



THE CITY OF
COLUMBUS
RECREATION AND PARKS

COLUMBUS
RECREATION AND PARKS

Strategic Plan 2019 - 2024

MISSION FORWARD



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Executive Summary

Columbus Recreation and Parks Department's (CRPD) mission is to connect the people of our community through the power of nature, wellness and creativity. With nearly 400 parks, 29 community centers, five athletic complexes, six golf courses, 30 pollinator gardens, 13,600 acres of parkland and 230 miles of regional trails, our vision is to ensure every resident has access to all of our department's many services. When visiting one of our parks, we expect our spaces to be places of joy. We expect our facilities and parks to be open to all. Last, we expect our spaces to be embedded in neighborhoods and serve as gathering places for every member of our community. As a department, we align our strategic goals with the 2019 – 2024 Strategic Plan because we believe our spaces are important assets entrusted for generations.

In 2019, 1.7 million residents participated in the department's programs and events. The department provided 2,000 swim lessons, served nearly 460,000 meals through the summer food program, and planted nearly 4,300 street and park trees throughout the system. In 2019, the department broke ground on the Linden Community Center & Park and launched the Community Center without Walls model at Eakin Elementary on the city's west side.

With 345 full-time and 1,304 part-time staff and an annual budget of approximately \$78M, the department plays a vital role in many of Columbus' neighborhoods. The department is a direct connection to the spirit of Columbus and continues to hold a prominent presence in every neighborhood. With the support of numerous partners, the newly established Columbus Recreation and Parks Foundation, and a volunteer core of 14,000 individuals, collaboration is key to the department's success.

Change is constant, but transition can be measured in time and action. The purpose of this Strategic Plan was to create an intensely internal roadmap for our transition from the 2014 Master Plan to the next one in 2024. Success will be measured by our results and how we transform CRPD over the next five years. An examination of the organization revealed strategic areas for growth that delivers on the objectives of the current Master Plan, and will uniquely position the department to take our

services, programming, and assets to the next level. The five strategic priorities in the Statement of Strategic Intent are: Smart Growth, Sustainability, Excellence in Programming and Service Delivery, Organizational Development and Communication.

The strategic planning process the department modeled included four phases. Those phases included the following:

- Phase 1: Discovery and Framing the Plan
- Phase 2: Goal Development and Integration
- Phase 3: Measure, Monitor and Adapt
- Phase 4: Positioning for the 2024 Master Plan

In 2018, CRPD adopted a mission statement: "We connect the people of our community through the power of nature, wellness, and creativity." This strategic plan is a "mission forward" promise, dedicated to advancing the department's goal to work toward an equitable city.

Mayor Andrew J. Ginther Strategic Priorities

Mayor Ginther's 2020 strategic priorities drive city resources in public policy and service to ensure the safety and prosperity of Columbus residents, strengthen neighborhoods, and make sure every resident in every neighborhood has the opportunity to succeed. For each of Mayor Ginther's strategic priorities, his administration has identified key initiatives that will advance the achievement of these goals, and those can be found in the individual department sections. Many of these initiatives cross departments, and collaborative work across city departments encourages greater efficiency and success.

Neighborhoods

At the core of every great city are strong and vibrant neighborhoods. In Columbus, each of its distinctive neighborhoods makes up the fabric of who we are and what makes our city special. The city is investing in neighborhoods throughout Columbus, and is especially focused on its Opportunity Neighborhoods – Franklinton, Hilltop, Linden, Near East, Northland, Near South, Southeast, and Northeast – by building on their greatest assets, the people who reside there.

Neighborhood Safety and Public Health

The city continues to employ new approaches to policing that empower neighborhoods, invest in police officers and firefighters, and bring the full resources of the city to bear to make Columbus neighborhoods safer and healthier. The Comprehensive Neighborhood Safety Strategy engages local law enforcement, public health, recreation and parks, neighborhoods, businesses, community and faith leaders, and residents in an innovative, broad-based approach to building stronger and safer neighborhoods.

