

Recreation Program Assessment

Introduction



The consulting team performed an assessment of the City of O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department program offerings. The Recreation Program Assessment offers an in-depth perspective of the recreation program offerings and helps identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in programming. The Assessment also assists in identifying core programs, program gaps within the community, duplication of programs with other recreational service providers in the community, and determining future program offerings for residents.

The consulting team based these program findings and comments from program assessment forms, discussions, and interviews with the recreation staff. The consulting team completed a programming meeting with staff, reviewed the existing inventory of programs and also toured parts of the system. This process also included a review of marketing and sponsorship materials and other service systems, a review of existing program data, and community input.

The O'Fallon recreation program staff selected the core programs to be evaluated and entered the data into the program assessment matrix. This report addresses the program offerings from a systems perspective for the entire repertoire of programs, as well as individual program information. It identifies key issues and presents recommendations for these issues, while also offering recommendations to elevate the core programs to the next level.

Program Assessment and Overview

The City of O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department has developed an excellent reputation in the community for its quality and variety of programming. According to the community input process, a high percentage of residents are satisfied with the quality of recreation programming. Furthermore, 42% of households participate in recreation programs, as compared to the national average of 30%, based on ETC Institute's benchmarking information of hundreds of recreation systems throughout the country. This is a very encouraging sign and speaks highly to the popularity of the program offerings.

Aquatics offers a wide variety of programs and activities, serving virtually every age segment and interest level. The Department has recognized the importance of senior programming and plans to expand program offerings for the older population. Another new program endeavor

includes outdoor recreation program opportunities. Overall, the Department is performing well as a recreation services provider and proactively working towards meeting the communities' needs. The challenge now is to take the program offerings to the next level and the recommendations outlined in the report will help the Department to move in such a direction.

Some overall observations from the program assessment sheets that were filled out follow:

1. A large proportion of programs do promote the benefits when selling the program, which is a good practice.
2. Age segment distribution is excellent. One area of improvement is the high school age program that is currently at 8% distribution. Best practice systems tend to have this in the 12% - 13% range.
3. There is a good balance of programs spread across various lifecycle stages; however there is a slightly higher percentage of programs in the saturation and decline stage.
4. Competitors include Boys & Girls Club and the O'Fallon YMCA.
5. Limited program performance measures tracked.
 - a. Youth sports, trips, dance and youth classes, fitness classes, aqua aerobics are some of the areas that do track program performance measures but these measures are not tracked on system-wide basis. Customer retention rate is one performance measure that is not tracked at all.
6. Volunteers for sports events are usually parents serving as coaches.
7. From a promotional standpoint, the staff undertakes a number of promotions with most programs using program guide, website and brochures / flyers.
 - a. Email blasts can be increased; Facebook / Twitter / Blogs / Webinars / Podcasts must be employed.
8. Pricing strategies focus on competitor prices and cost recovery rates, which is a good practice. Additional strategies using prime-time / non-prime time rates could help alleviate some capacity utilization issues.
9. Most commonly used customer feedback method is post program evaluation and user surveys.
 - a. Pre-program surveys and lost customer surveys are limited. Pre-program surveys are useful to gauge potential user interest before offering programs so as to limit cancellation rates and maximize resources. By building a database of all past and present users, the staff can track lost customers on an annual basis. These could then be surveyed to identify reasons for customer drop-outs.
10. Cost recovery rates across the board are commendable.

Age Segment Distribution

In addition to the lifecycle analysis, staff also assessed age segment distribution of programs. The distribution follows:

- Preschool - 9%.
- Elementary Aged (K-5th grade) - 12%.

- Middle School (6-8th grade) - 12%.
- High School (9-12th grade) - 8%.
- Young Adults 18-24 - 10%.
- Adults 25-44 - 15%.
- Middle Age 45-64 - 11%.
- Seniors 65+ - 9%.
- Family Events - 14%.

The balance of age segment distribution is excellent. One area that stands out is the 8% distribution of high school age programs, which is among the toughest age groups to program for. Best practice systems tend to have this in the 12% - 13% range. The demographics of O'Fallon support a variety of family events. Family events and Adults 25-44 had the highest percentage of representation.

