



Partnerships

INTRODUCTION

Value and Importance - The value and importance of partnerships has been recognized by virtually every author and practitioner in the park and recreation profession as well as the “father of modern management”, Peter Drucker, who once was quoted as saying that long term solutions to problems will only be possible through effective partnerships.

Partnerships are in their infancy - A relatively new concept in the profession, its importance, issues, and opportunities were only officially analyzed by leaders in the National Recreation and Park Association in 1995 when an article was published in the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*.

Definition - Partnerships have become a widespread component of park and recreation service systems, just like Platte County. One definition cited by many authors is that a partnership is an umbrella term that includes agreements, cooperative ventures, joint arrangements, alliances, collaborations, coalitions, and work forces.

Partnership Types - There are three basic types of partnerships:

- public/private
- public/public
- public/not-for-profit

Best Practices – At the most basic level, good partnerships are possible when the two parties share a common vision, a vision which is clearly defined, and a vision that is perceived as a priority to all of the participating organizations. If this initial “filter” has been met, there must be a *formal contract* as detailed below and acknowledgement of the *four characteristics* that must be present to have a successful long-term arrangement:

- **Formal Contract** - If it has been determined that the participating partners share a common vision, a formal contract must be signed by each. The contract will include key information such as:
 - contact information
 - age group served
 - official start/end date of the agreement
 - desired outcomes, how measured, by whom, and when by each partner
 - dollar value contributions by each partner
 - expected revenue by each partner
 - ongoing communication method
 - insurance requirements
 - other general agreement terms
- **Personal Characteristics** – Although most partnerships are designed at the organizational level, they are implemented at the personal level. It is critical to have the right mix of people and must include strong leaders who are committed to the partnership cause.

“We’ve got a lot of good partnerships with our school districts and I want to see that continue”

*– Trish Stinnett, CT Member,
May 28, 2008*



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- Interpersonal Characteristics – The success or failure of partnerships hinges on interactions between individuals. Each partner must participate in the sharing of information, be an active listener, and be direct rather than vague. From these characteristics, a level of trust should develop over time.
- Organizational Characteristics – The commitment must be expressed by each partner by ensuring that staff is available when needed and that other resources are also made available within the structure of the formal agreement that has been signed by each party.
- Operational Characteristics – All partnerships must be managed. To that end, it is important that a regularly scheduled meeting between the participants be held to make sure that everything is in order; namely, that the agreement has resulted in a win/win situation for each.

FINDINGS

Formal Contracts – The Parks and Recreation Department does have a formal partnership agreement that is signed by both parties.

Project Results – Since the creation of the Parks and Recreation Department in 2001, the use of bond revenue has resulted in:

- 880 acres of protected parks and open space, mostly funded by the County and significant assistance by partners for supervision, maintenance, and management
- 15 miles of shared use trails, that are mostly funded by the County and often maintained by partners
- 90,000 sq. ft. of indoor recreation space which was funded by the County and managed by the YMCA
- 22,000 sq. ft. of outdoor aquatics which was partially funded by the County and managed by the Kansas City, Missouri Department of Parks and Recreation
- \$1.6 Million in Outreach Grants to cities in the County for a variety of parks and athletic facilities
- \$20.6 Million in partnership contributions

Current Partnership Opportunities – The success of the projects detailed above has sparked significant interest in the completion of many of those projects and for new projects. Often mentioned during the planning process are:

- trails of all types in collaboration with the private sector, cities, and the State of Missouri
- positive sports and wellness programs that promote active learning and provide youth mentoring opportunities such as sports, wellness, arts, and culture
- creation of a “sports commission” type organization and new opportunities to share information, to promote collaboration between community organizations, and the development of more enhanced opportunities for children