Economic Development and Affordable Housing

The city is working to advance economic opportunity and shared prosperity through public investment and public policies that create jobs, increase wages, improve access to housing, and strengthen Columbus neighborhoods. As the city continues to grow, the administration is focused on increasing good-paying jobs that generate the revenue to support critical city services, and driving a collaborative approach to create housing all Columbus residents can afford.

Birth to Five and Education

Every child in every Columbus neighborhood deserves the opportunity to thrive. The city is investing in CelebrateOne to ensure all babies in Columbus and Franklin County – regardless of race, zip code, or family income – celebrate their first birthday. Early Start Columbus is focused on birth to five year-olds to ensure their ability to enter kindergarten with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.

Diversity and Inclusion

The administration is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion to ensure its workforce and suppliers reflect the rich diversity of Columbus. The city is expanding implicit bias training, strengthening recruitment strategies, increasing minority business participation and investing in business development support for women and minority-owned businesses. The Columbus Women's Commission is working to advance the economic well-being of women through its pay equity initiative, housing and eviction prevention efforts, and advocacy for increased access to affordable childcare.

Innovation

The city is investing in technology and advanced mobility options to improve access to jobs, education, and healthcare, and to serve as a model for connected cities. The administration is reviewing city operations to increase efficiencies and reinvest savings in critical city services, and to develop a modern, transparent, and effective government structure to continue to meet the needs of Columbus in the future.

Sustainable Columbus

A healthy environment is critical to ensure Columbus is America's Opportunity City, and Sustainable Columbus is optimizing internal city operations and working with external stakeholders throughout the community to enhance and promote environmentally friendly policies.

Strategic Planning Process

Phase 1: Discovery and Framing the Plan

The discovery period ran for seven months (June 2018 - December 2018), and through that period we engaged 19 Sections of the Department, over 150 CRPD employees, and CRPD's Commission. In this process, the department wanted to identify, clarify, and understand the department's core customer, the customer experience, and the organization's unique value proposition. We then filtered those findings through the lens of operational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. With that, the department was able to identify the strategic implications facing each section.

Next, each section developed a five-year road map identifying purpose and pacing key deliverables. Collectively, common themes were identified throughout the organization in order to identify the key and universal initiatives needed for growth, both selectively and holistically, for true organizational transformation. The Statement of Strategic Intent is this clear and bold statement of organizational direction and priority.

Phase 2: Goal Development and Integration

It is common for strategic plans to be adopted and then slowly fade into the background. Effective execution of a strategic plan requires active engagement, regular communication, and accountability. Beginning in January 2019 and through December 2019, Phase 2 of the strategic planning process focused on the goal development stage. This swift and focused attention articulating specific strategic goals and activities aligned with the thematic, strategic priorities identified in the Statement of Strategic Intent. Each section's goals and activities were then documented into their respective Mission-Forward Playbooks.

During this time, attention was given to the clarification and in some cases the identification of measurable annual Section Performance Standards. This looked at how we articulate success in the daily tactical work done by the organization. These standards have been integrated into Mission-Forward Playbooks and will be collected, reviewed, and reported annually.

Phase 3: Measure, Monitor and Adapt

The Mission-Forward plan was intended to be a living document and never static. The organization will continue to evaluate its progress annually and adjust strategies and tactics, as necessary. By adopting a Balanced Scorecard and a companion Performance Tree, the organization has created alignment between organizational-level strategic goals, the section's annual strategic and performance goals, and the individual employee's unique performance standards. All levels are in alignment and measurable.

Phase 4: Positioning for the 2024 Master Plan

Significant, directional, and intentional growth will occur for CRPD in the next five years, positioning the organization to deploy its 10-year Master Planning process. The new Master Plan process will include input from the community as to the priorities they seek from a modernized and dynamically enabled recreation and park system.

2019 – 2024 Statement of Strategic Intent

Mission: We connect the people of our community through the power of nature, wellness, and creativity

Vision: A socially equitable city

Smart Growth

- Through targeted acquisition and trail construction, connect unserved residents to a future park or trail within a 10-minute walk of their home.
- Develop new parks and trail connections that enhance service for 50,000 residents within a ten-minute walk.
- Achieve a staffing model that reflects proportionate growth.
- Position and align CRPD assets for the future.
- Achieve growth in service level through strategic partnerships.
- Implement key changes to Policy and Code affecting Recreation and Parks.