Staff should also review the age segment distribution on an annual basis and ensure that age segments show good balance throughout. In reviewing age segment growth over the next five years, the greatest percentage growth areas will occur in all age segments over 60. The demographics information compiled by the City of O'Fallon Economic Development Department shows that the 45-54 and the 55+ population is projected to increase from 2007–2012. This is in keeping with nationwide trends due to an aging baby boomer population and higher life expectancies. Currently, about 20% of the programming is focused towards the 45+ age groups and as their numbers increase, the Department will have to adjust its program offerings to adequately serve that audience.

Also, rather than categorizing the 55+ market as one program area, the trend is moving toward having two to three segments of older adults. The Department must continue to increase the program offerings for the 45–54, 55–65 and the 65–75 and the older groups.

Lifecycle Analysis

The program assessment included a lifecycle analysis by staff members. The listing of programs is included in Figure 5-1 at the end of this section. This assessment was not based on quantitative data, but based according to staff's knowledge of their program areas. The following list shows the percentage distribution of the various lifecycle categories of O'Fallon's recreation programs.

- Introduction stage (New program; modest participation) - 28%.
- Take off stage (Rapid participation growth) – 1.2%.
- Growth stage (Moderate, but consistent participation growth) – 30.5%.
- Mature stage (Slow participation growth) - 27%.
- Saturation stage (Minimal to no participation growth; extreme competition) - 10%.
- Decline stage (Declining participation) – 3.7%.

These percentages were obtained by comparing the number of programs in each individual stage with the total number of programs listed in the program worksheets. The consulting team recommends a percentage of 60% combined in the introduction, take off and growth stages. For the

City of O'Fallon, this percentage is right at 60% which is very encouraging. However, there are a number of programs currently in the introduction stage and it remains to be seen how many of them will take-off in the years to come or will flounder and decline. Hence the 60% number must be viewed with a hint of cautious optimism at this point.

On the other hand, while the programs in the mature through decline stage combined are in an adequate percentage range, the number of programs in the saturation and decline categories alone is almost 14% of the programs, which is not the most desirable. Essentially, based on this, one of seven programs shows limited or declining participation growth. However, it is worth noting that some of the programs designated as mature have continuous strong appeal and show no signs of declining. Based on discussions with the staff, there is also a sense that the growth in some program areas may be hindered due to limited indoor recreation space.

The overall strategy includes moving more mature and saturated programs to the introductory, take off, and growth stages, or simply adding new programs to these categories. Staff should complete a lifecycle review on an annual basis and ensure that the percentage distribution closely aligns with desired performance. Furthermore, the Department could include a performance measure of percentage of total number of new programs offered annually as an incentive for more innovation.

An example of promoting innovation in the recreation program development culture could include developing a network of national best-in-class agencies and creating an on-line discussion about programming trends.

From a strategic perspective, based on continuous increases in programs, the Department needs to identify ways to increase capacity for recreation programs through better prime-time versus non-prime scheduling, new or expanded facilities and partnerships / leases or agreements with similar providers to carve distinct market niches.

