

## 4. Community Participation and Resource Planning

- The Recreation and Park Department is one of the most publicly visible departments in the City and County of San Francisco. However, the Department does not adequately solicit or incorporate public input, demographic information, or other relevant community factors into its programming and service decisions. Rather, the Department makes its programmatic and service planning decisions informally, at a recreation center-level, and based on historical offerings and staff interest. Consequently, the Department has not kept pace with changing demand for recreation and park facilities, such as the increased demand for fitness facilities and adventure sports.
- The Department's attendance data collection methods are inefficient and the integrity of the data is compromised. The data the Department does collect are not used to influence resource planning decisions.
- The Department does not require minimum standards of program quality or establish program goals and outcomes. The identification of program goals and outcomes and the evaluation of programs, if done at all, are left to the discretion of individual recreation staff. The quality of programs is, therefore, largely unknown, highly variable, and primarily dependent on the abilities and resources of recreation staff managing them. Therefore, the Department is not able to assess community reaction to specific programs and to measure the occurrence of desired outcomes.
- The Department does not adequately advertise its facilities, programs, and services. The Department needs to provide its staff with the tools, training and support to perform better community outreach.
- The Department interacts with a diverse array of community stakeholders, including individual volunteers, other public agencies, foundations, and neighborhood groups that advocate on behalf of issues, facilities, and programs. However, the Department neither has an understanding of the scope of the partnerships in which it is engaged nor appropriate policies and procedures in place to govern its work with these stakeholders.
- The Department is increasingly working with volunteers in its parks and facilities. However, the Department, despite attempts, has not instituted a formal volunteer policy.

## **Community Participation in Recreation Planning**

The Recreation and Park Department is one of the most publicly visible departments in the City and County of San Francisco. The Department's central role is the provision of services and facilities to the public. Department staff are located in all City neighborhoods, and they interact daily with San Francisco residents by providing them with recreation opportunities and open space. Hence, the Department has a considerable responsibility to respond to the needs of its users and provide them with the types of services they desire.

The Department does not adequately solicit or incorporate public input, demographic information, or other relevant community factors into its programming and service decisions. Rather, the Department makes its programmatic and service planning decisions informally, at a recreation center-level, and based on historical offerings and staff interest.

### Decentralized and Informal Resource Provision Decisions

Decisions regarding the type, number, and quality of programs offered at recreation centers are made at the level of the recreation center. Front-line recreation staff are encouraged to generate their own program ideas and develop implementation plans for their own programs. Programming decisions are frequently passive, in that recreation staff tend to offer what has been offered historically at their centers.

Programming decisions are also strongly driven by recreation staff interest. Current recreation programs range from the traditional, such as basketball and arts and crafts, to the non-traditional, such as sewing, senior karaoke, youth cooking, and percussion classes. Although the opportunity to participate in one of these non-traditional recreation programs is a benefit, and the variety of programs provides more breadth to the Department's programmatic offerings, the Department needs to develop methods to ensure that the programs it offers are appropriate for the community.

### Insufficient Solicitation of Community Input

The Department does not have policies or procedures requiring recreation staff to solicit community input regarding what recreation programs should be offered. Recreation center staff frequently report that they do, in fact, gauge community interest, but they do so through unstructured, informal interactions with users and community members. This method can have positive outcomes, especially if the recreation staff are proactive in engaging with the community and, more importantly, are willing to be responsive to the information generated. Positive outcomes may include the generation of innovative programming ideas and the fostering of higher morale among recreation staff because they have been entrusted with greater stewardship over programming decisions and the community's needs.

But although positive, the generation and incorporation of informal community input into recreation decisions is not required by the Department and, therefore, not documented, quantified, or compiled centrally. Not all recreation staff may be actively engaging in dialogues with the community regarding programming decisions, and it is unclear how many recreation centers actually have attempted to solicit and include community input into programming decisions. Further, some recreation staff may be unwilling to suspend historically-offered programs or personally preferred programs that are no longer desired by the community, or to attempt the introduction of new programs that are in strong demand.

#### Insufficient Use of Demographic and Recreation Trends

Twenty percent of responding households in a citywide survey performed for the Department's 2004 *Recreation Assessment Report* stated that a "lack of quality programs that meet my needs" prevented them and members of their households from participating in recreation programs more often. The Department does not formally analyze important factors related to community in its programming decisions, including neighborhood and citywide demographics, what programs and services are offered by other providers in the area, and historical recreation trends. As a result, the Department does not understand the full picture of the community demand for recreation programming.