Sustainability

- Achieve CRPD's Natural Resource Sustainability Goals.
- Develop and implement the Urban Forestry Master Plan.
- Increase efficiency through operational planning, reducing costs and achieving tiered cost recovery goals for all activities. Exceed cost- recovery goals in Golf, Sports, and Rental Services.
- Achieve annual increases in leveraged operational & capital dollars: grants, sponsorships and donations.

Excellence in Programming and Service Delivery

- Drive annual growth in program participation through data-informed and inclusive programming.
- Implement Center for Opportunities model at the Linden Community Center.
- Maximize internal, cross-sectional partnership in programming.
- Improve customer experience feedback loops, and benchmarking.
- Adopt national best-practices and operating processes that result in CAPRA accreditation.

Organizational Development

- Develop a system and process for data collection, management and analysis to support decision making and evaluate performance.
- Define organizational culture that's informed by our operating values, value-proposition, and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan.
- Implement staffing and programmatic succession planning.
- Build staff capacities and create leadership opportunities.
- Develop and implement a new volunteer program model.

Communications

- Align external communication to the Department's strategic priorities.
- Improve external relationships through responsive and deliberate communication with the public.
- Improve internal communication that results in staff engagement and improved performance.
- Define and promote our value-proposition to the community.

Strategic Priorities



Priority 1: Smart Growth

We borrowed from the Urban Planner vernacular to suit our desire to achieve growth that is intentional, structured, and smart. The core principle of Smart Growth is to avoid future patterns of growth that operate independent of a total community vision and result in inconsistent, incompatible, and inequitable investment. Our strategic priority is to achieve Smart Growth by making the right decisions around park acquisitions and activations; evolving our staffing model to reflect current and emerging demands, sizing our facility/asset portfolio, and modernizing our City code and policies to enable our department to deliver upon our industry's three foundational-pillars: conservation, health/wellness, and social equity.

Strategic Objectives

Through targeted acquisition and trail construction, connect unserved residents to a future park or trail within a 10-minute walk of their home.

The benefits of time spent in our natural environment are abundant and well documented. Parks and trails are key city infrastructure and vital for thriving Columbus communities. The decades-old methodology of measuring a city park system's adequacy to serve its residents was based on a standard calculation of acreage / 1,000 residents. While that metric has value, it leaves out an important reality—that to receive the benefits of our 15,344 acres, residents must have proximity and ease of access. In 2019, Columbus Recreation and Parks adopted the "10-min walk" methodology, which measures our park system against the ambitious and visionary goal of that every resident has access to a park or trail within a 10 minute walk of their home. In 2019, with our existing portfolio of CRPD managed parks and trails, 59% of Columbus' 879,170 residents had that ability. The 10-min walk is the lens through which we developed our 2019-2024 Land Plan, and identifies at the street and neighborhood level, where we are parkland-rich or deficient. The research guides us to prioritize new parkland acquisition and construction of new trail segments and trail connectors, in areas that will connect residents who have been out of reach of that goal.

Develop new parks and trail connections that enhance service for 50,000 residents within a ten-minute walk.

A recent nation-wide survey confirmed that 85% of people consider high quality park and recreation amenities important factors in choosing a place to live. (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2020) Locally, the results of community outreach for the department's 2014-2024 Master Plan reflect the same sentiment. Acquisition of parkland reserve is the first step, but it remains a priority for us to develop and further activate parks and greenways. This strategic objective captures our intent to offer high-quality park amenities and recreational opportunities for all Columbus communities.

Achieve a staffing model that reflects proportionate growth.

While a great deal is known about the cost of managing our existing service footprint, more needs to be understood about the incremental cost of adding new parks and or programs to the system. This strategic goal establishes a priority to predict with greater accuracy the incremental cost of growth in our service delivery. This will inform how the department makes decisions to deploy or reposition available resources for growth and strategic priorities. Operational efficiencies are always top of mind and will continue to be achieved through periodic operational reviews and better use of equipment and technology.