FIGURE 5-1 – STAGE IN PROGRAM LIFECYCLE

Stage in Program Lifecycle					
Introduction	Take-Off	Growth	Mature	Saturated	Decline
Celebration of the Creative	HFF Handicapped Parking and Shuttle service	HFF National Entertainment	HFF Kids Area	HFF Parade	Adult Flag Football
HFF Business Expo		HFF Sideshow s	HFF Carnival Area	Swim Lessons	Soccer - 8&9s, 7&U
Celebration of Lights NFP Scene "Contest"		Celebration of Lights Holiday Stroll	HFF Vendors	Alligator's Creek Open Swim/Lap Swim	Youth Baseball - Tues/Thurs
Combo Rentals		Celebration of Lights Train Rides	Celebration of Lights NFP Scenes	Celebration of Lights Vehicle Traffic	
Dynamic Fitness Program		Celebration of Lights "Sleighayrides"	Girls Volleyball League	Adult Softball	
Dinner Theater		Celebration of Lights Horse Draw n wagons	Girls Volleyball Clinic	4th & 5th Grade Basketball	
Cabaret		Swim Lessons	Rec Swim Team	Soccer pee wee	
Stage Readings		Lock-Ins	Swim Lessons	Youth Baseball - Wednesdays	
Bingo		Multi-Purpose Rooms	RSC Memberships		
Adult Drop-in Volleyball		Gym Rentals	Martial Arts		
New Year's Lock-In		Personal Training	WR Orientation		
Painted Pot Classes		Aerobics	Theater Camp		
Draw ing		RSC Pool Open Swim	Youth Basketball		
Art Classes		Fall Production	Soccer 6 & under		
Wine & Art Classes		Spring Musical	Youth Baseball - Saturday		
Knitting		Senior Trips	GATOR Camp		
Guitar		Tai Chi	Aqua Aerobics		
ACT Prep		Girls Basketball	Morris Prom		
Recycle Art		Soccer 10 & 11s	Breakfast with Bunny		
Art Together		RSC & Civic Dance	Candy Cane Hunt		
Beginning Baton		RSC Pre-School	Breakfast with Santa		
Painting		Camp JACK	Pizza with Santa		
Spanish		Daddy~Daughter Dance			
		Pumpkin Picnic			
		Photography			
<i>New program; modest participation</i>	<i>Rapid participation growth</i>	<i>Moderate, but consistent participation growth</i>	<i>Slow participation growth</i>	<i>Minimal to no participation growth; extreme competition</i>	<i>Declining participation</i>
<i>Source: Client</i>					
Note: Each program or class in core program has been broken into the various stages of the lifecycle based on the definitions provided at the bottom of the chart.					

Note: There are a few program areas that are in the mature, saturated and decline stages in their lifecycle as a result of limited available space, despite there being a demand for those programs. Some of these include Mature programs (Rec. Swim Team, Swim Lessons, Breakfast With Santa, Pizza with Santa), Saturated programs (Swim Lessons, Alligator's Creek Open Swim / Lap Swim, Adult Softball, 4th & 5th grade Basketball, Soccer Pee Wee, Youth Baseball – Wednesday) and Declining programs (Soccer 8 & 9s, Youth Baseball – Tuesday / Thursday).

Core Programs

The consulting team believes in the importance of identifying core programs based on current and future needs. This assists in creating a sense of focus around specific program areas of greatest importance to the community. Public recreation is challenged by the premise of being all things to all people. The core program philosophy assists staff in being able to focus on what is most important. Programs are categorized as core programs if they meet a majority of the following categories:

- The program has been provided for a long period of time (over 4-5 years).
- Offered 3-4 sessions per year.
- Wide demographic appeal.
- Includes 5% or more of recreation budget.
- Includes a tiered level of skill development.
- Requires full-time staff to manage the program area.
- Has strong social value.
- High level of customer interface exists.
- High partnering capability.
- Facilities are designed to support the program.

During the programming meeting with the staff, the following core program areas were identified:

- Special Events.
- Fitness Programs.
- Aquatics Programs.
- Youth Sports programs.
- Adult Sports programs.
- Cultural Arts Programs.
- Camps.

Within each of these categories, many sub program areas exist. As an example the Department offers programs specifically targeting seniors, which is good practice, recognizing this important and growing niche market.

Program Gaps

As part of the Master Plan process, the consulting team prepared a priority needs assessment of facilities and programs based on community needs assessment survey data, community input, and consultant evaluation. The needs assessment is included in the Master Plan. Based on the needs assessment priorities, the most important program areas to concentrate in the future, ranked in priority order include:

- Adult Fitness and Wellness Programs.
- Youth Sports Programs.
- Youth Learn to Swim Programs.
- Nature Programs.
- One-day Special Events.
- Adult Sports Programs.
- Water Fitness Programs.

An infusion of new programs must be evaluated based on the amount of available program space. The Department can create an analysis of space

opportunities, including leased space and partnerships, as well as future construction of additional recreation program space. Furthermore, programs in the decline stage should be considered for removal to accommodate new programs that are better aligned with community need.

Recommended Core Programs

The following list includes recommendations to reposition current programs or add newer core programs to the existing ones:

Repositioned Program Areas

- Fitness and Wellness programs (as opposed to Fitness Programs).
- Active Adult Programs / Adult Enrichment Programs (as opposed to Senior Programs).

New Program Areas

- Outdoor adventure programs (Adventure Trips, Triathlons etc.).
- Nature and Environmental Education Programs.