Interviews with staff indicated that the Department has been non-responsive to two recent recreation trends in particular – the increased demand for fitness facilities and for adventure sports, such as rock climbing, skateboarding, cycling, hiking, and kayaking. The 2004 *Recreation Assessment Report* indicated that indoor exercise and fitness facilities were among of the highest priorities of respondents, together representing the third most important type of recreation facility to respondents. (The first and second were walking/biking trails and pools.) Currently, nine of the Department's 74 recreation facilities offer weightlifting and 18 offer "aerobics/exercise" opportunities. The Department has one skateboard park in operation at Crocker Amazon Playground, and one in the design phase. According to the recreation programming guide for September 2005 through April 2006, there are no adventure sport recreation programs or opportunities currently offered by the Department. The Director of Operations should develop a plan specifically to address these well-documented national trends and provide more fitness and adventure sport opportunities.

Because recreation center staff are best poised to understand their community recreation needs, responsibility for programming decisions should remain at the recreation center level, but the Department should implement policies and procedures that ensure that a minimum level of community input is incorporated. The General Manager should direct the Director of Operations to work with Neighborhood and Citywide Services Managers to research, develop and implement protocols based on best practices for the solicitation and inclusion of community input. Appropriate protocols may include regular focus groups, district-level community meetings, and suggestions boxes at recreation facilities.

Because the Neighborhood Services Division has a new organization structure based on eight neighborhood districts, the managers of these districts should be responsible for

ensuring protocol compliance, for example by including community outreach and input goals in their employee performance plans and evaluations, as is currently done by one quadrant supervisor. The protocols should also incorporate feedback reporting mechanisms so the Director of Operations and the new Neighborhood and Citywide Services superintendents can accurately quantify and describe the community outreach and input taking place.

The Department's planning staff should assist by analyzing recreation programs offered in relation to external factors such as neighborhood and citywide demographics, what programs and services are being offered by other providers in the area, and historical recreation trends. Further, and as described in more detail below, the Department should ensure better collection and analysis of attendance data and the use of community surveys and program evaluations.

### **Attendance Data - Understanding the Department's Existing Users**

The Department has a lack of reliable data concerning the participants in its programs and the informal users of its facilities (i.e., users not participating in a scheduled program). The Department currently requires that its recreation center staff fill out weekly attendance forms, which include tallies for attendance in formal and informal recreation activities, and the ages and genders of these attendees. In August of 2005, for example, the Department reported the attendance numbers shown below in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**

#### **Reported Recreation Attendance Figures for August of 2005**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Informal</b>
Pre-School	4,501	59,053
Children	48,907	99,629
Teen	34,363	87,204
Adult	52,333	144,630
Seniors	19,422	51,313
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>159,526</b>	<b>441,834</b>

Source: Recreation and Park Department Planning Division

#### Poor Data Quality and Collection Method

Interviews with recreation staff and their managers, however, suggest that these attendance forms are not practical. Many staff comment that the current method of attendance data collection requires a significant investment of time. The form asks staff to record attendance data in 13 categories of formal recreation programs for every day of the week, reported for each of five age categories. The form also asks for daily informal recreation numbers during five time brackets per day, reported using the same five age

categories, in addition to dog walkers. Further, all of these reported attendees must be broken down by gender.

Consequently, there are 940 boxes to be filled out by each recreation facility every week. This poses a significant challenge to recreation staff, particularly those working alone or in smaller recreation facilities where staff must run programs, provide general supervision, and observe and record a considerable volume of user data.

The attendance data that are collected are of dubious quality, in part, because the forms are so daunting. Many staff reported that they do not actually take counts, but rather they fill in the attendance forms at the end of the week and guess at the numbers after the fact. Other staff mention that intentional inflation of attendance numbers may be taking place because staff wish to protect their jobs, make the case for more recreation staff, or prevent any further staffing reductions. Therefore, the Department should institute a method of checking the integrity of data, such as using anonymous “shoppers” who visit recreation centers to observe actual community use of facilities and programs.

#### Inadequate Reporting Compliance and Cultural Barriers to Data Collection

In addition to data collection and data integrity challenges, the Department has not been able to regularly achieve high attendance reporting compliance among recreation facilities. In September of 2005, for example, only 51 of 73 facilities, or 70 percent, submitted their attendance forms. This compliance problem is partially the result of the cumbersome process utilized to transmit attendance data from the recreation centers to McLaren Lodge, where a clerk enters the data from paper forms into an electronic database. Currently, recreation facility staff give their paper attendance forms to their supervisors, who in turn bring them by hand to McLaren Lodge, where the data are entered on a monthly basis. These facility data, in conjunction with attendance data collected by citywide recreation program staff, are then compiled for use in SFStat presentations and other reports.

This multi-step process is vulnerable to delays and bottlenecks. For example, if recreation center staff do not meet with their supervisors frequently, their attendance forms may not get to McLaren Lodge on a timely basis. Further, the forms are often submitted at the same time, creating a backlog at the data entry phase. These process difficulties could be solved, in part, if recreation centers had increased internet and intranet access and could directly enter their attendance data electronically. To partially address these delays and bottlenecks, the Department should institute more regular meetings with staff at a section or quadrant level, a recommendation which is further discussed in Section 3 of this report.