Position and align CRPD assets for the future.

Columbus Recreation and Parks Department manages 15,344 acres across 505 properties. Our diverse assets include indoor and outdoor pools, public golf courses, event facilities, athletic complexes, marinas, community recreation centers, nature preserves and parks of all sizes and uses. Our shelters, playgrounds, ponds, walking paths, sports courts and fields make each location a unique destination for Columbus residents. The department strives to strike a responsible, equitable balance between maintaining and improving existing parks, trails, recreational and aquatic facilities and growing to meet the needs of future generations of residents. This required a detailed assessment and analysis of our facility and amenity conditions, and an ongoing eye to the projected growth patterns, demographic trends and evolving recreational preferences of our residents. Shifting to an allocation-based model of Capital Improvement Budget that incorporates these points of analyses balances parkland acquisition, new development of parks and trails, renovation and revenue generating opportunities and ensures that the needs identified are represented and resourced through our 5 year Capital Plan.

Achieve growth in service level through strategic partnerships.

Within the strategic planning process, significant work was done by each section to identify who the primary customers are for their offerings, what the customer experience should be, and how and whether we should be reaching more or different population segments. Coupled with an understanding of the capacity we can achieve with current staffing levels, we now know what we should do on our own, and where it makes sense to partner. The department has long partnered with schools, nonprofits and private entities to make programming available in areas and varieties that we've not offered. However, we've now identified strategic areas in which we need to expand, and are putting in place tools to ensure that partners operate in ways that reflect the standards and priorities of the department. In this way, more people can be served, an increased variety of programming can be offered, operational efficiencies achieved and parks and facilities can be utilized to their potential.

Implement key changes to Policy and Code affecting Recreation and Parks.

Outdated department policies and City code negatively effects our parks, programs, and service delivery. The most significant of these codes is the city's current Parkland Dedication Ordinance, which attempts to achieve smart growth by setting-aside a proportion of parkland or payment-in-lieu that preserves open space and balances the impact of new commercial and residential development. Adopted in 1997, Columbus' Parkland Dedication Ordinance has been inadequate to keep pace with today's land use. A pattern of commonly used exemptions have resulted in a steady decline in the number of acres of green space or fees secured in-lieu of land received by the Department.

Another conservation-related priority is the protection and expansion of Columbus' tree canopy. In 2019, Columbus had the fastest growing Urban Heat Island effect of any major U.S. city. The department has brought together an expert team and local stakeholders to develop an Urban Forestry Master Plan. New protections are also needed in areas of environmental vulnerability, where new policies and codes will secure the Department's Nature Preserves.

Additional important code improvements needed are programmatic in nature, such as Special Events. Existing events-related code is scattered and buried throughout the various sections of code. We will identify and assemble those references into a centralized single section of code where it can be understood and seamlessly coordinated between various Departments. Other important key code changes will seek to improve usability of our parks and reservoirs.

Not every administrative rule needs the formal authority issued in City code. Some changes can be effectively managed through Departmental policies, such as the Non-Park Use Policy that will systematically manage entities requesting non-park use impacts and prioritize the protection of intended park uses.

Early Win: Community Center without Walls

CRPD's Community Recreation program has for years wanted to find a way to expand its recreational services into Southeast Columbus but was challenged by the capital cost and operating support necessary to add a new facility to our portfolio. To solve this problem, Community Recreation sought to replicate its successful "Community Center without Walls" model first piloted on the West Side, to offer new programming at Liberty Elementary in Southeast Columbus. With the support of the Mayor's Office and Columbus City Schools, the new program location was established. The model adds another layer of programming to the current "afterschool" model, by and this new program expands the current Community Center without Walls pilot with after-school programming to a new year-round model with summer, evening, and after-school programming.

This new model aligns with the Mayor's priority providing services to neighborhoods and CRPD's ability to achieve Smart Growth grow through strategic partnerships.



Priority 2: Sustainability

This pillar reflects our commitment to management decisions and operating models that support high quality parks, facilities and service delivery over the long-term. The term Sustainability has connotations that are both financially and environmentally derived, and the Department's focus on Sustainability as a pillar is intentional in including and linking both perspectives. These strategic objectives prioritize critical elements that if addressed now, set a foundation for healthy management and growth of our natural resources and financial systems.