Staff should continue to work toward expanding all existing core program areas. According to the community needs assessment survey, fitness and wellness activities are the most important program category. Walking and jogging areas and fitness center space were deemed by residents on the community needs assessment survey to be used most often. The recreation centers' existing amount of square footage allocated to fitness is limited. Adding more space will enable additional program opportunities. As mentioned earlier in the program lifecycles, many of the aquatics programs, pee-wee and youth soccer and youth basketball / baseball and some special events have experienced slow, minimal or declining growth patterns due to indoor and outdoor space limitations.

In addition to the new core programs, the other recommendation is to develop an additional age segment for active adult and senior programming. As mentioned earlier, the recommendation is to differentiate between younger and older senior populations, 55-64 and 65+ programs. 55 year old participants have substantially different recreation needs than 70 year old participants.

Nationally, outdoor recreation programming is a growing trend. This can include rock climbing, canoeing, kayaking, paragliding, dirt biking, driving off-road vehicles, running, and triathlons. The staff can add in outdoor adventure trips too as a new program area. The largest growth segment by age for triathlons is the youth market. In particular, the women's market is the fastest growing segment in the sport of triathlon. According to USA Triathlon, USAT female membership has increased from 11% in the early 90s, to 37% today. O'Fallon could have some staff time spent on seeking ways to develop this area. One option could also be to have an 'Indoor Triathlon' using just the facilities available in the Renaud Spirit Center (RSC) itself.

Nature, environmental, and green programs also received significant interest from the households who completed the survey. This is currently a program area that does not seem to have much of a presence in the

inventory of O'Fallon programs. With all the interest in energy conservation and sustainable practices, there should be growing interest in helping residents with having a more green and sustainable house and lifestyle. This is a program area that will help position O'Fallon Parks and Recreation as a leader in the community for environmental and sustainability efforts. The City's current sustainability initiative should include emphasis on providing these programs to the community.

Barriers to Recreation Programming Participation

Along with tracking participant interest and participation in various programs, another important area to investigate further is examining reasons why people do not participate in O'Fallon's programs. One of the community survey questions asked, "What prevents family members from participating in programs?" The four most significant reasons were:

- Fees are too high – 26%.
- Program / facility times are not convenient - 21%.
- I do not know what is offered - 20%.
- Location is not convenient – 20%.

Since previous survey results are unknown it is difficult to establish how the current 42% participation rate ranks in comparison to past data. However, going forward O'Fallon should continue to track this number over time to establish trends in participation. Average national program participation trends are around 30% - 35% as obtained from ETC Leisure Vision Institute database and based on the Consulting Team's operational experience. Keeping that in mind, the program participation for O'Fallon is well above average and is certainly an encouraging sign.

This determination could be difficult, as non-participants generally do not feel motivated to attend a focus group or complete a survey about why they do not participate. One method for determining root causes of non-participation includes participant interviews at community events. In this way the Department provides outreach to the community for feedback, rather than having them go to the Department to offer feedback.

Based on the barriers to participation, it is difficult to establish to what extent the current economic condition influences people's response where they state high fees as a barrier. It would be useful to perform an online pricing survey to evaluate some fee ranges that may be more amiable to the community. In addition, non-participants should be asked what times are convenient for them to participate, as well as what types of programs they would be interested in.

Quality Approaches to Recreation Programming

One of the most significant issues in managing a recreation program system includes the challenges faced with the overwhelming complexity associated with thousands of service transactions from hundreds of staff at a variety of locations. Furthermore, the heavy reliance on part-time staff in the service delivery process creates even greater challenges. These dynamics result in significant program and service quality variation.

The consulting team seeks to provide an inventory of best practices for recreation programming that should be considered for a good quality

system such as O'Fallon. This does not reflect the current practices or deficiencies in the system but is merely a listing of some key best practice areas that help ensure a high quality and consistent experience for customers. Recommendations addressing several of these best practice areas have been provided throughout this report.

Recreation program standards.

In reviewing the program assessment information, there are limited numbers of performance measures used throughout the system to gauge performance. Recreation programs should have standard measures in place. Some examples include:

- Customer retention.
- Customer satisfaction toward the registration system.
- Specific cleanliness ratings.
- Cost recovery rates.
- Household percentage of program participation.
- Percent of programs in introduction and growth stage.
- Market penetration by age group.
- Program distribution by age group.