In addition to the cumbersome process of collecting and transmitting attendance data, the Department’s decentralized organization structure contributes to incomplete attendance data. Decentralized facilities foster a culture of independence among staff, a culture that, although having many benefits, includes a reluctance to comply with policies and procedures of administrative staff who “don’t ever get out in the field.” In staff focus groups, front-line staff repeatedly commented about how the administrative staff

understands very little about the work that the front-line staff does. Moreover, the cultural disconnect between the administrative and front-line components of the Department results in distrust among front-line staff that the attendance data will be put into use. Because they have not seen any changes resulting from data collected in the past, many front-line staff view the attendance data collection requirement as just another administrative hoop through which they are being asked to jump.

Attendance data is currently included as performance measures in Department reports and in SFStat presentations, but it is not clear if the attendance data is ever formally used to make programming and service provision decisions. For example, participation in senior recreation opportunities has decreased in some recreation centers but this decrease has not been followed by a reduction in the senior recreation programs offered. Therefore, after collecting and compiling attendance data, the Operations and Planning Divisions need to use this data to inform the program planning processes.

The Department should create stronger incentives for staff to submit attendance data, supplemented by disciplinary actions, if necessary. Further, the Department should make a strong case for the collection of data to staff, by creating and articulating a clear plan for how it will be used to make inform programming decisions in the future.

#### Forthcoming Data Collection Changes

The Department states that it is currently in the process of revising the attendance data collection form to be used by recreation centers and programs. The new form should require less time on the part of recreation staff by simplifying the quantity of data staff are asked to observe and record. The Department should consider asking recreation staff to take “snapshots” of attendance activity at different points throughout the week, rather than tracking every user. However, even with a new form, the Department needs to address the issues of (a) staff perception of the data collection process, (b) reporting compliance, and (c) the integrity of the data itself.

### **Program Quality and Evaluation**

The Department does not have a policy requiring minimum standards of program quality or the establishment of program goals and outcomes. The quality of recreation programs is, therefore, largely unknown, highly variable, and primarily dependent on the abilities and resources of the recreation staff managing them. As with the solicitation of community input into programming decisions, the identification of program goals and outcomes and the evaluation of programs by participants, if done at all, are left to the discretion individual recreation staff. Therefore, the Department is not able to assess community reaction to specific programs and measure the occurrence of desired outcomes in both programs and facilities.

### Defining Core Recreation Services

The 2004 *Recreation Assessment Report* defined the Department's "core services" and recommended that the Department use this list of core services in developing standardized performance measures, goals, and evaluation procedures for programs. The report's criteria to define core services included, among other criteria, if the services have a deep history of being provided by the Department and if the services consume a considerable portion of the Department's budget. Although these criteria may reflect effects of the provision of core services, they are merely descriptive and are not appropriate for understanding what constitutes a staple function of the Department. These criteria could potentially be used to perpetuate underutilized or otherwise unsuccessful programs simply because these programs have a long history in the Department or utilize a significant amount of Department resources.

The Operations Division and Long Range Planning Division have recently undertaken a similar effort to define the Department's core services. This process is currently underway and, the results are not yet available for analysis. The Department should ensure that it is not using criteria to define core services that are based on history or expenditures, but on the service's role in the fulfillment of the Department's mission as a provider of recreation opportunities and parks. Once the development of the list of core services is completed, the Operations Division should design methods to ensure quality in the provision of these core services, including standardized performance measures, program goals, and evaluation procedures.

### Office of the Controller's Measure of Service Quality

The performance measures reported by the Department on a quarterly basis do not address the issues of program outcome fulfillment and program quality. However, the Office of the Controller's Annual Citywide Survey includes several general measures intended to assess recreation program quality. Table 4.2 summarizes these results for FY 2001-2002 through FY 2004-2005.

**Table 4.2****Office of the Controller's Annual Citywide Survey Results for  
Recreation Performance Measures****FY 2001-2002 through FY 2004-2005**

<b>Performance Measure</b>	<b>FY 2001-2002</b>	<b>FY 2002-2003</b>	<b>FY 2003-2004</b>	<b>FY 2004-2005</b>
Percentage of San Franciscans who rate the quality of adult programs good or very good	44%	47%	44%	35%
Percentage of San Franciscans who rate the quality of children and youth programs good or very good	49%	57%	51%	37%
Percentage of San Franciscans who rate the convenience of recreation programs good or very good	55%	56%	55%	47%

Source: Office of the Controller, Annual Citywide Survey

As shown in Table 4.2, the percentage of San Franciscans who rate the quality and convenience of recreation programs as good or very good has decreased between FY 2001-2002 and FY 2004-2005 by between 8 and 12 percentage points, as measured by all three performance measures. These measures do not provide specific information, and therefore have limited prescriptive value, but they suggest that the public is less satisfied now than it was four years ago with recreation program quality. The Department needs to better understand the public's experiences behind these numbers, including the public's satisfaction with specific programs and services.