Strategic Objectives

Achieve CRPD's Natural Resource Sustainability Goals.

Conservation is one of three nationally recognized pillars of the Recreation and Parks industry. The Department's commitment to conservation was demonstrated when we elevated the Urban Forestry Master Plan as an organizational priority. Columbus residents have also expressed interest in seeing a reduction of pesticide use in our parks. The first department-wide Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Policy was developed in 2019 and the key objectives will be pursued, monitored, and evaluated through an IPM committee established through that effort. The Department has also aligned itself with the city's broader Sustainable Columbus initiative, is making ongoing land management decisions that increase conservation practices, and making capital investments in energy-efficiency programs that reduce our facilities' carbon footprint.

Develop and Implement the Urban Forestry Master Plan.

The Urban Forestry Master Plan is a strategic and long-term investment in Columbus' tree canopy. Our tree canopy is vulnerable to threats from disease, pests, the changing climate and increased development. Columbus is expecting 1 million more residents by 2050. Efforts like the Urban Forestry Master Plan need to happen now to ensure residents' quality of life in the coming decades. This plan will engage stakeholders (both internal and external to city departments), review current operations and policies impacting trees, and recommend strategies for improvement.

Increase efficiency through operational planning, reducing costs and achieving tiered cost recovery goals for all activities. Exceed cost- recovery goals in Golf, Sports, and Rental Services.

Portions of the Department's costs are covered by revenue generated by service providers, programs, and rentals. In 2017, the Department adopted a cost-recovery system, and now with several years' experience and through trend analysis, we are better able to plan our growth, and predict and manage the financial impacts that are outside of our ability to influence or control--such as the broader economic environment. The information helps us to model financial scenarios, enabling us to be proactive and make informed decisions about our operations. The Department is now in a position to refine our Cost Recovery Model after its successful initial implementation.

Key to this strategic objective is the ability to increase revenue of Tier 1 programs, such as Golf, Sports, and Rental Services, so that they exceed their cost, making the funds available to offset losses and fund capital requirements. Strategic capital investments in these operations during financially healthy years are critical to creating an ongoing return on investment and limiting disruptions in service in the case of operating budget shortfalls.

Achieve annual increases in leveraged operational & capital dollars: grants, sponsorships and donations.

Leveraged funding from sources outside of the City is important for enhancing equitable access to programming, and parkland acquisitions and development.

The Department has a successful history of securing large-scale capital grants from other governmental or quasi-governmental organizations. The 2019-24 Land Plan and facility assessment results improve our ability to make targeted requests that match strategic project locations and specific needs with new opportunities for leveraged public and private capital investment.

Further, in 2019, the Department launched an unaffiliated, 501c (3) Foundation that will enhance the Department's ability and position to receive grants and donations, it will allow the Department's fundraising staff to focus on generating sponsorship revenue. To coordinate these parallel efforts, a resource development plan is in creation that choreographs the efforts between the two organizations.

Early Win: Whetstone Prairie Restoration

As a large land management agency, our staff is challenged to maintain and mow thousands of acres, as well as conserve our natural resources. Mowed turf is critical in sports fields and play areas, but does not offer much biodiversity or habitat. Advancing the strategic priority of Sustainability, the department challenged itself to begin restoring the Whetstone Park prairie.

Staff wrote the first 5-year prairie management plan with community and expert input. Restoration efforts increased awareness, garnered grant funding and significantly improved the natural habitat. Volunteers and staff cleared saplings, removed invasive plants, and added native pollinator plants. Woody species have decreased 67%, and native, non-woody species have increased 142% from 2017 to 2019. Whetstone prairie now hosts an annual Pollinator Field Day to educate the community, continue its restoration, and collect prairie seed to plant at other Columbus parks. In 2020, the department is able to build on these efforts and expand to four additional sites.



Priority 3: Excellence in Programming and Service Delivery

This pillar acknowledges the Department has an innate desire to improve its services, but has been limited by the challenges of facilitating systems-change in a complex organization. The strategic initiatives enable excellence in programming and service delivery by harnessing the use of data, structuring a process for collaboration, and maximizing the use of internal expertise.