Currently, the organization does have some standards in place but they are not as well established across the board. Many of these standards should apply consistently to all programs. System-wide standards reduce service variation and provide customers with reliable and consistent service throughout the system. They help to reinforce to part-time and seasonal staff what is most important to customers and significantly help with the brand building process. Standards include such items as:

- Facility cleanliness standards.
- Safety standards.
- Signage standards.
- Program cancellation standards.
- Instructional quality standards, such as instructor toolkits.
- Internal communication standards for part time and seasonal staff, such as instructors.
- Class minimums and maximums.
- Registration process standards.
- Telephone answering standards.
- Customer service standards.

Annual review process of programs.

Another method of ensuring quality programming is to develop an annual program review process, in which recreation staff present their yearly goals for program areas to other divisions and senior management of the Department. This would include policy reviews, financial and registration performance, customer issues, and plans for the future. This helps to ensure good communication and cooperation for supporting divisions, such as parks, administration and technology as well.

Documented program development process.

This is required in order to reduce service variation and assist in training new staff. This is a how-to process map that provides guidance to staff in consistently developing new programs. It will help to diminish the

learning curve for new staff and reinforce program development as a core competency. This is created in a flow chart format showing the steps in the process for program development including writing class descriptions, process steps, hiring staff, using contractual employees, and the list of standards.

Identification of customer requirements.

Staff should also identify customer requirements for core program areas. Again, this is important to emphasize with staff that directly interface with customers. Customer requirements relate to those service and product attributes that are most important to a customer. A core program area should include a listing of approximately five key customer requirements. For example, in a youth gymnastics program, key requirements could include: overall safety of the program, instructional quality, convenience and ease of registration, cost of the program, and skill development. Key requirements should be identified by customers and can be included as part of an importance/performance matrix (asking what is most important and asking how the City of O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department is performing). Key requirements should be reinforced in the training process. Additionally, in developing surveys or program evaluations, the survey questions should relate to the key requirements.

Similar provider/competitor analysis – Benchmarking with best-in-class agencies.

Another good practice includes a similar provider review. This includes identifying key competitors or similar providers of core program areas. Every two years or so, staff should develop a matrix of information to compare services in areas that have the greatest importance to customers. Benchmarking other nationally renowned agencies also can provide a process to continuously improve programming.

A systematic approach to measuring customer satisfaction.

Employee orientation program. / Training program for staff, particularly customer service training.

Trends research process to identify program opportunities for the future (e.g. American Sports Data).

On-going policy review.

This must be undertaken to ensure relevance and effectiveness of established policies.

Instructor toolkit that outlines information about the Department, including mission, vision, values, goals, organizational structure, etc.

On-going process to connect part-time programming staff with the Department through meetings, email, newsletters, staff recognition, and random visits by management as well as determining their job satisfaction.

Root cause analysis to determine cause of turnover, quantifying resultant associated costs.

Recreation Programming Staff Job Descriptions and Training

Program. All recreation programming positions should have job descriptions. These job descriptions should be re-evaluate, when in place, on an annual basis to ensure they are still current and appropriate based on what is expected and required in their job positions. Additionally, recreation programming staff should have training programs in place. A process should also be developed to ensure an on-going evaluation of the staff's capabilities and skill sets to achieve the highest level of efficiency and performance in the work they perform.

Cost Recovery and Pricing

Based on the numbers provided, the Department is faring well in comparison to most systems nationwide. The Renaud Sports Center (RSC) currently generates over 100% cost recovery including both direct and indirect costs, which is very commendable. The Department as a whole had a deficit of \$700,000 in the 2007-2008 fiscal year which would point to an overall cost recovery of over 75% based on a total budget for parks and recreation (excluding capital). However, it must be recognized that the Department moved from a property tax revenue base to a sales tax base mid-way through 2008. Hence, the cost recovery numbers are significantly lower than those in previous years which were over 90%. Going ahead, the current fiscal year would actually provide a more accurate picture of the Department's operations and cost recovery status. However, the funding structure is in a state of flux as it moves from a property tax base to a sales tax based structure. Based on estimates provided by the Department, the ½ Cent Sales Tax to fund Parks and Storm Water projects is expected to generate \$3.4M in revenues as per the 2009 budget.