**The Need for Program Evaluations**

In order to gauge program quality, the Department should perform post-program evaluations. Currently, the Department neither requires nor requests that recreation staff conduct post-program evaluations with participants. Similar to the informal and ad hoc process described above for making program decisions, program quality is also assessed through informal participant feedback, if done at all. Some recreation directors choose on their own to ask program participants to fill in evaluation forms. However, even though these recreation staff create their own evaluation forms and administer their own evaluations, the Department was unable to identify where these evaluations are being done in neighborhood facilities, much less the results of such evaluations.

Even in the citywide programs, which are run in a centralized manner, program evaluations are not required and generally not performed. Of eleven citywide recreation programs surveyed, only two regularly ask participants to perform a post-program

evaluation. These were (a) the Workcreation Program (a teen employment program) and (b) adult softball. As discussed above, this lack of centralized knowledge of what is happening “in the field” is pervasive.

The Department should develop policies and procedures for the establishment of program goals and suitable performance measures associated with these goals. The Department should develop a generic program evaluation form in order to collect community feedback, a task which the Department reports it is currently undertaking. At minimum, the use and compilation of program evaluations should be required for citywide and core recreation programs. Finally, the Department should centrally collect program outcome and quality data for use in better programming and resource allocation decisions.

### **The 2004 Recreation Assessment Report**

Even when the Department has undertaken a formal analysis of communities’ needs in relation to the Department’s recreation priorities, the Department has not adequately followed through with implementing the results. In August of 2004, the Department published the *Recreation Assessment Report*, the culmination of a study conducted by Leon Younger and PROS, LLC. The 2004 *Recreation Assessment Report* represents the first attempt at studying recreation in the Department’s one hundred-year history. The study analyzes the types and quality of recreation opportunities provided by the Department and compares these with the recreation wishes of San Francisco residents – including both users and non-users of Department facilities and programs. The Department’s decision to develop the *Recreation Assessment Report* was the result of a recommendation contained in the 2001 five-year Strategic Plan.

#### Implementation Progress To Date

Since the *Recreation Assessment Report’s* publication over one year ago, the Department has made minimal progress in executing the report’s recommendations. The report outlined five overarching goals and recommended between five and ten implementation strategies for each goal. As shown in Table 4.3, as of November of 2005, the Department has completed only one of these 35 recommended strategies and has shown evidence of progress in seven of the 34 remaining strategies.

**Table 4.3****The Recreation Assessment Report's Five Recommended Goals and Progress in their Implementation**

<i>Recreation Assessment Report Goal</i>	<b>Number of Recommended Strategies</b>	<b>Number of Strategies Completed</b>	<b>Number of Strategies With Evidence of Progress</b>
1. Develop consistent core programs and facility standards across the City so all participants and users receive a quality recreation experience.	6	0	1
2. Recreation services will meet community needs through effective use of demographic data and increased marketing and promotional efforts to inform users of services.	6	1	0
3. Recreation facilities will be valued as community assets by upgrading and maintaining all indoor and outdoor facilities in need of major repair over a ten-year period to create a quality user experience and positive image for the City.	5	0	0
4. Update existing and create new partnership agreements to establish balance and equity of each partner's investment, creating trust and eliminating entitlement.	8	0	2
5. Reposition recreation services as a viable City service by developing an outcome based management culture that focuses on accountability and exceeding the needs of users while building an efficient and productive organization that operates in a proactive manner.	10	0	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>

Accomplishments in the implementation of the *Recreation Assessment Report's* recommendations are primarily in two areas. First, in response to the recommendation that the Department "create consistent program design standards for all core programs as it applies to staff-to-user ratios, hours, program content by level of activity, activity outcomes and equipment access," the Department formed advisory groups for two

citywide programs – the Latchkey and Tiny Tots Programs. The Department also began compiling information about all of its recreational opportunities and schedules and publishing this information twice a year - online and in brochure format for distribution. (However, as of November 11, 2005, the program information and schedules contained on the Department’s website were considerably out-of-date, with no information available for any programs after August of 2005.)

#### Implementation Delegation and Management

Despite these few accomplishments, the Department has clearly not progressed far in the *Recreation Assessment Report’s* implementation. This is partially the result of how the Department chose to initially manage and monitor implementation. The Department first delegated responsibility for managing the implementation of the *Recreation Assessment Report’s* recommendations to a Classification 3284 Recreation Director and a Classification 3292 Assistant Recreation Superintendent.