Strategic Objectives

Drive annual growth in program participation through data-informed and inclusive programming.

With each section's greater understanding of their primary customer, came the realization that there are many potential customers within those segments that our services have not yet reached. Analyzing the data we have collected about our current customers and facility use informs where, how and to whom we need to reach in order to improve services, be more inclusive and grow program participation.

Implement Center for Opportunities model at the Linden Community Center.

The Linden Community Center will be the first, full-scale deployment of the Centers for Opportunities model on a newly constructed facility. This 50,000 sq. ft. facility, located on a completely renovated 19.5-acre Linden park, will have all of the traditional recreational activities and more. In addition to Recreation and Parks programming, the center will host partners providing a range of services from cooking and nutritional classes in the commercial kitchen, to music instruction in the studio, and critical health care services for new mothers and their infant babies. The model sets a precedent for the development of future Centers for Opportunities within our portfolio.

Maximize internal, cross-Sectional partnership in programming.

Our discovery in the strategic planning process revealed an overwhelming desire for internal collaboration between the different Sections in the organization. Despite the intention, there has been limited success in this area. Without some type of structure, and with competing interests and varying programs, collaboration was short-lived and aspirational. The Mission Forward Playbooks will provide the structure to identify mutual customers and establish shared goals, accountability, and documentation towards these expectations.

Improve customer experience feedback loops, and benchmarking.

It is critical we hear from our customers to know just how well we meet their expectations and how satisfied they are with our service. Not all areas of the organization are equally prepared to engage customers for feedback. Internal systems to analyze, respond to and act on feedback must first be improved so that we can become a more customer-centric department. The longer-term objective here is to have all external-facing areas of the organization utilizing a similar methodology and measurement to collect and respond to customer feedback from customers. Sports, Rental Services, and other service providers will pilot these approaches externally. Customer experience will also be collected by internal support functions, such as Facilities Maintenance, HR, and Community Relations in order to gain insight on their performance and support.

Adopt national best practices and operating processes that result in CAPRA accreditation.

The value of attaining CAPRA accreditation, for our organization, is in the process of studying and adopting best management processes and learning from peer-organizations locally and nationally. Beginning in 2020, we will establish an internal steering committee to develop a deep understanding of the standards, and then guide the Department towards operational readiness.

Early Win: Excellence in Therapeutic Recreation, Outdoor Recreation and Aquatics

Columbus Recreation and Parks offers such a rich variety of recreation programming. Over time, sections such as Outdoor Recreation, Aquatics and Therapeutic Recreation for youth and adults with disabling conditions have developed high levels of expertise in their program areas. The strategic planning process unveiled a mutual interest in program collaboration between these sections, to break down some of the siloes that accompany niche programming in a large organization.

In 2019, intentional collaboration between Therapeutic Recreation and Outdoor Recreation resulted in a new Blind Archery program offering, an Outdoor Recreation Summer Camp tailored to Therapeutic Recreation campers, and planning for additional joint programming in 2020. Similar cross-section partnership between Aquatics and Therapeutic Recreation created a new Therapeutic Water Fitness program. These three sections took the lead in modeling a systematic approach to planning their collaboration, outlining space, staffing, training, outreach and registration responsibilities so that any of the gains in program variety and customer experience made during this preliminary effort can be sustained and guide the next few years.



Strategic Priority 4: Organizational Development

Organizations are constantly growing and evolving, and the task ahead for this Department is to take an active role the shaping of its future organizational design. Culture, people, and infrastructure suffer when there is failure to shape an organization. In those cases, we are left with organizations that are designed by default. They lack consistency and predictable patterns. People and knowledge are central to all organizations, and is why our focus over the next five years will be on establishing our operating values; developing our staff and volunteers; investing in data systems, prioritizing inclusion, and challenging ourselves to living up to the standards set forth in our unique value proposition.

Strategic Objectives

Develop a system and process for data collection, management and analysis to support decision-making and evaluate performance.

