Play Systems, LLC	454	Concrete PolyFix	107
ACTIVE	922	 Confluence, Inc.	243
Acuity Brands / Holophane	626	Cooper - Ephesus Sports Lighting	622
Agents of Discovery	236	Cordogan Clark & Associates, Inc.	143
All Inclusive Rec	524	Correct Digital Displays, Inc.	400
Allen Pepa Architects	909	Counsilman-Hunsaker	413
Amazing Sensory Designs	208	CPS HR Consulting	151
American Ramp Company	343	 Cunningham Recreation	703
American Red Cross Training Services	316	Custom Bridges and Boardwalks	601
Amilia	137	CXT Inc	700
Andrews Technology	348	Dekra-Lite	814
Anthony Roofing - Tecta America	114	DEO Consulting, Inc.	919
 Aqua Creek Products	828	Design Perspectives, Inc.	711
 Aqua Pure Enterprises Inc.	431	Dewberry	520
Aqua Tile	701	Direct Fitness Solutions	640
Aquatic Design Partners	740	 Divine Signs and Graphics	338
ARCO/Murray Design Build	702	 DLA Architects Ltd.	216
Arndt Municipal Support Inc	129	Doty & Sons Concrete Products, Inc.	320
AstroTurf Great Lakes	248	DoubleSpot AI	304
Aurora Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	235	DrillPickle	452
Away With Geese	926	DuraPlay, Inc.	205
Bailey Edward Design, Inc	326	Dutch Crafted Solar Seating	355
Baird Public Finance	446	DynaDome	707
BarkPass LLC	809	Engineering Resource Associates	215
 Battle Company	251	Entertainment Concepts	917
 Baxter & Woodman, Inc.	722	ERG Elite Remodeling Group	526
 BCI Burke	122	Eriksson Engineering Associates, Ltd.	333
BEAR Construction	607	EVP Academies, LLC	109
BerryDunn	833	Farnsworth Group, Inc.	619
Bid Evolution	220	Featherstone, Inc.	612
BLICK Art Materials	633	Fehr Graham	325
Bluestem Ecological Services	127	FGM Architects	600
Blue-White Industries	832	FieldTurf - Tarkett Sports Indoor	820
BMO Bank N.A.	252	Fifth Third Bank	522
 Boller Construction	203	First Bank Chicago	729
Bounce Houses R Us	201	Fitness Asset Manager	838
BOWNET AWARDS	913	FMX	407
Brightly Software	921	ForeverLawn Chicago	427
Bronze Memorial Company	340	Foundation Mechanics, LLC	228
BS&A Software	344	Frederick Quinn Corporation	738
Buck Services	448	GeoSurfaces	153
Byrne & Jones Construction	728	 Gewalt Hamilton Associates	713
Camosy Construction	602	Glow Getters	227
Campspot	254	GMIS Illinois	638
Canlan Sports	923	Go Ape	211
Capri Pools & Aquatics	428	Gold Medal Products	313
Chicago Communications	839	GovDeals	708
Chicago Fire FC	255	GRAEF-USA, Inc.	224
Chicagoland Pool Management	133	Graffiti Solutions, Inc.	334
Chicago's North Shore CVB	237	Great Lakes Urban Forestry	157
CivicPlus	528	Great Southern Recreation	928
ClimbZone Chicago	246	 Greenfields Outdoor Fitness	118
Clowning Around Entertainment	229	GRG Playscapes LLC	247
Columbia Cascade Company	322	H.E. Hodge Company	523
 ComEd Energy Efficiency Program	714	H2I Group	412

COMPANY

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Halogen Supply Company, Inc.	438
Hawkins Inc.	345
Henry Bros. Co.	444
Heritage Corridor Destinations	346
Hershey's Ice Cream	932
Hey and Associates	411
 Hitchcock Design Group	419
Home Court Advantage	131
Homer Industries, LLC	309
HR Source	628
Hustler Turf Equipment, Inc.	106
HydroApps	226
IdentiSys Inc.	105
IHC Construction Companies LLC	527
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January 28 – 30, 2027
Hyatt Regency Chicago

Presenters: The Conference Program Committee is seeking proposals for workshops and sessions that reflect the best thinking, informed by research, theory, or practice, in the field of parks, recreation and conservation. Proposals that highlight emerging trends, best practice case studies or issues of diversity and inclusion are highly encouraged.

Proposal topics should fall into one of the following content areas:

- Boardmanship
- Diversity
- Facilities
- Finance/IT
- Forest Preserve/Conservation
- Governance/Legal
- HR/Risk Management
- Leadership/Management
- Marketing/Communications
- Parks/Natural Resources
- Recreation
- Therapeutic Recreation

To submit a proposal for consideration, please visit ilparksconference.com. **Proposals will be accepted March 23 – June 25, 2026.** Only online submissions will be considered. No paper submissions will be accepted.



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