The current practice indicates that cost recovery goals and actual recovery rates are tracked Department-wide and for some individual programs like the RSC – Fitness Training. However, this is a not a consistent system-wide practice. Cost recovery rates need to be developed for all core program areas in order to provide targets for recreation staff. This includes the need to determine the costs of services, both direct and indirect, for major program areas.

From a pricing standpoint, there are some significant issues that need to be addressed. Based on staff input, the prices for RSC resident membership have been unchanged since the facility opened. On the other hand, there is a gap between the resident and non-resident fees (approximately 10% for RSC memberships and 8% - 20% for program fees). This may have been the cause of some dissatisfaction in the community. One way to address this would be to eliminate non-resident fees and instead introduce 'resident discounts'. This would ensure that the baseline fees remain at the non-resident levels, but the residents obtain a privilege and greater value for their tax money. Additionally, reviewing the senior discount age could also create more funding for operations.

In terms of pricing policy, the recommendation would be to review fees and charges on an annual basis to ensure the Department is in line with

meeting the pre-established goals. Currently, the staff has the authority in establishing fees and charges which is a good practice.

As for instructors, they currently work either as Department employees or as contractual individuals. A majority of the contractors operate based on set fees while some contractual employees receive a split of revenues of 70% to 30%. According to national trends, contractual instructor splits are moving toward more of a 60 to 40 split, which would work toward the Department's advantage. If implemented, this can be changed over time. However, it should be noted that a review of all agreements and percentage splits needs to occur on a case-by-case basis. This will ensure standardization and good quality control for instruction.

Overall, in today's ever toughening economic times, identifying cost of service, establishing a structure and target and creating a pricing philosophy ensures greater efficiency and ultimately helps create a more sustainable Department.

Strategic Partnerships and Volunteers

In reviewing the partner area of the program assessments, there is a variety of partners used to deliver services. The Fitness program area does have good partner support, with formal agreements and measurable outcomes. While some of the partnership agreements are due to the grant availability and its associated conditions, this structure could serve as a good benchmark for the other programs in the system.

Going ahead, an annual review of partners should be completed to determine missed opportunities as well as to recalibrate partnership outcomes and goals. In addition, the Department should complete a partner satisfaction process on a case-by-case basis to determine satisfaction levels and opportunities for improvement. The expansion of partners and active management of the partnership relationships by key senior leaders of the organization is a critical component of strategic direction.

Currently, there is a good system for corporate and individual sponsorships through the TEAM UP publication. By providing tangible metrics (participants), the publication can help organizations evaluate their return on investment for sponsorships / partnerships. Some suggested recommendations to enhance this would be to publish the participation metrics on the website and promote them aggressively. Additionally, recognizing any existing or past sponsors for their support would certainly help build goodwill. The brochure's images could provide some sample images of promotions that may have been done or could be done.

It has been seen that the greater the opportunities to package the offerings, the more the likelihood of selling sponsorship. Providing sample packaging options that tie-in some signature special events such as the Freedom and Heritage Festival with some of the less popular events would ensure that the staff up-sells events that may not get sold otherwise, while the partner gets more bang for their buck.

The ability to offer a potential partner / sponsor the chance to maximize the experiential marketing opportunities they offer is a huge plus. As an example, using Dell or Apple signage and images would not hold the same value as Dell or Apple products being displayed at the event where the users have the ability to touch and feel the product i.e. experience the product they may want to purchase. Additionally, promotions via coupons / discounts etc. that are shown to directly impact sales are powerful tools and could be used for local businesses.

The Department must continue to work with the City-wide volunteer coordinator to further strengthen and enhance the desirability of volunteering for Parks and Recreation's programs and events. One way is to create a volunteer section on the website as well as in the program guide. Also, typically good volunteer programs have an overall system in place for volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition. Staff should also quantify the labor dollars which volunteers provide to the Department and this should be communicated to all partners, stakeholders and community members. The Department's current Park Partners Program is a step in the right direction.

Service System Review

The relationship between the service delivery process and program revenues is of critical importance. With an understanding of this important dynamic, the following section provides an analysis of the service system and includes building on the service foundation that already exists in the Department. As noted in the community needs assessment survey, the City of O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department currently experiences a high level of customer satisfaction. Therefore, this section is intended to move the Department to a higher level of sophistication in its service approaches.