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- development of new recreational facilities that are designed for children such as underserved youth sports of soccer and football
- development of diverse interactive facilities that support lifetime learning and wellness such as interactive playgrounds and lifetime sports such as tennis
- possible need for signature indoor facilities which benefit children such as sports centers, ice rinks, and competitive pools
- the need for safety and security by partnering with the Sheriff's Department and other law enforcement agencies to continue patrol of park facilities and develop a safety audit and security program while increasing visibility of staff and security in the park system
- the need to partner with the business community to promote health, wellness, and quality of life benefits such as economic benefits resulting from a strong park program
- the need to leverage sales tax proceeds with partner contributions and state, federal, and private sector grants

Specific Partner Conditions – Many partners have specific conditions that must be met prior to entering into an agreement with the County. For example:

- The Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Conditions stated by this partner include:
 - the agency must have an interest in the project
 - the project must have a high natural resource integrity
- The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) – Conditions stated by this partner include:
 - core mission is fish, forest, and wildlife and make sure that spaces are inviting to the public
 - due to current budget constraints, it is not likely there will be any future land acquisition unless it would be near Platte Falls or another MDC property that needs to be completed
 - MDC strives to balance the need to invite the public in versus high standard of care for keeping areas natural and sustainable for wildlife
- Developers – In priority order for developers, their greatest needs are partnerships which result in:
 - a pool and activity center
 - trails
- School Districts – Generally, the first condition that must be met in partnership agreements with school districts is that they have access to the facility during school hours and for school-sponsored events.
- Cities – Generally, agreements with cities will require significant capital funding requirements by the County and less, if any, capital funding by the city. Second, city partners will want primary access to the facility for their events.
- Not-for-Profits – Generally, agreements with not-for-profits will require the County to provide the capital funding required for the project. The typical role of the not-for-profit is for management and operations.

“Park and trail public safety should be “seamless” between jurisdictions. Park and trail patrons generally do not know or care when they have crossed between jurisdictions, but they still should have quality public safety services available to them regardless of their location.”

*– Mike Shelton
Public Safety Focus Group
December 2, 2008*

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SUMMARY

While each partnership opportunity is unique, there are basic similarities that are common to each. Of extreme importance are the following:

- each partner must share a common mission with the Parks and Recreation Department
- there must be a formal partnership agreement that is reviewed annually
- projects funded by the Parks and Recreation Department must be designed, maintained, and operated at a standard that is approved by the Department and detailed in the partnership agreement
- of the current partnerships in Platte County, the apparent key issue is that some of the *partners have not had the organizational capability* that is required to maintain the facilities at an acceptable level. Predictably, in those instances, the partnership deteriorates and significant effort is required to re-establish the original intent of the partnership
- important partnerships as the master plan is implemented will be those who contribute to the County's Guiding Principles and planned improvements that are required to make the Principles become a reality; namely,
 - community center partner – YMCA
 - trail partners – Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, levee districts, cities, Corps of Engineers, developers
 - recreation opportunities – youth sports associations, cities, not-for-profits such as the YMCA, business community, volunteers

Partnership Opportunities for New 'Signature' Recreation Facilities in Platte County

As new opportunities present themselves, these guidelines will be used in conjunction with the other evaluation filters detailed above to determine if the opportunity warrants further consideration. The guidelines are as follows:

- must have a significant need for County "finishing" funding
- must have significant, majority, resource support from applicant agency/organization to be used as match
- must serve a significant Platte County population and be open to the general public; must include affordability and accessibility program
- must complement other existing Platte County Parks and Recreation resources
- must provide new recreational opportunities or work cooperatively with other similar providers, public or private
- must have business plan or documented feasibility study indicating need, population to be served, and plan of action/implementation
- must provide protection for public investment through public capital ownership or payback clause (should mission or disposition of facility change in nature)
- must meet a need identified in the most recent Platte County Park System Master Plan



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Volunteer Programs

The County will implement a community volunteer program that allows park patrons to learn about the sustainable practices being used in the parks. Use of volunteers also helps to stretch budgeted dollars and increases the social sustainability of the community by increasing the investment of community members into the park system. Volunteer programs may also be used to evaluate the implementation of sustainable systems by implementing groups such as stream teams to test and improve water quality.