Almost all of the report’s recommendations, however, require of a scope of management that significantly exceeds the job descriptions of these two positions. This delegation of responsibility to staff who are not among the Department’s top-level managers sent the message, whether true or not, that the *Recreation Assessment Report’s* realization was not a priority for the Department. Further, the Department’s did not establish methods for monitoring the progress and status of the report’s implementation.

In early 2005, the Acting General Manager put the implementation of the *Recreation Assessment Report* implementation on hold. The Acting General Manager directed planning staff to examine and refine the proposed core programming activities described in the *Recreation Assessment Report*. It is unclear what the current status and direction of the implementation process is, given the current period of management transition, however the new Director of Operations has indicated that implementation of the *Recreation Assessment Report* is a top priority. Regardless, if the Department intends to follow through with some or all of the *Recreation Assessment Report’s* recommendations, it needs to make the responsibility of implementing them a duty of one or several high-level staff, develop a clear implementation timeline and strategy, and establish a formal procedure for tracking the progress.

### **Community Affairs and Outreach**

According to the citywide survey performed for the 2004 *Recreation Assessment Report*, the most common reason reported preventing respondent households from participating in the Department’s programs more often was “I don’t know what is being offered” (57 percent), followed by “I do not know locations of programs” (37 percent). Both of these reasons point to the Department’s limited transmission of information about its programs and facilities to potential users.

Recreation facility staff perform the majority of the public outreach for the programs held at their facilities. However, the Department does not provides its staff with adequate training related to public outreach. Further, the Department does not have an overall

understanding of the scope or types of outreach done by its staff. The Department has one budgeted Classification 1314 Public Relations Officer in FY 2005-2006 among a total of 1,120.24 full time equivalent positions. By comparison, DPW has 5.0 full time equivalent budgeted positions for public relations and information (1.0 full time equivalent Classification 1310 Public Relations Assistant, 1.0 full time equivalent Classification 1312 Public Information Officer, and 3.0 full time equivalent Classification 1314 Public Relations Officers) among a total of 1,456.19 full time equivalent staff. Therefore, as shown by this staffing allocation, the Department and City have made an implicit decision over time to delegate the task of outreach and community affairs management to its front-line staff.

Even though community outreach may continue to be the primary responsibility of front-line staff, the Department should consider organizing a community affairs and outreach task force composed of existing staff, including representatives from the General Manager's Office and the Operations, Volunteer Services, Capital Planning, and Long Range Planning programs and divisions. This task force should assess the current outreach and community affairs situation in the department and develop recommendations for future improvements.

#### Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee (PROSAC)

The Department has an existing resource that is well-suited for serving as a strong liaison to the community, but this resource is not currently operating at its full capacity. The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee (PROSAC) was formed by the passage of Proposition C in 2000 and is a citizen's advisory body composed of 23 members appointed by the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor. In addition to commenting on the Department's strategic, operation, and capital plans and providing assistance in conducting public meetings to review the proposed annual budget, the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee, according to Park Code Section 13.01, also has the following responsibility to conduct outreach and solicit public input:

Members of the Committee appointed from supervisorial districts shall serve as liaisons between the Commission and the residents, neighborhood groups and organizations dedicated to park and recreational issues in their districts. Members may also serve as liaisons to the public at large and to citywide organizations that are concerned with park and recreational issues, and may assist the Department to arrange meetings with neighborhood groups, citywide organizations and the public at large to discuss such issues.

Interviews with Department staff and Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee members indicate that the advisory committee is not fulfilling the above responsibility. The Department should work with the Chair of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee to determine a clear plan for the execution of these district and citywide liaison activities, including how the Department will provide appropriate support for the committee's efforts and what the performance expectations should be for committee members.

## **Managing Community Partnerships and Relationships**

The Department interacts with a diverse array of community stakeholders, including individual volunteers, other public agencies, foundations, and neighborhood groups that advocate on behalf of issues, facilities, and programs. The Department has the responsibility to actively manage its myriad relationships with community stakeholders. However, the Department does not have policies and procedures in place to govern its work with any of these stakeholders. As discussed above, the Department has a decentralized and informal approach for soliciting and incorporating public input and community information into its program decisions. This same approach also extends to how the Department manages its relationships with a diverse array of community stakeholders.

### Unknown Scope of Community Partnerships

Upon request, the Department could not provide a list of community groups with which it regularly works. Although it is understandable that such a list would be constantly in flux and would likely not encompass all partnerships (such as small groups that arise in response to a single event, issue or facility for a short period of time), the Department should be able to provide a list of those partnerships and community stakeholders it works with on a regular basis.