A Data Inventory completed by a team of CRPD staff and City Department of Technology found over 50 data systems, both proprietary and enterprise level, that the Department relies on for day to day operations such as program registration, event permitting, facility reservation and management, asset and property management, staff scheduling, and capital investment. While critical to our work, these systems suffer from fragmentation, technical limitations and lack of formally recognized data stewardship roles within each section.

Over the next five years, the Department will evolve a strategy of data management that prioritizes accessibility and integration ability of any systems we use, and develops the data governance procedures and roles of those employees charged with entering, generating and analyzing data to support decisions.

Define organizational culture that is informed by our operating values, value-proposition, and the Inclusion Plan.

Within the Discovery phase of each Section's Mission Forward Playbook development, staff defined the operating values such as safety, excellence in quality, customer service, affordability and stewardship, which guide how they conduct their work. Each Section, whether business support units such as Fiscal and Human Resources with internal customers, or the external-facing divisions serving the public, developed a purpose statement and unique value-proposition.

The Department's first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy Statement and department-wide Inclusion Goals was developed by a committee with employee representation from every Section and staff level. Each section has assessed their current operations through a diversity, equity and inclusion lens and identified activities necessary to achieve CRPD inclusion goals.

Implement staffing and programmatic succession planning.

Columbus Recreation and Parks Department is fortunate to have a talented cadre of employees who have spent much of their careers as public servants in support of the Department's mission. Like any organization gifted with committed employees and low turnover, the acquisition of institutional knowledge and unique skills and expertise required to carry out the work more often results from tenure rather than through deliberate and documented means of transfer. As a significant portion of CRPD employees gets closer to retirement eligibility, a recurring theme of vulnerability to change or departure of key staff arose in each Section's SWOT analysis. Strategic Planning created an opportunity to imagine how their capacities would be disrupted by an unanticipated loss of knowledge and skills. We have identified and will implement the next steps to strengthen our organizational infrastructure to provide uninterrupted quality and level of service to our residents.

Build staff capacities and create leadership opportunities.

Though we recognize the vulnerabilities inherent in a talented, knowledgeable and aging workforce, the Department is also energized by the opportunity presented to train, mentor and cultivate the leadership abilities of our entire staff. As we detail the skillsets and job functions necessary to each Section, it will become easier to identify existing skills gaps in our employees and develop training and coaching opportunities that target specific needs. In 2019, the Department's Human Resources Section implemented a successful pilot cohort of our Leadership Academy, and is already incorporating the feedback of the graduates and their supervisors to prepare for multiple cohorts in the coming year. We are also launching a mentoring program that complements efforts to share institutional knowledge and provides opportunities for employees to learn other aspects of work that is within our industry but outside of their own section.

Develop and implement a new volunteer program model.

Each year, over 14,059 volunteers contribute more than 160,404 hours of service to Columbus Recreation and Parks. Their efforts are broad, and include park landscaping and beautification, conservation and removal of invasive species, advisory and Friends group membership, building playgrounds, serving at produce distributions, mentoring, serving as camp counselor-in-training program, and supporting community events. For much of its existence, the volunteer program took its direction organically, shifting with the department's capacity to offer and manage meaningful volunteer opportunities at that time.

The Department has in recent years elevated the case for volunteerism by more fully defining the role of the Volunteer Coordinator and investing in resources to promote volunteer opportunities, capture the value of service, and to steward those who give their time to the Department. We are now in a position to offer the types of volunteer effort that advance our mission the most, and provide rewarding experiences for the individuals and organizations involved. Over the next five years, the Department will have evolved its volunteer model through intentional efforts to develop strong and long-lasting "adopt-a-park" and "adopt-a-center" partnerships. We will grow the size and use of our volunteer

program fund so that resources are available to match the willingness of volunteers. We will train staff across the department to identify meaningful volunteer opportunities and to plan, supervise, and recognize volunteer efforts to ensure positive experiences for volunteers, employees and the residents we serve.

Early Win: Aquatics Partnership with ETSS

Across the country, competition from career-specific summer internships and the increasingly programmed summer schedule of high school and college-aged youth has made it difficult for recreation providers to fill lifeguarding positions and other seasonal positions critical for Aquatics, Recreation and Summer Camp programs.