It is important for the Department to manage service as an overall system in which all program areas consistently apply similar service standards. This is first and foremost in working on continuously improving overall service excellence. One method to achieve this is to follow established standards for customer satisfaction. This can be accomplished through a cross functional 'voice-of-the-customer' team.

ISO 9000:2001 (International Standards Organization) develops standards for various industries worldwide). These are best-practice components that are employed across multiple industries as a mechanism of developing an overall excellent customer satisfaction system. The City of O'Fallon might consider adopting portions of these standards to improve customer satisfaction. These four components include:

- Top management commitment.
- On-going needs assessment of customers.
- Overall customer satisfaction system.
- Overall customer dissatisfaction system.

Top management commitment is demonstrated by allocating resources to continuously improve services, such as technology, registration system improvements, staffing to support excellent service, development of overall service training, and recognizing staff for excellent service. Part-

time staffing recruitment, retention, salary and benefits were all mentioned as concerns for delivering excellent service. This is an important area of improvement for the Department.

Top management should regularly review data relating to customer satisfaction. This can be achieved by including customer feedback as a regular discussion item in staff meetings.

The **needs assessment**, as part of the strategic plan, is a good starting point in determining customer needs. This formalized approach should be completed approximately every five years. In interim years, it is helpful to do less formal approaches in determining customer needs by core program areas through program evaluations, consumer advisory panels, secret shoppers (Department's insider or plant), and focus groups. Good service systems identify future customer needs as well as current needs.

The Department has high satisfaction rates. This is evident, not only by the individual program areas, but on the needs assessment survey as well. In the needs assessment survey, at least 80% of respondents rated all seven program areas as good or excellent. Program areas such as Fitness, Youth Activities and Athletics – Youth and Adult are all well over 90%. This compares favorably to a national average of 87% of other park and recreation systems that have completed a needs assessment survey from ETC Institute.

Customer satisfaction rates should be included as part of a performance measurement system. Results should be shared with the Council and Mayor, City Manager's Office, Parks Board, staff, and the public. It is important to ensure that the evaluation criteria match the key customer requirements which should be established for each program area. Customer satisfaction processes should occur not only with recreation programs, but also with general park maintenance and athletic field quality, new park design, and community events.



Another best-practice suggestion for enhancing the customer satisfaction process is to use the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) score criteria, developed at the University of Michigan. Their customer satisfaction index includes three overall satisfaction scores:

- How satisfied are customers with the Department overall?
- How likely will the customer repurchase the program or service?
- How likely will the customer refer the service to a friend?

The averages of all three percentages are then included as one overall score. These questions should be included on all surveys and program evaluations

Survey questions need to correlate with the most important customer requirements. No standardized process exists for determining customer requirements. The most effective method to determine important customer requirements is through interviews/focus groups with customers. Staff input into the process is valuable as well; particularly staff who interface with customers on a regular basis.

Good satisfaction measurement systems include performing additional methods beyond surveying and program evaluations. Many times, high satisfaction rates from surveys provide insignificant actionable data to determine improvements. This is particularly true for the O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department as a result of high customer satisfaction rates. Surveys are a good tool to measure current conditions. However, in order to keep ahead of customer demand and needs, the Department should have some knowledge of future needs and expectations of customers.

Another component of excellent standards for customer satisfaction is the development of a system wide approach to handling customer dissatisfaction. Standards should exist for handling complaints and inquiries. Furthermore, a database should exist that tracks all of the inquiries or comments about needed improvements. This information should be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the senior management team. Consistent suggestions for improvements or dissatisfaction areas should become a focus for the following year's strategic objectives.

As mentioned previously, a voice-of-the-customer team can be responsible for overseeing the service system. This is a cross-functional team comprised of several staff interested in service quality and they assume responsibility for overseeing the organization's service system. This process ensures consistency in the customer experience throughout the entire organization. This team should have the responsibility of developing an overall customer satisfaction measurement system, the development of standards, and the development of customer requirements for core program areas. The team should also monitor customer service training.

The team should identify specifications for excellent service and develop an audit system to verify that specifications are being met by staff. The audit system could be performed by secret shoppers or staff members who do not have direct responsibility for an audited area. Audits can be as simple as a listing on a check list of important service requirements.

One area of improvement mentioned during the community input process was the need to improve service training for front desk staff at the Centers. The voice-of-the-customer team can develop a Department wide approach to service, supplemented by site-specific individual training and orientation.