Partial lists of partners do exist. For example, the Volunteer Program provided a list of the 120 groups it works with on a monthly or otherwise regular basis. The Parks Trust reported 74 “Park Partners”, or community organizations which support and work with Department facilities and programs. Examples of Park Partners include Aces for Junior Tennis, Friends of Alta Plaza Park, and the Strictly Bluegrass Festival. Many of these partners have set-up accounts with the Parks Trust to manage their financial contributions to the Department. However, there are community groups that are not counted among the partners working with either the Parks Trust or the Volunteer Services Program.

This analysis has identified seven types of partnerships that the Department engages in with community stakeholders - public, private, and not-for-profit - on a regular basis. These seven types are listed in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4**  
**Types of Community Partnerships**

Partnership Category	Example(s)
CCSF and Department-sponsored Citizen Advisory Committees	Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PROSAC); Dog Advisory Committee (DAC); Natural Areas Program Citizens Advisory Committee (NAPCAC)
Partnerships and arrangements with other governmental entities	Other City Departments; San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD); City College
Non-profit foundations affiliated with Department	Parks Trust
Volunteer and advocacy groups affiliated with a specific facility or program	Friends of Buena Vista Park; Friends of Glen Canyon Park
Ongoing volunteer groups not affiliated with a specific facility or program	Gap, Inc.
Issue specific advocacy groups	California Native Plant Society; DogPAC
Advocacy groups concerned with citywide park and recreation issues	Neighborhood Parks Council; San Francisco Planning and Urban Research (SPUR)

#### Inadequate Policies Governing Community Partnerships

Many recreation center staff report that they regularly work with community partners, but they do so without guidance regarding topics such as how to assist community groups in forming, how much staff time to devote to partnerships, and how to solicit, process, and report donations and in-kind assistance from partners. It is currently not clear what should happen when a community group wishes to form and advocate on behalf of the Department. Upon asking this question of several different high-level Department staff, no common answer was received.

The Department does not have policies or procedures in place guiding the formation and management of its partnerships. Although several staff reported that the Department does, in fact, has a formal policy related to partnerships with community groups and other organizations, no one in the Department was able to locate or describe such a comprehensive policy. Even though the Department does have some minor and scattered policies that relate to community groups and partnerships, these policies certainly do not constitute an intentional, comprehensive approach to managing the Department's interactions with community partners.

Additionally, there are situations, such as when there is a monetary relationship or the occupation of Department facilities by community partners, when the Department should clarify the roles and responsibilities of itself as well as the partner organization through a partnership agreement. Therefore, in addition to creating policies and procedures related to how staff should work with partners, the Department should clearly define the types of partnerships that require partnership agreements and employ these agreements accordingly.

It is important to note that there have been situations in the past in which the codification of partnership agreements has been politically contentious, or even unfeasible. A well-known example of this was the failed attempt at the creation of a memorandum of understanding between the Department and the Friends of the Randall Museum in 2004. By having a policy in place, it may be that the Department can avoid some future contentious situations by actively managing and tracking partnerships from the beginning.

#### No Centralized Management of Community Partnerships

The Department does not have any staff dedicated to developing and managing community partnerships. There is no single person, office, or program within the Department that can describe the magnitude and diversity of the Department's partnerships and community relationships; however, there is one individual in the General Manager's Office who facilitates some partnerships and works with community groups on various large projects. The General Manager should designate a person in his office to compile information related to the community groups and partners with which the Department works.

A centralized clearinghouse of partnership information would assist the Department in a number of important ways. It would assist the Department in its planning decisions by allowing the quantification of the resources the Department both provides and receives from partnership arrangements. Examples of quantifiable resources the Department provides include staff time and facility usage. Examples of quantifiable resources the Department receives include equipment donations to recreation centers and volunteer hours. Such a centralized source of information on partnerships would also provide the Department with valuable information related to best practices in partnering.

#### Partnerships for the Provision of Recreation Programming

As discussed above, the Department has recently undertaken an effort to define its "core services." There are some programs and services that are currently offered by the Department at recreation centers, such as child development and education programs and other social services, which arguably are non-core and fall outside of the Department's mission. Although it may be appropriate for non-core programs and services to continue to be offered at recreation center facilities, the provision of facilities should not be equated with the provision of all of the programs and services offered within them.

Because the Department’s resources are already stretched thinly, the Department must focus first on providing quality services and programs that are central to its mission, prior to extending into other areas. Therefore, once the development of the list of core services is completed, the Operations Division should use this list to prioritize resource allocation decisions in recreation centers. Should the Department arrive at a list of core services that does not include programs that focus on, for example, child development and other social services, the Department should investigate the development of partnership opportunities for continuing to provide these non-core services at recreation center facilities.

The Department has entered into a pilot program with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families in which community based organizations will provide children’s and families’ programs in Recreation and Park Department facilities during FY 2006-2007. The Department should evaluate this pilot as a model for providing additional programs and services.