Aquatics hires part-time seasonal staff each year to support operations of our eight outdoor pools. We have found that hiring from within the neighborhoods where our pools are located removes some of the barriers that younger employees face and increases the chances of retaining committed staff for multiple seasons. We saw an opportunity to enhance our seasonal recruitment strategy when we began thinking about it in terms of advancing our department's inclusion policy- making sure that our employees represent the diversity of residents in our communities.

CRPD Aquatics launched a pilot with Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS) to recruit and provide workforce development services to job applicants from within Columbus' New American communities. Our desire to create a more representative workforce and ETSS' trusted reputation create an opportunity to attract a new applicant pool to our seasonal positions and introduce more residents to the Recreation and Parks field and future careers within the department.



Priority 5: Communication

Our constituents and stakeholders seek information on a multitude of levels. Our staff desire the same. A sense of urgency is felt here to improve our communication. Prioritizing this will require everyone to engage differently than they do presently. Technical solutions alone will not solve these communication challenges. Rather the technical solutions must work in concert with behavioral change in order for adaptive change to occur.

Strategic Objectives

Align external communication to the Department's strategic priorities.

The Department effectively communicates its mission and values to the public through various communication styles and platforms. We want the strategic priorities that were established for the organization and the communication to be mutually reinforcing. While we say the Mission Forward Plan is primarily an internal document, the strategic priorities identified within are not. By linking the five strategic priorities as regular themes in our communications, we will have a noticeable and positive impact in our parks and programming.

Improve external relationships through responsive and deliberate communication with the public.

Columbus Recreation and Parks is a large organization, and by the nature of its work, is operationally and geographically decentralized. Depending on the channel through which customer questions or resident feedback is received, a coordinated and clear response has been a challenge. Despite this, staff have an eagerness to respond with answers. Initial steps have been taken to identify common questions, topics of interest, and concerns residents wish to address with us. New systems are needed that equip staff with critical information that is appropriate to share, along with the right point of contact.

Improve internal communication that results in staff engagement and improved performance.

A major vulnerability of the Department is its siloed communication within the organization. We operate as 23 specialized and disconnected operations, hyper-focused on delivering our own service. This problem is not uniquely ours, however the solution will be. There is no single "drumbeat" solution

to the problem. For as much as this is an institutional problem, it is also a behavioral one. We must emphasize, experiment, and model routine-building behavior and risk losing time to over-communication.

Define and promote our value-proposition to the community.

Unique Value Propositions were developed for every Section of the organization as part of their Discovery in the Strategic Planning process. An overall organizational Unique Value Proposition must be developed in order to highlight the strength of operating through a single entity both a park system and a recreation provider. Once created, this should be regularly communicated as companion language to our strategic priorities, mission and what we value.

Early Win: Drumbeat Messaging

Central to any organization is its ability to communicate clearly and effectively with its customers. In today's digital age, customers of all services and products expect engagement, through multiple platforms, in a timely and digestible format. As mentioned in the Executive Summary, the department's evaluation and reset of the organization's mission and vision were not only functional steps to create a more aligned brand internally. The rest was a strategic action to better communicate the department's bold goals with residents and community stakeholders.

In tandem with the momentum centered on building operational efficiencies in the department's capital planning and programmatic offerings, the organization shifted its communications and engagement efforts to reinforce engagement with external partners. Those steps included improving section specific websites, generating multiple program guides, solidifying the department's brand standards and messaging, as well as generating tools like one-pagers and annual reports to communicate the department's work. In completing some of these tasks, the need to have a more robust communications plan for the department's strategic priorities surfaced.

The enhanced operational efficiencies accomplished in the first year of the CRPD Mission Forward Strategic Plan propelled the need for more robust drumbeat messaging with residents. Drumbeat messaging includes building a communications plan centered on the department's most critical goals, projects, and initiatives. Since 2020, the Community Relations section has worked with several teams to move this goal into a tactical reality. The department looks forward to implementing and measuring the success of a more efficient approach to engaging the department's customers and, most importantly, residents of Columbus' neighborhoods.