Marketing Approaches

This section reviews O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department's marketing approaches as well as key promotions and tactics.

One of the biggest challenges from a communications standpoint is the lack of identity and confusion over the Parks and Recreation Brand versus the Renaud Spirit Center (RSC) brand. Most people associate the RSC as its own brand and independent of the Department. The fact that the parks and recreation brochure also carries the website address of the RSC does not help ease the confusion. One of the first ways to start building a more concrete identity would be to develop a Parks and Recreation Department logo that is independent from the City of O'Fallon's logo.

Additionally, the Department could insert an underlying footnote or an accompanying line on the RSC website as well as any marketing collateral, signage or communications material relevant to it. The objective of that line would be to help users build an associative relationship between the Department and RSC. An example of the line could be 'The premier facility run by O'Fallon Parks and Recreation'.

According to the community needs assessment survey, a very high percentage of residents acquire information about the Department's program and service offerings through O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Program Guide. 62% of residents get their information from this publication. Nationally, 48% of residents rely on their park and recreation program guide. The other most frequently mentioned ways that respondents learn about programs and activities include: from friends and neighbors (48%), newspaper (43%), and City of O'Fallon website (40%).

The section-wise breakout of the online brochure is a great idea and makes it a very user friendly process. Based on current marketing and promotions activities undertaken, as stated in the program assessment worksheets, virtually every program is promoted via the program guide, the website and through flyers and brochures. There is limited use of email blasts which are a very useful promotions tool since they are cost-effective and offer the ability to customize the message to individual groups. Additionally, the use of new technology is limited and can be expanded. There is an opportunity to create a Facebook and Twitter account for the Department and the RSC that can help with outreach and also to further solidify the brand.

Facebook – Teens are the main target of this movement, but more and more young mom's are on Facebook. Advantages of using Facebook include:

- The page is free and tons of information can be accessible to users.
- The Center can control the content.
- Users can "become a fan".
- Weekly calendar updates with events and display pictures as well as daily status updates.

Twitter – can be updated daily/hourly with promo codes and special events also

SMS Texting – Current research shows that approximately 1,742 texts are sent and received per month by teenagers. By utilizing text messaging, the RSC and / or the Department can better track Return on Investment (ROI). Some specific advantages of utilizing SMS include:

- Using different short codes, one can track exactly where the customer saw the promotion – if it were via the newspaper, billboard, or television/radio commercial. In using the short codes, the organization can determine which avenue of advertisement reaches the most customers.
- SMS prompts people to respond; thus, offering a promotion with a relatively short shelf life encourages people to act immediately that may not have otherwise.

Blog – This could be written by alternating staff members or could be 'from the Director's desk' where upcoming events, pass successes or plain community outreach could be undertaken. This is a very personalized form of communication and helps build an affinity for the staff and Department as a whole. However, blogs do offer an opportunity for almost instant feedback which may need to be controlled or monitored on a regular basis.

Opportunities also exist for cross promotional activities particularly at the RSC and special events. Bundling of services and pricing accordingly may increase registration in areas that have room to grow. There should be a connection between marketing and program performance. Marketing should help with return on investment and assist in the program areas that most need it.

There is also an opportunity to add a retail link to the website that could have branded RSC shirts, shorts, swim caps, coffee mugs etc. Slogan ideas include:

- "Pain is temporary".
- "Fitness for fun".
- "Surrender the booty".
- "All natural".
- "Simply the best".
- "One more mile".
- "Pick up a six-pack...at The Spirit Center".
- "RSC makes it possible".

Overall marketing efforts should follow a Department marketing plan, supplemented by business plans for core programs and facility operations. The marketing plan lays out the overall marketing direction for the entire Department. Business plans provide vision and direction for the individual core program areas.

Conclusion

Overall, the City of O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department has been doing a commendable job with the quality and diversity of program offerings. The community feedback has been very positive and staff interactions, program quality and value for money have been some of the biggest strengths.

Moving forward into the future, the Department should consider tracking user information, establishing system-wide performance measures and customer feedback mechanisms, as well as maximizing cross-promotions and partner support. By proactively reaching out to the community, the staff can ensure that the program needs continue to be served and the O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department can be the premier agency of choice for the residents of O'Fallon and beyond.