### Managing Volunteers

The scope of volunteerism in parks and recreation centers is increasing, but the Department does not have policies to manage the use of volunteers or incorporate volunteer supervision into staff work activities. The number of volunteer hours performed in parks grew every year during the past four years, and totaled 41,571 volunteer hours in FY 2004-2005. Table 4.5 below summarizes the number of volunteer hours performed in parks from FY 2001-2002 through FY 2004-2005. In FY 2004-2005, there were 120 community groups that regularly volunteered in parks, and many others that volunteered on one or a few occasions.

**Table 4.5**

#### **Volunteer Hours in Parks, FY 2001-2002 Through FY 2004-2005**

	<b>FY 2001-2002</b>	<b>FY 2002-2003</b>	<b>FY 2003-2004</b>	<b>FY 2004-2005</b>
Number of Volunteer Hours in Parks	32, 189	36,700	41,365	41,571

Source: Recreation and Park Department Volunteer Services Program

Also indicating a growing desire to engage community volunteers, the Mayor’s Office announced in July of 2005 a new initiative called “Project Park Connect.” Although there are still few specific details about Project Park Connect, the initiative aims to increase community participation in park maintenance, thereby essentially increasing the

volunteer presence in parks. According to an article in the *San Francisco Examiner*,<sup>1</sup> Mayor Newsom described the program as a way to "reconnect the public in San Francisco to their parks in a formal way," and at the same time "help offset the burden that exists with limited resources in maintaining our parks and recreation facilities."

Although the Department is increasingly working with and relying on volunteers, the Department does not have a formal volunteer policy in place. There have been repeated efforts over the past several years to write and adopt a volunteer policy. However, the Commission has not adopted a policy to date, primarily as a result of dissent from labor and community organizations.

The Department's Volunteer Program oversees volunteer efforts, at times in conjunction with the Parks Trust, the Department's non-profit partner. The Volunteer Program, in the absence of formal policy guidance, has developed its own procedures for governing work with volunteers. The Volunteer Program procedures include the use of an in-house "permit to work" form, a hold harmless agreement (related to the Department's liability in the case of accident or injury), and the distribution of volunteer representatives.

The Commission has not adopted a formal volunteer policy, at least in part because of concern among front-line staff and the unions representing them that an increased reliance on volunteers may endanger the job security of staff positions. Further complicating the situation are the current job descriptions for some staff, which do not include references to working with volunteers. Staff response to, and enthusiasm for, working with volunteers varies widely, and some of those who do not want to work with volunteers point to their job descriptions for support of their positions. Furthermore, there has been debate related to the appropriate staff-to-volunteer ratio during a volunteer work project and whether or not this ratio should vary with the type of volunteer work being performed. Because of the sensitivity and complexity of the issues involved, many involving negotiations with labor unions, the Department has not been able to institute a volunteer policy. The Office of the Mayor has recently taken leadership of this issue and is now managing the discussions with unions and interested community organizations.

Given that the number of volunteers working in the Department's facilities will likely continue to grow, especially with the institution of the Mayor's Project Park Connect initiative, the lack of a formal volunteer policy needs to be promptly remedied. Although the negotiations are currently being handled by the Office of the Mayor, the Department should monitor these discussions and ensure that progress continues. The Department should provide negotiators with the productivity standards for gardeners that are currently under development by Planning Staff (see Section 2). These standards may assist in clarifying which gardening tasks do not require specific horticultural knowledge and training, and which should only be reserved for gardening staff.

Additionally, the Department should clarify the job descriptions of appropriate staff to include the supervision of volunteers. Finally, although the Department provides lead

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon, Rachel. "Mayor proposes legion of volunteers to keep up parks Union leaders, city managers working on an agreement." *San Francisco Examiner*, July 29, 2005.

pay to gardeners who work with volunteers, the Department should investigate the possibility of providing incentives to all staff who do so.

## **Conclusions**

The Recreation and Park Department is one of the most publicly visible departments in the City and County of San Francisco, whose central role is the provision of services and facilities to the public. Department staff are located in all City neighborhoods, and they interact daily with San Francisco residents by providing them with recreation opportunities and open space. Hence, the Department has a considerable responsibility to respond to the needs of its users and provide them with the types of services they desire. However, the Department does not currently have adequate policies and procedures in place such that it can effectively seek out and respond to the needs of the community.

The Department interacts with a diverse array of community stakeholders, including individual volunteers, other public agencies, foundations, and neighborhood groups that advocate on behalf of issues, facilities, and programs. The Department has the responsibility to actively manage its myriad relationships with community stakeholders. However, the Department does not have policies and procedures in place to govern its work with these stakeholders. The same informal and decentralized approach to resource planning described above also extends to how the Department manages its relationships with a community stakeholders.

## **Recommendations**

The Recreation and Park Department General Manager should:

- 4.1 Direct the Director of Operations to work with Neighborhood and Citywide Services Managers to research, develop, and implement protocols based on best practices for outreach and the solicitation and inclusion of community input. Appropriate protocols may include the use of a standard recreation program evaluation, regular focus groups and district-level community meetings, and suggestion boxes at recreation facilities. These protocols should include reporting mechanisms, so that the Director of Operations and Neighborhood and Citywide Services Managers can accurately quantify the community outreach and input taking place.
- 4.2 Direct Neighborhood Services Managers to be responsible for ensuring compliance with community input and outreach protocols, for example by including community outreach and input goals in employee performance plans and evaluations.
- 4.3 Direct the Department's planning staff to analyze the recreation programs offered in relation to external factors such as neighborhood and citywide demographics, what programs and services are being offered by other providers in the area, and historical recreation trends.

- 4.4 Direct the Director of Operations to develop a plan to address recreation trends, a plan that should specifically include the provision of more fitness and adventure sport opportunities.
- 4.5 Direct the Director of Operations to create stronger incentives for staff to submit attendance data, supplemented by disciplinary actions, if necessary, and make a strong case for the collection of this data to staff, by creating a clear plan for how it will be used to make programming decisions in the future.
- 4.6 Direct the Director of Operations to create a more efficient method to collect attendance data, such as asking recreation staff to take “snapshots” of attendance activity at different points throughout the week, rather than tracking every user.
- 4.7 Direct the Director of Operations to develop protocols for checking the integrity of attendance data, such as using anonymous “shoppers” who visit recreation centers to observe actual community use of facilities and programs.
- 4.8 Direct the Director of Operations to require regular meetings with staff at a district or quadrant level to facilitate the transmittal of attendance data, among other goals discussed in Section 2.
- 4.9 Direct the Director of Operations to ensure that the criteria being used to define core services do not include the length of time the service has been offered by the Department or the amount of budgetary resources the service currently requires. Rather, the criteria for defining core services should elucidate the service’s role in the fulfillment of the Department’s mission as a provider of recreation opportunities and parks. Once the development of the list of core services is completed, the Operations Division should design methods to ensure quality in the provision of these core services, including standardized performance measures, program goals, and evaluation procedures.
- 4.10 Direct the Director of Operations to develop policies and procedures for the establishment of program goals for core programs and the measurement of performance measures associated with these goals.
- 4.11 Direct the Director of Operations to develop a generic program evaluation form. At minimum, the use of program evaluations should be required for citywide and core recreation programs. The Director of Operations should ensure the central collection of program outcome and quality data.
- 4.12 Delegate the responsibility of implementing the recommendations of the 2004 *Recreation Assessment* to the Director of Operations and require the development of a clear implementation timeline and strategy and the establishment of a formal reporting procedure, including reporting to the Recreation and Park Commission, for tracking implementation progress.

- 4.13 Consult with the Chair of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee (PROSAC) to determine a clear plan for the execution of the committee's district and citywide liaison activities, including how the Department will provide appropriate support for the committee's efforts and what the performance expectations should be for committee members.
- 4.14 Develop policies and procedures related to community partnerships. The policies should clearly define the types of partnerships that require memoranda of understanding and partnership agreements.
- 4.15 Designate a person in the General Manager's Office to compile information related to the community groups and partners with which the Department works.
- 4.16 Direct the Director of Operations to use the list of core services, once developed, to prioritize resource allocation decisions in recreation centers and investigate partnership opportunities for the provision of non-core services at recreation center facilities.
- 4.17 Direct the Director of Operations to evaluate the pilot program with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families in which community based organizations will provide children's and families' programs in Recreation and Park Department facilities as a model for providing additional programs and services.
- 4.18 Monitor the progress of discussions being led by the Office of the Mayor to address development of a formal volunteer policy. The General Manager should provide negotiators with the productivity standards for gardeners that are currently under development by Planning Staff. This effort may assist the Department and the union by clarifying which gardening tasks do not require specific horticultural knowledge and training, and which should only be reserved for gardening staff.
- 4.19 Work with the Director of Human Resources to modify the job descriptions of gardening and recreation staff, so that they include the supervision of volunteers.
- 4.20 Investigate the possibility of providing incentives for staff to work with volunteers.

The Recreation and Park Commission should:

- 4.21 Review and approve the protocols, plans, policies and procedures, and list of core services contained in Recommendations 4.1, 4.9, 4.10, and 4.14.

## **Costs and Benefits**

The Budget Analyst's recommendations are intended to improve the Recreation and Park Department's practices in working with the community and planning programs that meet the community's needs. The Department incurs significant opportunity costs, which are difficult to quantify, by failing to develop accurate program use numbers and by failing to work with the community to offer programs that meet the communities' needs. By implementing the Budget Analyst's recommendations, the Recreation and Park Department would better plan and allocate recreation resources and serve the community.